

Revision 1.0

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This book is a chapter-by-chapter but not necessarily paragraph by paragraph paraphrase of the book *Acts of the Apostles*. The language was simplified and in this case the volume was reduced by about 50%.

The history is the start of the Christian church during the time of the Apostles covering the time that the New Testament was written.

A free pdf of the original book can be obtained here:

https://media4.egwwritings.org/pdf/en_AA.pdf

If you find any errors or broken hyperlinks, you can let me know by sending email to aafeedback@btlb.org.

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Chapter 1—God's Purpose for His Church

The purpose of the church is to serve the world and to teach people how they can be saved. From the beginning it was God's plan that His greatness, His ability to meet every need, and most of all His love would be revealed to the world through the members of the church. They should be like a light to the darkness of the world that they came out of [[Ephesians 3:10](#)].

Many of the promises and purposes for ancient Israel apply to the church. The church should be a house of prayer for all nations [[Isaiah 56:7](#)]. God will bless His people, their homes, and businesses. They will be recognized for their success and will not be attacked by foreign countries. By this they will know that God is with them and that they are His people [[Ezekiel 34:26, 29-31](#)].

God chose Israel and gave them a special, firsthand knowledge of Himself, so they could reveal Him to the world. He told them ahead of time that He was going to save them from slavery, then He demonstrated His power to the whole world, while at the same time showing His favor to them. No god has ever done this [[Isaiah 43:10-12](#)]. God sent Jesus to Israel to give an in-person demonstration of His goodness. Jesus would be a symbol of God's promise to Israel, and He would be a light to the whole world. He performed many miracles, including giving sight to the blind, and He brought freedom to those who were no better off than prisoners [[Isaiah 42:6-7](#)].

God said to Israel, I heard you call out to Me and I helped you. I will save you and promise to establish you as a nation, then I want you to bring freedom to those who have none, and light to those who are in darkness. God promised to protect Israel from hunger, thirst, and even the scorching heat of the sun. He led them by springs of water and paved a road where He wanted them to go. Rejoice because the Lord will comfort His people and have mercy on those who are having a hard time. But Israel said, "God has abandoned me and forgotten me." But can a woman forget her nursing child? On rare occasions one may, but I will not forget you. Your name is written on the palms of My hands [[Isaiah 49:8-16](#)].

The church is God's fortress on earth, in a world that is at war with Him. Whoever harms the church is hurting God who gave His only Son to save the world. In the history of the world, there have always been some who were obedient and faithful to Him. Through these, God was able to keep alive a knowledge of Him on the earth, as they shared their messages of warning to the world. At times He has even sent angels to come protect His church from being completely wiped out in this sinful world. God has already seen and knows everything that will happen to the church and has given it messages through prophets so they can know certain events

that will happen in the future. The church exists to preserve the truth about God and He will make sure that nothing can defeat it. During times of great spiritual darkness in the world, the church has been like a city on a hill shining a light to the valley below. The church is made up of human beings who are weak and imperfect, but God pays special attention to it and makes it the place where the world can see His love, mercy, and power to change hearts.

Jesus asked, what can I compare the kingdom of heaven to? Obviously not the kingdoms of the world, which exist through power and force. In the kingdom of God, no person is forced to be a part of it. It exists to show people a better way to live, and to show them the happiness that can come from helping others.

God does great things for His church so that His name can be glorified and people will take notice. Ezekiel paints a picture of a river flowing east from the temple, going down through the desert on the way to the sea. On its journey, the river brought life and green growth on its banks. Trees grew on the riverbank that provided food and shade and even healing [[Ezekiel 47:8-12](#)].

Through His people God brings blessings, even to people who don't know and accept Him. Through Joseph God brought great success and wealth to Egypt and saved many people from starvation. Through Daniel, the wise men of Babylon were saved from being killed by the king. God's love and grace can flow like the rising ocean tide to the world through His church. God wanted Israel to demonstrate His salvation to the world, like wells of water to people who are thirsty. Israel had God's law written on stone, and a firsthand knowledge of Him. But the other nations of the world had lost all knowledge of Him and because of that their religions were dark and corrupt [[Romans 1:21](#)]. But because God is merciful, He didn't destroy them and wanted them to learn of Him through the Israelites. The system of sacrifices that God gave to Israel was supposed to be a constant reminder to them that one day Christ would come and be sacrificed for the sins of the world. The entire Israelite culture and economy was a reminder of their relationship with God and a symbol His plan to save humanity.

But Israel fell away from God and didn't bring God's blessings or the knowledge of Him to surrounding nations. They kept His blessings to themselves and prevented outsiders from learning or participating. It is true that God had commanded them not to learn or copy heathen worship practices, but the way they followed this command was to not share their knowledge or allow outsiders to worship with them. Their priests lost sight of the meaning of the sacrifices, and the laws God had given them, but kept some of them, and added many other laws that they created themselves.

God described Israel as vine that was supposed to bear excellent grapes, but instead it became a wild plant that did not bear good fruit [[Jeremiah 2:21](#)]. At times Israel was prosperous and bore fruit to glorify herself [[Hosea 10:1](#)]. God asked, "What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not already tried, but it still brought forth bad grapes. So, I will remove the protective wall and hedge and will stop pruning and fertilizing it. It will be trampled on, and weeds and thorns will grow around it. I will also stop sending rain to water it [[Isaiah 5:4-7](#)]. You have not taken care of the sick and people who need help among you but have ruled with cruelty [[Ezekiel 34:4](#)].

When Jesus was on earth, the Jewish leaders thought they were too wise to be taught by Him and too good to need salvation from Him. So, the disciples were called to do the work that they refused to do.

Chapter 2—Training the twelve

For the important work of spreading His kingdom, Jesus did not choose educated well-spoken leaders of the Jewish nation, or the power of the Roman empire. He chose humble, uneducated, teachable men, to spread the truths that would change the world. But this important work would not depend on human ability or wisdom but would succeed through the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were trained for 3.5 years by the wisest and best teacher to ever live. Jesus trained them by example as He spent many hours each day with them, having them listen to Him, and watch how He treated the poor, sick, hopeless, and overworked people. He used nature as object lessons as He taught on the mountainside, or by the seashore. He taught about the kingdom of God and how to be saved.

When Jesus selected the 12 disciples, He was taking the first step in organizing the church. The King of Heaven surrounded himself with 12 weak, sinful human beings, that with His teaching and through the power of the Holy Spirit, would bring the knowledge of salvation to the world. Heaven understood the role these men would play, and it filled them with happiness. The disciples were to go to the world and tell what they had seen and heard from Jesus. In symbolism and prophecy, as the 12 sons of Jacob stood as representatives of the nation of Israel, the 12 disciples were representatives of the church.

When He was on earth, Jesus began to break down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, offering salvation to all. Jesus freely associated with Samaritans, who had been hated by the Jews, eating their food, staying in their homes, and teaching in their towns. This was symbolic of how the Gospel was to be shared with the rest of the world [[Ephesians 2:14](#); [3:6](#)]. Jesus also demonstrated this by rewarding the faith of the Roman centurion in Capernaum and the Canaanite woman from Phoenicia. The disciples had to unlearn the long-standing belief that Gentiles were unworthy of salvation, and that God loved them and wanted to save them just as much as the Jews.

Jesus taught the disciples that in the kingdom of God, there were no national boundaries, no difference between rich and poor, and no families that were more important, but that all were equal in His eyes [[Acts 17:26-27](#)]. Among the disciples themselves, there was a wide range of personalities, which would make it easier to reach all types of people. They were all very different, but needed to be completely united in action, and this Jesus wished to accomplish by bringing them into unity with Himself [[John 17:21](#), [23](#)]. One of the most repeated prayers of Jesus was that His disciples would be changed and made holy by the truth. He knew that the truth together with the power of the Holy Spirit would always win the battle with evil.

As His time on earth was ending, Jesus knew that his disciples would greatly miss His presence and advice. He encouraged them and tried to prepare them but did not lie to them about the difficulties they would face. He knew He would be leaving them as sheep among wolves, and that they would be persecuted, rejected, put in prison, and most would eventually be killed. He told them some of these things, so that when they experienced them, they would know they were on the right track, and it would increase their faith.

Jesus also left them with words of encouragement as well, [John 14:1](#) "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. ² There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³ When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going." [John 14:1-4 NLT](#). He told them that when He was gone, He would be working together with the Father for them. Regarding their actions, Jesus even said, [John 14:12](#) "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. [John 14:12 NLT](#). This didn't mean they would do greater miracles, but that with the power of the Holy Spirit, their efforts would be greater in reach and results. The Holy Spirit would teach them about Jesus and that combined with their personal experience would give them everything they need to tell the world about Him [[John 15:26-27](#)].

The words of Jesus were fulfilled and when the disciples had received the Holy Spirit, their words combined with the Spirit's influence on them and their listeners brought thousands of converts to the church. The fact that they were not great and influential men did not reduce their results but rather increased it because then all attention would be on Jesus rather than themselves. Everything they said and did lifted up the name of Jesus and His sacrifice to save all people from sin.

On the night before He was crucified, Jesus spoke of the peace the disciples could have even though there was so much trouble and sorrow in the world around them [[John 16:33](#)]. Jesus did not fail because He was crucified, and even though He knew what was coming, He was not discouraged. The disciples needed to learn that even though their task might seem impossible, they were to press forward, and with the Holy Spirit, they could not fail.

The death of Jesus was the completion of the work He was given to do. Now those He had gathered around Him were to continue the work He started, and He prayed that they could be united with the Father even as He was one with the Father. But this prayer was not just for the disciples but for everyone who would ever believe in Him [[John 17:10-11](#), [20-23](#)].

Chapter 3—The Great Commission

After Jesus had died, the disciples were overwhelmed with discouragement. The disciples said, "We hoped that He was the One who was going to save Israel." [[Luke 24:21](#)]. Their Master had been rejected, and the priests in making fun of Him on the cross said, "He saved others but can't save Himself! If He really is the King of Israel, let Him come down from the cross and we will believe in Him." [[Matthew 27:42](#)].

Jesus had tried to prepare His disciples for what was coming, but because of what they wanted to believe, they could not understand what He was telling them. Satan was trying to keep them in a cloud of discouragement and sadness. They wouldn't have been in this state if they had remembered and understood that He said He would rise on the 3rd day. The disciples hid in the same upper room where they had the Last Supper with Jesus, and in fear that they would be next, closed and locked the doors. But doors and locks could not keep Him from them, and it was there that Jesus first appeared to the group.

After His resurrection, Jesus stayed on earth for 40 days, preparing the disciples for the work ahead of them. He explained the prophecies that told of His coming, rejection, and death, showing that they were all fulfilled by what had happened. That gave the disciples faith to believe in the prophecy about the power they would receive and the work they would do. It was because of His death that they could then preach the message of repentance and forgiveness for sins [[Luke 24:45-48](#)]. They also realized that Jesus had chosen them and kept them close to Him so that they would be the firsthand witnesses of His life, death, and resurrection, so that they could tell the world what they had seen and heard. And now He taught them how everything they had seen was a fulfillment of prophecy, and how it was all part of the plan to save people from sin. This was the gospel of peace and salvation that they were to preach to the world.

Before He went back to heaven, Jesus told His disciples that even though Israel had rejected Him, they should still be given one more chance to accept Him as the Son of God. Jesus reminded them that anyone who comes to Him would never be rejected [[John 6:37](#)]. But after that last offer to the Jews, the invitation would be given to the rest of the world. The gospel commission, which is the command to share the good news of salvation, is the main goal and purpose of the church. The church was not to sit back and wait for people to come it, but they were to take their message to the people.

Everything the disciples did going forward was to be done in the name of Jesus. There is power in that name, because whoever calls on that name will be saved

[[Romans 10:13](#)]. They were to pray to the Father in the name of Jesus, and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The name of Jesus is like a password, uniquely identifying the speaker, tying everything together, the authority for all their actions, and the source of their success. Everything of value and importance in His kingdom was associated with the name of Jesus.

When Jesus told the disciples to go out in His name and gather all who believe into the church, His instructions were very simple. They should not try to put on an impressive presentation, but their results would be greater if they kept it simple. Jesus used simple stories to explain His kingdom, and the disciples were to do the same thing. In fact, they were to follow His example and even use the same lessons and stories. Keeping it simple didn't mean it would be easy, in fact, all the power of darkness and evil would oppose them [[Ephesians 6:12](#)]. But Jesus promised to be with them and that they would have the all-powerful shield of God protecting them from evil. It was not just the power of angels that would be with them, but the General and Commander of heaven's armies. God was responsible for the success of the work and not weak human beings.

With Christ's sacrifice on the cross, the substitute death for sin was available, and man could truly be forgiven. Jesus had taken back the world from Satan who had taken it from Adam. Now with the authority of God, He told the disciples, [Matthew 28:19](#) Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." [Matthew 28:19-20 NLT](#).

Just before Jesus left, His disciples still hoped that He was going to sit on David's throne. But Jesus told them not to worry about worldly kingdoms and when they would be set up [[Acts 1:6-7](#)]. All they should concern themselves with was to spread the good news of salvation from sin through the death of Christ on the cross. To help them in what they were to do, Jesus promised them the power of the Holy Spirit. John baptized people by putting them under water, but after Jesus was gone, Jesus said they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. After that, they would have all the power they needed to do everything He commanded them to do, which was to spread the good news of salvation, first in Jerusalem, then the land of Israel, and then to the farthest parts of the earth [[Acts 1:5-8](#)].

Jesus knew that no amount of human reasoning and logic could convert the sinner's heart, but the Holy Spirit could prepare the heart to hear what they needed to hear. The Holy Spirit would give power to the words spoken and would soften the heart of the hearer to receive them. On their own they could not hope to win against the powers of darkness and Satan, but with the Holy Spirit, they could succeed.

The disciples were to start in Jerusalem, where people were still wondering about the recent events. It was there, that the Jesus from the humble town of Nazareth had been tried, condemned and crucified. It was there that many people had been deceived by the leading priests and led to reject their Messiah. It was there that the Savior of the world had made His amazing sacrifice for the human race. It was in Jerusalem, where the preaching of the disciples would find many curious listeners.

When Jesus was still with them, He had sent out the 12 disciples, and then later 70 people to experience preaching, and teaching about the kingdom of God without Him being physically with them. By dividing them up and sending them out in small groups, so that each person could be involved, He was preparing them for this. There were few at first but as their number grew, they could go to more places and reach more people. Eventually the good news of salvation would reach the farthest parts of the world.

When the time finally came for Jesus to go back to His Father in heaven, He was in Bethany. Then He called the people to gather about Him, and stretched out His hands to bless them, and then slowly began rising up into the air [[Luke 24:50-51](#)]. As they were losing sight of Him, He was joined by angels who were there to sing songs of praise as they returned with Him to heaven. As the disciples were still looking up, two angels who appeared as men dressing in white robes spoke to them. Why are you standing there looking up into the sky? This same Jesus that was taken from you to go back to heaven will return in the sky, similar to how you have seen Him leave [[Acts 1:10-11](#)].

When He returns as promised, He will bring us home with Him [[John 14:3](#)]. The people who died loving Jesus and were ready for His return will be brought back to life and will meet their Lord in the air. And He will say to them, come you who have been blessed by the Father, inherit the kingdom that has been prepared for you since the world began [[Matthew 25:34](#)].

Chapter 4—Pentecost

This chapter is based on [Acts 2:1-39](#).

As the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives where Jesus left them, people expected them to be sad and discouraged. But instead, their faces showed happiness and joy, and they appeared as if they had just won a great victory. In obedience to the command of Jesus, they waited in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. [Luke 24:53](#) And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God. [Luke 24:53 NLT](#). They also spent time in prayer, remembering the words of Jesus, to ask the Father for anything in His name, and they would receive it [[John 16:23-24](#)]. They also knew that Jesus was now at the right hand of God, making requests for them [[Romans 8:34](#)].

As they waited, the disciples put aside their differences, humbled themselves, confessed their sins, and prayed for greater faith. Together, they recalled the words Jesus had spoken to them before He died, and they thought about His pure and holy life. They wished they could re-live the last 3 years of their life, realizing the privilege they had of being in daily contact with the Son of God. How differently would they have treated their Master, and how they would have shown their love. They were sorry about all the times they made Jesus sad because of their arguing, but they knew they were forgiven, and now they were ready to tell the world about Him.

The Holy Spirit had been present in the world before this, but never in the full power that was to be poured out on the world after Christ left. On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were all together, united in spirit and purpose. Suddenly there was the sound of a mighty rushing wind that filled the room. The Holy Spirit came upon each person present in the room, in full power as never before. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, there were words of confession, songs of praise, and words of prophecy. Now, they understood what Jesus had meant when He said, it is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't, the Holy Spirit will not be poured out on you [[John 16:7](#)]. When you receive the Holy Spirit, you will understand the truth, and He will even show you things that are to come [[John 16:13](#)].

After Jesus was welcomed back to heaven, with the praise and love of the angels, then the Holy Spirit was sent to the world. It was only after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that the disciples truly understood the glory Jesus had with the Father. The Spirit revealed to them that the work of Christ on earth had been successfully completed, and now He was their priest and king, and was given all authority both in heaven and on earth.

Now with the sound of wind, there was seen above each head what looked like tongues of fire settling on each one of them. Then they began to speak words that were given to them by the Holy Spirit. It just so happened that at this very time, there were Jews from all over the world that had come to Jerusalem for the festival. Many of them only spoke and understood the languages of the countries where they came from. This would have been a great obstacle to the spreading of the message of salvation, but with the Holy Spirit, every person was able to understand the words that were spoken by the disciples as they preached. But the Holy Spirit could not only translate words spoken to be understood in other languages, but He could also translate weak and inadequate words in the same language, to exactly what the hearer needs to hear. The Holy Spirit is able supply what is lacking, provide strength instead of weakness, and to make a person a perfect missionary for the cause of Christ.

The listeners began to realize that they were all understanding the disciples speak in their own languages and they were amazed. But the priests and rulers were angry about this new development. They had finally succeeded in killing Jesus and now His uneducated Galilean disciples were preaching about Him. They began to spread rumors that the disciples were preaching under the influence of alcohol, but Peter answered by quoting from the prophet Joel. [Acts 2:17](#) 'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. [Acts 2:17 NLT](#).

With clear and powerful words Peter spoke of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He told of how God was with Him, and how He performed many miracles among them. Then wicked men crucified Him, but death could not hold him in the grave, because God unlocked the chains of death. But rather than quoting the words of Jesus whom the priests called a deceiver, he quoted the words of king David. [Acts 2:25](#) King David said this about him: 'I see that the LORD is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. ²⁶ No wonder my heart is glad, and my tongue shouts his praises! My body rests in hope. ²⁷ For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave. [Acts 2:25-27 NLT](#).

Peter went on to explain that David was not talking about himself being resurrected, because he is dead and buried and his tomb is still with us. The Holy One he spoke of is Jesus of Nazareth, whom we have both seen and talked to after He came back to life. The priests had expected the killing of Jesus to drive the disciples into hiding in fear for their lives, but now they found themselves being blamed for the murder of the Prince of life.

Some in the crowd of listeners knew exactly what Peter was talking about because they were among the mob who had shouted, give us Barabbas instead of this man [[John 18:40](#)]. They had also shouted, crucify Him, we and our children will take responsibility for His death [[Matthew 27:22-25](#)]. Some of these people felt guilty now and believed that Jesus was who He claimed to be and they asked, "What should we do?" Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the disciples now clearly understood the scriptures that Jesus had taught them. They saw with perfect clarity what Christ's mission was and the nature of His kingdom that He had continually spoke of. They could now carry on the work of Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit, and many were convinced and converted. That day, on the Day of Pentecost, about 3000 people were converted and baptized.

The disciples were surprised and happy with how many people were converted on that first day but did not feel it was the result of their own effort. The people that were converted on that day were the result of seeds planted by Jesus during His ministry, and of the work of the Holy Spirit on the people's hearts.

The disciples had been taught by Jesus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and now they were no longer a collection of uneducated, unqualified people, who argued and competed against each other for power. They now worshipped together, ate together, shared everything they owned with each other, and were perfectly united in purpose [[Acts 2:46](#); [Acts 4:32](#)]. Now when people looked at them, they thought, these men have been with Jesus [[Acts 4:13](#)]. They now spoke the name of Jesus with confidence, because they felt He was their friend and older brother. Their hearts were so full of love for Him that they would go to the ends of the earth to tell people about Him. Their success was guaranteed because the Holy Spirit motivated them and spoke through them.

Chapter 5—The Gift of the Spirit

When Jesus told His disciples about the Holy Spirit, He had been weighed down by the burden of the sin of the world. When He left them, He wanted to leave them with a gift that would be better than His presence, and would assure them of His endless love, acceptance, and forgiveness for them. [John 14:16](#) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. ¹⁷ He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. [John 14:16-17 NLT](#). Through the centuries of earth's history, the Holy Spirit had resisted the tide of evil in the world, but He would work with much greater power after Christ returned to heaven.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit worked on the hearts of people, and many accepted the message of a risen Savior. The young church saw converts from all types of people, from those who had lost their former faith, to sinners who had never believed, and everyone between. Some who had fought the hardest against the ministry of Christ, would now become its champions. The young Christians loved and respected each other, and all had the same desire and goal, which was to bring more people into the kingdom of God.

God can do great things through people who are willing to allow the Holy Spirit to come into their lives and work through them. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not limited to any social class, age, race, men or women. Any who accept Christ as their personal Savior, can have the Holy Spirit to guide, teach, and work through them. Throughout history, men and women have been able to stay faithful under great persecution because of the presence of the Holy Spirit within them.

Having the Holy Spirit does not mean a person will not experience hardship and temptations to do wrong. In fact, Satan may do more to attack and tempt those who have accepted the gift of the Holy Spirit. But these should use their power of choice to pray every day, asking for strength to resist temptation and power to do God's work, and to become more like Christ. The Holy Spirit can do great things through the weakest person who invites Him into their life. As we humbly submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we will become more like Jesus.

The same power of the Holy Spirit that was poured out on the disciples is available to us today, but most do not appreciate and ask for it. There is great spiritual darkness where people do not feel the need for the Holy Spirit. Since this is the way to have spiritual power and success, why aren't we hungrier and thirstier for the gift of the Spirit? Why aren't we talking, praying, and preaching about it all the time? God is more willing to send the Holy Spirit to those who ask, than parents

are to give good gifts to their children. When the church sends missionaries out, it should be praying for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on them. This is not only the best, but it is the only way that mission will have true power and success.

The promises given to the disciples are ours as well, and workers who are truly dedicated to God will have the Holy Spirit with them. In sadness, hardship, and even the realization of our own mistakes and failures, the Spirit brings comfort and strength. Emotions and the appearance of a spiritual high alone are not enough evidence that a person has the Spirit but surrender of the will and complete obedience to every word of God as well as faith and trust should also be seen.

It is not necessary to be able to explain the precise nature of the Holy Spirit or how He works on people's hearts, but we are told that He comes from the Father, He guides men into truth, and He doesn't speak of Himself [[John 15:26](#); [16:13](#)]. We should not speculate or claim to understand the mystery of the Holy Spirit; in fact, it is beyond human comprehension. But we can know what the Bible clearly tells us. The Holy Spirit helps us to see our sinfulness [[John 16:8](#)] but also can help us to lose our love of sinful things and replace them with a desire for holiness. The Holy Spirit teaches us about the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. He helps us to remember what Jesus said and taught [[John 16:14](#); [14:26](#)].

Before the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples, He was with many of the great men of faith in the Old Testament. In dark ages, long after the He was given to the disciples, He was with the Waldensian Christians and those preparing the way for the Reformation. He was with those who started the work of translating the Bible into different languages, and those who began the missionary work of taking the Bible and the gospel of salvation to all the world. Today, the Spirit is with those who are going throughout the world preparing the way for the second coming of Christ. A spotlight is shining on the Law of God, and the Spirit is moving on the hearts of people to help them to see and accept the truth. When in the last days the Spirit of God is poured out again as it was on the Day of Pentecost, the whole earth will be lit up with the glory of God.

But there are some who neglect opportunities while they wait for the last outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They expect that without any effort on their part, they will be transformed into perfect instruments for God's service by the Spirit. But without a living connection with the source of all spiritual truth, we cannot be ready to receive the Spirit. We must as the parable teaches, keep our lamps trimmed and burning [[Matthew 25:1-13](#)].

If Jesus saw the need to spend hours of time in prayer with His Father to receive the strength and power to go out each day to teach and minister to others, how much more should we be praying to God each day. Jesus knew the weakness of

humanity and the temptations we face, and as the older brother of our race, He gave us an example that we should follow. Instead of waiting for some future time when the Holy Spirit is to be poured out, we should be developing our connection with God, and the Spirit will supply the power we need now. Instead of waiting for the big event, we should be looking for small opportunities to share the good news of salvation with those that we are in contact with each day. If we follow the example of Jesus, we will receive the power we need each day and we will be ready for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the final harvest of the earth.

Chapter 6—At the Temple Gate

This chapter is based on [Acts 3; 4:1-31](#).

The disciples had seen Jesus in action and understood their need for help to do the job He gave them. Because of this they gladly accepted the strength, wisdom, righteousness and wealth offered by Him. With that, they were ready to accept the job given to them by their Master.

One day Peter and John went to the temple to worship and at the gate called Beautiful, they met a 40-year-old man who had never been able to walk. He had wanted to be healed by Jesus but had never had the opportunity, but his hope was lost when Jesus had been killed. On this occasion, he had pleaded with some friends to carry him to the temple gate where he could do some begging. As Peter and John passed by, he asked for something from them, but Peter stopped and said, "Look at us." When the man looked, Peter said, "I don't have silver or gold to give you, but I will give you this: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Then Peter took him by the hand and pulled him up, and the man went into the temple walking and jumping up and down, praising God. And when the people recognized him as the man who had been begging at the temple gate, they were amazed.

Then Peter took this opportunity to speak and said, "Why are all of you surprised, as if by our own power we healed this man. It was through the name and power of Jesus of Nazareth that this man now walks." The priests and leaders rejected and killed Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead, and now we are here to tell you about Him. It was prophesied in the Scriptures that He would suffer and die, and this had to happen otherwise there could be no hope for any of us to be saved from sin. Then Peter said, "Repent and believe, so that your sins can be forgiven. God had an agreement with Abraham and our ancestors, that through him the whole world would be blessed. The death and resurrection of Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise."

As the disciples preached about the resurrection of Jesus, many people remembered His words and believed. The seeds that Jesus planted were finally being harvested. While they were still talking, the priests and temple guard came and tried to silence them. After the resurrection, the priests had tried to spread the story that the body of Jesus had been stolen by the disciples while the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb slept. Now they were unhappy that the disciples were accusing them of murdering Jesus. In fact, the Sadducees did not believe there would be a resurrection after death, and if this were true, it would disprove one of their core beliefs.

Many people were believing and joining the young church and the Pharisees and Sadducees began to worry that they might be worse off now than when it was just Jesus alone preaching and healing. So, they sent the temple guard to arrest Peter and John and put them in prison. The evidence that Jesus had risen from the dead was very clear, but the Jewish leaders hardened their hearts and refused to admit they were wrong in killing Him. There was also plenty of evidence that the preaching and actions of the disciples were inspired by God, and it was still not too late for them to repent and accept the truth.

The Jewish leaders would not be lost just because they killed the Son of God, but because they continued to reject every attempt by God reach them. Every time they abused and harassed the disciples, they were rejecting another offer from God and hardening their hearts. God's judgment will not be poured out on sinners because He gave up on them. It will be because they continued to resist the repeated attempts of the Holy Spirit, until they could no longer hear His voice, and as a result did not repent.

The next day after the healing, Peter and John were brought out of prison and stood before the High Priest and other leaders of the Jews. Many were aware of the shameful way that Peter had denied his connection with Jesus the night before the crucifixion and now they thought they could easily scare him into doing what they wanted. But Peter was not the proud boastful person he was that night. He was more humble and not so self-confident, but most importantly, he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In answer to the question about how the man was healed, Peter said, "It was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, and God raised from the dead, that this man was healed. He is the stone that was rejected by the builders that later became the chief cornerstone, and there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved." Jesus described Himself with this story to the priests and leaders [[Matthew 21:42-44](#)]. The council members who were questioning Peter and John were amazed by their boldness, and knowing they weren't trained in their schools, thought to themselves, these men have been with Jesus.

As Jesus was rising into the sky, His last words to those watching were, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world." [[Matthew 28:20](#)]. The disciples knew that even though Jesus was at the throne of God in heaven, as a man He was still their friend and understood what they were going through. They also knew that salvation from sin was available to them because He had died for them. These thoughts gave them the strength to endure the trials they were going through. Their connection with God was stronger through the Holy Spirit than it was when Jesus

was with them in person, and people could see the light and love of Jesus shining through them.

The miracle was the evidence that what Peter was saying was true, but even as they put a stop to Jesus in spite of His miracles, the council was determined to stop the disciples. At this point though, they were unable to do anything because of the attention of all the people who were excited by the miracle and impressed by the words Peter spoke. They couldn't cover up the miracle with lies because too many people had seen it, so for now they commanded them to stop talking about Jesus and healing in His name. Peter and John answered, "You can decide for yourselves if you think we should obey you rather than God, but we cannot stop talking about the things we have seen and heard."

While Peter and John were in prison, the other disciples were praying for them, and when they were released, there was great joy among the believers. The disciples now understood that they would face the same opposition that Jesus did, so they prayed for strength and courage to never give up. In answer to their prayer, the Holy Spirit came upon them in such a powerful way that the room shook, and they were filled with courage.

The command of the council to Peter and John was not unlike the command of the emperor to the German princes at the Diet of Spires in 1529. Both were an attempt to restrict the freedom to speak about one's religious beliefs. As the disciples boldly defied the command for them to stop, the German princes declared, "Let us reject this decree. In matters of conscience the majority has no power."¹ The Bible itself teaches that we should respect and accept the authority of governments, [[Matthew 22:21](#), [Romans 13:6-7](#)] but if its laws require us to break God's law, we must obey God rather than men.

¹ D'Aubigne, J. H. Merle, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* Vol I-V, New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1856, p 519.
https://www.google.com/books/edition/History_of_the_Reformation_of_the_Sixtee/KvICAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA519&printsec=frontcover

Chapter 7—A Warning Against Hypocrisy

This chapter is based on [Acts 4:32](#) - [5:11](#).

As the early church grew many of the new believers were cut off from their families who didn't believe. In these cases, the church took responsibility to make sure that no one was without food and shelter. There were some among the believers who had money and land, and they cheerfully donated money or things that were needed and even sold land and gave it to the apostles to use as needed. This generosity was one of the gifts of the Spirit, and members of the new church were completely united. The salvation of others was of more value to them than money and property. This is how it will always be when people are filled with the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ. When we have the same Spirit as the early church, then our churches will grow with the same power theirs did.

Ananias and Sapphira were converts to the early church and they were moved to sell some land and give the money to the church. At some point they began to regret their decision, but they still wanted to be seen as generous donors to the cause of Christ. They decided to go ahead with the sale of the property and pretend that they were giving the full sale amount, but actually they would keep most of it for themselves. People were giving to the church freely and willingly, and no one was being forced to give. But God hates lying, and when Ananias and Sapphira lied about giving the full amount, they were lying to the Holy Spirit. When he brought the money Peter said, "Ananias, why have you listened to Satan and lied to the Holy Spirit. The land was yours, and even after you sold it, the money was yours. Why are you lying about giving the full amount?"

When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. After about three hours, Sapphira was wondering what happened to her husband, so she went in to see Peter. He asked her, "Did you sell the land for this particular amount of money?" She answered, "Yes, that is the amount." Then Peter said, "Why did you both agree to lie to the Holy Spirit? The people who buried your husband are at the door and they will bury you as well." Immediately she died and fell at his feet. When everyone heard about this, they became very afraid.

God saw that this example was necessary to keep the church pure from those who would claim to be members but were really worshippers of money. It also showed that you cannot lie to God because He knows what you are thinking, and He doesn't like hypocrisy [leading people to believe something about you that isn't true]. Money is needed to support the people and organization for the spread of the gospel. God claims a tithe, a 10th of our income as His, to be used for this purpose. If you don't pay tithe, you are stealing from God, but beyond that, people are free

to give whatever they want. But if a person promises to give something, God also considers it stealing from Him if they don't give it.

Don't think that Satan won't tempt you to keep money that belongs to God, or money that has been promised to Him. He may tempt you to think that it will hurt your family if you give that money up to God.

God blesses some people with wealth so they can support His cause, but many spend it on their own pleasure. They forget or don't realize that one day God will ask us to report on how we have used the financial blessing He gave us. Even though they are not struck dead immediately, those who have the same spirit as Ananias and Sapphira, will be judged guilty in the end.

God hates lying and dishonesty and says so in Revelation. [Revelation 21:27](#) Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty--but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. [Revelation 21:27 NLT](#). About truth, Paul wrote, [Ephesians 6:14](#) Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. [Ephesians 6:14 NLT](#). People who lie and cheat in their business dealings will have difficulty because they will always assume others are lying to and cheating them.

Chapter 8—Before the Sanhedrin

This chapter is based on [Acts 5:12-42](#).

The cross that has been a symbol of hope and salvation to the world was actually an instrument of torture and shame in the Roman world. The disciples were men with no power or influence but with the power of the Spirit, they brought hope to the world. Strong opinions existed about Jesus in the land of Israel and Jerusalem, where he had been crucified as a criminal. Now the disciples were boldly and successfully preaching about how it had been the mission of Jesus to die, but after that to be resurrected, and return to heaven. Now the power that Jesus had freely used to heal, rested on the disciples. The sick and demon possessed were brought from surrounding towns and they were all healed.

There were 2 political parties of Jewish leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Sadducees feared that the continual preaching about the resurrection would destroy one of their fundamental beliefs that there was no life after death. They were afraid that if members of their party started believing in the resurrection of Jesus, they would lose numbers and as a result power. Pharisees were afraid that the teaching of Jesus and the disciples would undermine their ceremonial and sacrificial laws. As they did to deal with Jesus, they again had to put their differences aside to deal with the disciples.

The religious leaders of the Jews should have been the ones to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and work with Him to fulfill His mission. But because they were unfaithful, Christ's mission had been fulfilled in spite of their rejection of Him, and now as it appeared that they themselves had fulfilled prophecy, they were like men who had lost reason and logic. The only thing they could think to do was threaten, silence, and punish the new developing church. But with the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were not afraid, and repeated the words of Jesus, "If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you. They will throw you out of the synagogue and will even think they are doing God's work by killing you." [[John 15:20-21](#); [16:2-4](#)].

If the disciples were in prison and God wanted them out, it was no problem for Him. During the night, He sent an angel who opened the prison doors and told the disciples to go into the temple and preach the words of salvation. This command directly contradicted the command of the Jewish rulers, but the disciples did what they said they would, and obeyed God rather than man. Now Peter and John could even talk about the miracle of their release from prison, and how they were led right by all the prison guards who did nothing to stop them.

The high priest called the council together to decide what to do with Peter and John. They decided they could accuse them of plotting against the government, and they would add the charge of murdering Ananias and Sapphira. They hoped they could stir up the mob to shout for the death penalty as they had against Jesus. But they also realized that many people were unhappy with them and now had another option to turn to, so they were afraid the people might turn against them.

When they were ready, they sent guards to the prison to bring Peter and John. Not long after they were shocked to hear that though the doors were all still locked, and the soldiers were still standing guard, when they opened the cell door, it was empty. Then someone came and told them that Peter and John were in the temple preaching to the people. So, guards were sent to bring them from the temple, but they were instructed to do it politely so as not to cause a violent reaction from the people.

Being freed from prison didn't mean they would not have to suffer for Christ's sake. Jesus had told them, "You will be called before councils." [[Mark 13:9](#)]. The deliverance from prison was a miracle to strengthen their faith and the faith of the people, but now they would have to suffer for preaching about Jesus.

Before them, prophets had suffered prison, torture and death for speaking God's messages of truth. Now the apostles would suffer the same for preaching the gospel of salvation through Jesus. As Peter and John stood before the council they were asked, "Didn't we tell you not to preach about Jesus? You have filled Jerusalem with this story, and on top of that you are teaching that we are guilty of killing Him." Peter answered, "We told you that we had to obey God rather than man. And the angel that freed us from prison even told us to go back to the temple and preach. We were simply obeying the command of God."

Now the Holy Spirit came upon Peter, and he accused the council members, "This Jesus whom you killed and hung on a tree was brought back to life by the God of our fathers. God then took Him to heaven to be at His right hand, to be a Prince, and our Savior, so that our nation can repent and be forgiven for our sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, who God will give to those that obey Him."

The council was angry to be spoken to this way, and they were ready to kill the disciples without even going through the formality of the Roman court. If they were already guilty of the blood of Jesus, they were willing to do the same to His disciples. But Gamaliel, a man with great influence remained calm, and realizing the consequences of this action, asked that the prisoners be removed so he could say something. Then he began, "Men of Israel, I caution you about what you intend to do to these men. Remember the time when Theudas rose up and claimed he was

somebody, and some 400 men followed him. Then he was killed and all his followers were scattered. Then remember Judas of Galilee who rose up during the taxing, and many people followed him, but he also died and his followers were scattered. I suggest that you leave these men alone, and if this movement is not from God, it will fail, but if it is from Him, you will not be able to stop it. In fact, you might find yourself to be fighting against God.

The priests couldn't argue against the logic of Gamaliel but to satisfy their anger ordered the disciples to be beaten, then ordered them not to preach about Jesus anymore before releasing them. When the disciples walked free, they were happy that they were worthy to suffer punishment for the sake of Christ. Despite the warning, they continued preaching about Jesus in the temple every day.

In His last conversation with His disciples before He was crucified, Jesus told them that He would leave them with His peace. Not the kind of peace that the world gives, but the kind that would help them not to be afraid [[John 14:27](#)]. This is not peace with the world through compromise. In fact, Jesus said to them on an earlier occasion, "Don't think that I came to bring peace on earth, but a sword." [[Matthew 10:34](#)]. He was called the Prince of Peace, but He caused division. His message was good news and brought hope and joy to the hearts of men, but it also stirred up great opposition. His followers were warned, "You will have trouble and hardship in this world." [[John 16:33](#)]. "You will be arrested, persecuted, thrown in prison, and will stand on trial for My name's sake." [[Luke 21:12](#)]. "You will be betrayed by parents, family, and friends, even to be put to death." [[Luke 21:16](#)].

All these warnings Jesus gave were fulfilled over and over starting with the disciples, the early church, down through the dark ages, and it will continue wherever the gospel is preached. In this sinful world, truth has always faced great opposition. The strength to suffer persecution comes from being united with God. Persecution causes division between friends but never separates the faithful from the love of God. Jesus said, "I will show Myself to those who love Me and keep My commandments." [[John 14:21](#)]. Jesus' promise to them is, "They may kill the body, but they cannot destroy your soul." "Fear not, because I am with you. Do not be troubled, because I am your God. I will give you strength, I will help you, I will hold you up with the right hand of My righteousness." [[Isaiah 41:10](#)].

Chapter 9—The Seven Deacons

This chapter is based on [Acts 6:1-7](#).

In the early day of the church, when its number were increasing greatly, the Greeks complained that their widows were being ignored in the distribution of daily necessities. At the time of Pentecost there were people from many nations in Jerusalem [[Acts 2:5](#)], among them some Greeks that the Jews didn't like, possibly even hated. Now people from many nations were being converted and the racial issues had been softened by their common love of Christ, but Satan thought he could stir up this former racism and cause division in the church.

Now the attention of the disciples was called upon to deal with this issue before it grew into a larger problem. The Holy Spirit had been working through them with great results, and the church was growing so fast that organizational issues began to take up their time. The believers were gathered and led by the Holy Spirit the apostles announced that they would be choosing some leaders for the job of distributing food and other necessities to the people in need. For this they chose 7 men who would be called deacons, who had reputations for being honest, wise, and full of the Holy Spirit. These good men did their jobs well and even took care of the finances of the church, allowing the apostles to dedicate their time and effort completely to preaching and bringing in new members. Just because these deacons had a specific job didn't mean they were not allowed to teach and preach as well, which some of them did with great success.

Among the great numbers being added to the church were many priests. As the church continued to grow, it would eventually spread beyond the borders of Israel and spread out to the whole world. It was important that the church should be a light and a blessing to everyone, otherwise it could not hope to keep growing and spreading. This would only be possible if all the members got along well together, and that could only happen if they were united with Christ. Jesus had prayed asking the Father to help those who had been given to Him to be united, even as He and the Father were one [[John 17:11](#)]. On another occasion Jesus prayed, "Make them perfectly united as one so that the world would believe that I came from God." [[John 17:21](#)].

Unity with Christ was necessary to have the full power of the Holy Spirit and the help of angels. This was the only way they could be victorious over the powers of darkness. In this state nothing could stand in her way or stop her growth, and she could be described by the words of Solomon, "Fair as the moon, bright as the sun, as majestic as an army with billowing banners." [[Song of Solomon 6:10](#)].

The church in Jerusalem was to be an example for churches everywhere else, and those who were given the responsibility of keeping it running smoothly were not to act like kings or rulers, and their lives should be examples to the members [[1 Peter 5:2-3](#)]. The deacons were to be men who had a reputation of being honest, wise, and full of the Holy Spirit. They should have a uniting influence on the church, but they should always choose right over compromise. Later, as the apostles understood the different gifts of the Holy Spirit, the church would be organized further to best utilize these gifts. [1 Corinthians 12:28](#) Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages. [1 Corinthians 12:28 NLT](#).

[1 Corinthians 12:4](#) There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. ⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. ⁸ To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹ The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. ¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have. ¹² The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. [1 Corinthians 12:4-12 NLT](#).

But not just anyone should be chosen for leadership positions in the church. [Titus 1:7](#) An elder is a manager of God's household, so he must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money. ⁸ Rather, he must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life. ⁹ He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong. [Titus 1:7-9 NLT](#).

Following these guidelines, the church was well organized and united even though members and congregations were of many nationalities, and in different countries. If an issue arose that could not be resolved at the local church, it was referred up to the higher governing body. The highest level was the council in Jerusalem. There

was an example of this in the New Testament involving the church in Antioch. When the members of that church were not able to come to an agreement, the matter was taken up by the general council, and a decision was handed back down. [1 Corinthians 14:33](#) For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God's holy people. [1 Corinthians 14:33 NLT](#). God desires His work to be carried forward with completeness and precision. Members and churches should be united under the Holy Spirit, and all contributing their spiritual gifts toward the one goal of bringing the good news of God's grace and salvation to the world.

Chapter 10—The First Christian Martyr

This chapter is based on [Acts 6:5-7:60](#).

Stephen was the most well-known of the first 7 deacons. He was a man of great faith and was very knowledgeable about his religious beliefs. He was a Jew that spoke Greek and was also familiar with the Greek culture. Because of this he was able to preach the gospel to them at their places of worship. He was very active and spoke with great knowledge and confidence. Some religious teachers thought they could easily embarrass him in debate, but he was very knowledgeable about the law and the prophets, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and it was they who were embarrassed. He was a good example of the words spoken by Jesus, [Luke 21:14](#) So don't worry in advance about how to answer the charges against you, ¹⁵ for I will give you the right words and such wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply or refute you! [Luke 21:14-15 NLT](#).

The religious leaders of the nation were unable to debate against the reasoning and logic of Stephen, but instead of accepting it, they hated him and decided they had to kill him. He was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin council for trial. They were not supposed to condemn anyone to death, but on occasions they had bribed Roman officials to look the other way, and they did not doubt that they could do it again. Smart and knowledgeable men, even from other countries were brought in to respond to his powerful reasoning. Saul of Tarsus, being someone who was well spoken, was one of the men leading the effort to get rid of Stephen. He laid out their case against him, claiming that his teachings were dangerous to the nation. But those who were honest with themselves found Stephen to be full of knowledge and understanding of the purpose of God regarding the spread of the gospel to the world.

When they could not win in clear calm debate, their anger and hatred took over, and they hired false witnesses to claim Stephen had spoken blasphemous words against the temple and the law. They claimed he said that Jesus would destroy the temple and do away with the customs passed down to them from Moses. As Stephen stood there before the council, his face shone with light from heaven, like the face of an angel. His accusers had to shield their eyes from the brightness, but they were still intent on killing him. In his defense, he spoke out in a clear, strong voice, and began to tell the history of the chosen people of God. He explained how their religious system, and even their economy was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. He repeated the words of Moses predicting the coming of a Messiah, "God will raise up a prophet from among you like me, and you should listen to Him." Everything he said, showed that he was loyal to God and Jewish beliefs, but that the law they held in such honor did not save Israel from repeatedly falling into idolatry. He

reminded them of how even Solomon, who built the first temple, and later Isaiah said, "The Most High does not live in temples made by human hands, and that heaven is His throne and earth His footstool."

When Stephen said these things about the temple and explained to them how Jesus was the fulfillment of everything they looked forward to, the priest tore his robe in pretend horror at these blasphemous words. Stephen, realizing the fake trial was over, stopped his reasoning, and condemned his accusers, saying: "You stiff-necked people. You always reject the Holy Spirit as your fathers did before you. Which of the prophets did they not persecute and kill? And the One, these prophets predicted would come, you have betrayed and murdered." The priests were now so angry they were like wild beasts, attacking their prey as they rushed toward him grinding their teeth. Stephen had absolutely no fear of death and was calm as this wild scene unfolded before him. In fact, it faded from his view as he was given a vision which he described, "I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." His accusers covered their ears as they ran toward him, then they dragged him outside the city and began throwing stones at him. Then Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit, and please do not hold these people responsible for my death." After he said that he died.

The things that happened at Stephen's trial were not easy to forget. Many people, including Saul, remembered the calm convincing way he answered his accusers, the light that shone from his face, the vision he spoke of as he was being stoned, and the peaceful and forgiving spirit that he died with.

At first Saul's heart was softened by what he saw at Stephen's mock trial and murder. But shortly after he was angry at himself for those feelings, and then he put all his energy into persecuting the young church. He hunted them down, arresting them in their homes, and handing them over to be thrown in prison or even killed. The Christians in Jerusalem were terrified of Saul, and the Romans did nothing to stop the killing, and maybe even went along with it. Because of Saul's energy and enthusiasm that led to the death of Stephen, he was given the privilege of joining the Sanhedrin council. For a time, he was a great instrument in Satan's battle against the Son of God, but One stronger than Satan had plans for Saul.

Chapter 11—The Gospel in Samaria

This chapter is based on [Acts 8](#).

After Stephen was killed, it seems the floodgates of persecution against the Christians were opened and none of them were safe in Jerusalem, so they began to scatter all over the region of Judea and even Samaria. After Saul's conversion, he spoke of the terrible things he did to the followers of Jesus. [Acts 26:9](#) "I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the very name of Jesus the Nazarene. ¹⁰ Indeed, I did just that in Jerusalem. Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many believers there to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. ¹¹ Many times I had them punished in the synagogues to get them to curse Jesus. I was so violently opposed to them that I even chased them down in foreign cities. [Acts 26:9-11 NLT](#).

At this time of persecution against the church, Nicodemus boldly came forward in support of the followers of Jesus. He had been moved by the words and miracles of Jesus, but he had been too proud and felt he had too much to lose if he openly accepted and followed Him. As he became more convinced that Jesus was who He claimed to be, Nicodemus began to use his influence on the Sanhedrin to try to protect Jesus. Finally, when Jesus was lifted up on the cross, he remembered the words of Jesus from their private conversation, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." [[John 3:14](#)].

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both member of the Sanhedrin, had already shown their sympathy for Jesus when they went to Pilate to ask for the body, and at their own expense, laid Him to rest on a tomb. Their wealth and position on the council at first protected them from the hatred of the other ruling priests. Because of this they were able to give Jesus a proper burial while the disciples were completely helpless to do anything. Now Nicodemus encouraged the disciples and used his wealth to support the church and its mission to share the good news of salvation. The former respected member of the Sanhedrin council started being made fun of and even persecuted, but even when his wealth was used up, he remained faithful to Jesus.

As believers fled the persecution in Jerusalem, the result was that the gospel of Christ was spread to wherever they went. The disciples were in danger of just staying in Jerusalem, attempting to strengthen the church to stand firm against the tide of persecution, but this was not God's will. He had commanded them to take the good news to all the world [[Matthew 28:19](#)], and now He had allowed the persecution to accomplish this purpose. Regardless of the reason they left, since

they were overflowing with the love of Christ and the good news of salvation, they shared the gospel wherever they went.

Philip, another one of the 7 deacons went to Samaria and preached the gospel of Christ to them. Seeing the miracles performed by him and hearing the good news, there was great joy in that city. Seeing the need for more help, he sent a message to Jerusalem, asking the apostles to send help. When they got this message, they remembered the words of Jesus, that they should preach in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and then to the rest of the world [[Acts 1:8](#)].

From Samaria Philip received a message from heaven to go to a certain road that went from Jerusalem to Gaza, which he obeyed right away. When he got there, he saw a man who was high in the court of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was trusted as the keeper of all her treasures. He had been in Jerusalem to worship and was on his way back home, reading from the book of Isaiah as he rode in his chariot. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, going quietly without trying to defend Himself. He humbly accepted the sentence of death and was killed." [[Isaiah 53:7-8](#)].

The Spirit told Philip to run after the chariot and when he did, he asked the man in the chariot if he understood what he was reading? He answered, "How can I unless someone explains it to me?" So, he asked Philip to join him in the chariot, and Philip explained to him how the words he read were a prophecy of Christ and how it had just recently been fulfilled in the person of Jesus. The man's heart was thrilled with that he heard, and when they came to some water, he asked if he could get baptized right then and there. Philip answered, "If you believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, there is no reason not to." The man ordered the chariot to stop, and they went down into the water and he was baptized. As soon as they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord miraculously transported Philip away and the Ethiopian man went on his way rejoicing.

The Spirit transported Philip to Azotus where he immediately began preaching and went from one city to the next until he arrived in Caesarea. There are people who read the Bible but need someone to help them understand. They are thirsting for truth, and longing for hope, and ready and waiting to be told of God's love for them. People are needed who will listen to the Spirit, and be willing to go where He sends them, so they can minister to those who are ready and waiting. Everyone who has accepted the gospel of salvation has a responsibility to share the good news with others, and God's faithful people have always been very active missionaries. The work of spreading the gospel is not for the ordained minister alone. God expects all His followers to use the gifts and talents He has given them for the work of saving people for the kingdom of God.

Many believers are like the people standing in the marketplace doing nothing when they could be out in the field working. To these, the words of Jesus through His parable are, "Why are you here all day doing nothing? Go into the vineyard and work." [[Matthew 20:6](#)]. Because they are not a preacher or pastor, many more chose not to answer the call than the few who do. But God wants the entire church to catch the spirit of service, each one according to their abilities. When the members of God's church do this, the gospel will be preached to all the world and then the Lord Jesus will return. [Matthew 24:14](#) And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come. [Matthew 24:14 NLT](#).

Chapter 12—From Persecutor to Disciple

This chapter is based on [Acts 9:1-18](#).

One of the most energetic and aggressive opponents of the new Christian church was a man named Saul of Tarsus. He was a Jew but was also a Roman citizen by birth. He described his Jewishness this way. [Philippians 3:5](#) I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin--a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. ⁶ I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. [Philippians 3:5-6 NLT](#). Because he showed so much promise, he was even given a seat on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

Saul had a leading role in the trial, conviction, and death of Stephen. For a short time, he had been impressed with the thought that maybe God really was with Stephen. But he put those thoughts aside and re-convicted himself that Stephen was a blasphemer, Jesus was a pretender, and the Jewish leaders were fully on the side of God.

Because of his persecution of the new church, its members had scattered and as a result, their teachings had been spread far and wide [[Acts 8:4](#)]. One of the cities where they went was Damascus, and as a result there were many new converts there. Full of energy, Saul volunteered to go and do to the new believers there what he had done in Jerusalem.

At noon on the last day of their journey to Damascus, when the beautiful city was in view, suddenly a great light, brighter than the sun, surrounded the group. Saul was blinded by the light and was face down on the ground, when he heard a voice speaking to him in the Hebrew language [[Acts 26:13-14](#)]. The people traveling with him were terribly afraid when they saw the light, heard a voice that they couldn't understand, but didn't see anyone. But the voice spoke to Saul saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul answered, "Who are You Lord?" The answer came back, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. You should give up fighting against My will." [[Acts 26:14](#)]. In the light Paul saw a glorious being, the Son of God, Jesus the Crucified One. It became immediately clear to Saul that in persecuting the followers of Jesus, he was doing Satan's work. He became aware of the wrongs of his former life, and his need of the Holy Spirit. He realized that the priests and rulers were liars, and the disciples were telling the truth. In that instant, Saul understood that Old Testament prophecies had been fulfilled by Jesus. He even realized that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension were all predicted by the prophets. These realizations convinced him

that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, and He had been killed by human beings He had come to save. He also realized that Stephen had indeed seen into heaven and was shown Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Now he realized his great sin that had resulted in the persecution and death of so many followers of Jesus.

Saul then asked Jesus, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Jesus answered, "Get up, and go into the city, and you will receive further instructions there." When the brightness was gone, Saul realized that he was blind. Saul thought his blindness must be punishment for persecuting the followers of Jesus, but the brightness and glory of seeing Jesus had just been too much for his eyes to take. Now his traveling companions led him by the hand into the city.

That morning, he had approached the city with great plans for the arrests he was going to make, but now he was blind, helpless, and his spirit was tortured with the terrible things he had done. For three days Saul didn't eat or drink anything and was filled with guilt. With sadness, he remembered the evidence that had stared him in the face, when Stephen was lit up with glory from heaven. His only hope was God's mercy which he prayed for with a broken heart. During that time, he was still blind and couldn't read, but he remembered the scriptures that mentioned the promised Messiah, and he was surprised how clearly, they were fulfilled by Jesus. Saul had thought that Jesus was a law breaker, but now he realized that Jesus sacrificed His life so that the law could be kept when sinners repented and were forgiven. He saw clearly how the whole Jewish temple and sacrificial system pointed toward the one true sacrifice of Jesus to save humanity from sin.

The Christian believers had been told that Saul was coming to Damascus, and now they wondered if this was all part of the plan to trick them into revealing themselves, so none of them went to comfort or talk to him. But Saul was truly converted and allowed the Holy Spirit to come into him and to show him the mistakes of his life. He had been a proud Pharisee who trusted in his own good works, but now humbly realized his unworthiness, and confessed his sins to God.

Saul's conversion is an example of the power of the Holy Spirit to help people see their sinfulness and need of a Savior. Now there was something the followers of Jesus needed to do. God appeared to one in Damascus named Ananias and said to him, "Go to the street called Straight, to the home of Judas, and ask for someone called Saul of Tarsus. He is praying right now, and I am showing him a vision of you coming to lay hands on him to heal his blindness." Ananias was shocked by this command and replied, "Lord, I have heard about this man and the terrible things he has done to the church in Jerusalem, and how he has come here with the authority to arrest everyone who mentions Your name." God responded by saying,

"Just go and do what I asked you to do, because I have chosen him to preach the gospel of Salvation to the Gentiles, to kings and even to the Israelites."

Ananias obeyed and found Saul as directed and laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus that appeared to you has sent me to you so that you may see again and also be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately it was as if scales fell from his eyes and he could see again, then he got up and asked to be baptized. Jesus had given authority to the church organization and now Saul was sent to them. The church on earth was established by Christ's followers at His command, and He gave the church the knowledge of salvation to share with the world. Even though Jesus had appeared directly to Saul, he was still to work with and for the church. The church is to be Christ's representative on earth, and to act on His behalf. Christ is the fountain of living water, and the church is the channel through which it flows to the world.

Chapter 13—Days of Preparation

This chapter is based on [Acts 9:19-30](#).

After his baptism, Saul now known as Paul ended his fast and stayed with the disciples in Damascus. Right away he went into the synagogue and began to preach that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and was the Messiah that they had been expecting for so long. He died for our sins as the scriptures said He would, and was buried, and then rose again the third day. After being resurrected, he appeared to the 12 apostles, then He met with as many as 500 other disciples before He went back to heaven. Last of all, He appeared to me, as one who was born very late [[1 Corinthians 15:3-8](#)].

The chief priests in Jerusalem were shocked when they heard that the man they had sent to arrest the followers of Jesus had instead joined them. And worse still, was already preaching about Jesus as the crucified and risen Savior and was bringing new converts into the church. Saul had been a very committed and enthusiastic defender of the Jewish religion, and that included persecuting the followers of Jesus. Now the same commitment and energy along with his courage, persistence, and other talents were dedicated to the cause of Christ.

Jesus could have struck Saul dead on the road to Damascus to prevent him from killing any more of His followers. But from the perspective of the Jews, this was worse, because Saul had taken his considerable energy and talents and joined the other side, which was just what the young church needed at this time.

As Paul preached in Damascus, the people said, "Isn't this man the one who was destroying the church in Jerusalem, and even came here to do the same?" He spoke very clearly and convincingly about how the prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, proving that He was the Messiah. Now the Jews that weren't convinced by him, turned their hatred against him, and intended to put an end to him. Then a message came to him from heaven telling him to go to Arabia [[Galatians 1:17](#)].

There in the desert of Arabia, Paul spent time in quiet study and prayer. He examined his life and made sure he had repented of his past sins. He emptied himself of his former religious beliefs and traditions, making way for Jesus to fill him with truth, wisdom and grace. Any person that is truly open to the infinite mind of God, will not just benefit spiritually, but mentally and physically as well. [Job 22:21](#) "Submit to God, and you will have peace; then things will go well for you. [Job 22:21 NLT](#).

The responsibility of Ananias' words weighted heavily on Paul. [Acts 22:14](#) "Then he told me, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the

Righteous One and hear him speak.¹⁵ For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard.¹⁶ What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.' [Acts 22:14-16 NLT](#). Paul had received a personal invitation from Jesus Himself to be an apostle [[Galatians 1:1](#), [1 Corinthians 1:1](#)]. Now as he prepared himself, he spent much time studying the scriptures so he could preach the gospel, not with clever and convincing words, but in a way that the Spirit and power of God could work through him [[1 Corinthians 1:17](#); [2:4-5](#)].

As Paul studied the Scriptures, he realized that God didn't usually call the rich and powerful, the strong, or the wise, but He can use those who are weak and looked down on. In this way, it is Jesus Christ who is glorified and not the person [[1 Corinthians 1:26-29](#); [2:2](#)]. Many years later near the close of his ministry, Paul still remembered this. [Philippians 3:8](#) Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ⁹ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.¹⁰ I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, [Philippians 3:8-10 NLT](#).

After his preparation in the desert of Arabia, Paul returned to Damascus and again preached in the synagogue. This time the Jews were determined to capture and kill him, so they watched the city gates to make sure he didn't escape. But the Christians there helped him to escape by lowering him in a basket from the city wall, and from there he went to Jerusalem [[Acts 9:25-26](#)].

About 3 years after his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul was finally going to meet some of the apostles face to face in Jerusalem [[Galatians 1:18](#)]. But the Christians in Jerusalem were afraid, thinking maybe it was a trick to get them to expose themselves. But Barnabas believed him and brought him to the apostles and retold the story of his conversion, and how he had even preached boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus.

Not long after arriving in Jerusalem, Paul was anxious to reach out to the chief priests and rulers that he had formerly been associated with. Thinking they were sincere in their beliefs, he felt that they would see the truth as he had. So, he spoke to them boldly in the name of Jesus, and even debated some Greeks, but the Jewish leaders tried to kill him. Saddened that he was unable to convince any of them, Paul was praying in the temple when he was given a vision. [Acts 22:18](#) I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry! Leave Jerusalem, for the people here won't accept

your testimony about me.' [Acts 22:18 NLT](#). Paul was not afraid, and didn't want to give up so quickly, but the response was, [Acts 22:21](#) ",,, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!'" [Acts 22:21 NLT](#).

The believers were anxious about the safety of Paul in Jerusalem, so when they heard about his vision, they sent him on his way from Caesarea to Tarsus. After Paul left Jerusalem, the persecution died down, and the church had a period of rest, and during that time, many believers were added to the church.

Chapter 14—A Seeker for Truth

This chapter is based on [Acts 9:32-11:18](#).

Peter went to Lydda, where he visited the believers, and there was a man there named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed for 8 years. Peter said to him, "Aeneas, get up from your bed because Jesus Christ heals you." Immediately he got up and many people who saw this miracle joined the church.

Near Lydda was a town called Joppa where a woman named Dorcas had lived. She was a disciple of Jesus and had done many good deeds for the poor and needy but had recently gotten sick and died. Since Peter just happened to be nearby, they sent a messenger to Lydda, asking him to come to Joppa right away. When Peter arrived, he was immediately met by many widows who were crying and brought the clothes that Dorcas had made for them to show Peter. Seeing what this woman meant to the people of Joppa, he asked for some privacy so he could pray. He knelt and earnestly prayed that God would bring Dorcas back to life, then he said, "Tabitha arise," and she opened her eyes and got up.

In Caesarea there was a Roman centurion [centurions have 100 soldiers serving under their command] named Cornelius. He was born into a wealthy family and was educated and trained to serve his country in this honorable position. Though he was raised to worship the gods of the Romans, through his contact with the Jews, he had learned about God and had chosen to worship Him instead. He was known by both Jews and Romans as being a kind, honest, and generous man, who even cared for the poor. He prayed to God often and even had an altar in his home.

Cornelius was familiar with the Jewish Scripture prophecies about a Messiah, but he had not learned about the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. One day as he was praying, an angel appeared to him and said, "Your prayers have been heard by God. Send men to Joppa to the home of a man called Simon the Tanner who lives by the sea and ask for a man named Simon Peter. It is not angels who share the gospel of salvation, but fellow human beings. It is God's plan that those who have the light of salvation, share it with those who are in the darkness of sin. Human weakness combined with the power and wisdom of God is the tool God uses to spread the message of salvation to the world.

After talking to Cornelius, the angel went to Peter who happened to be praying on the rooftop of Simons house. Peter was hungry when he had a vision of a great sheet held up at the corners, and in it were all kinds of animals, including birds and insects. Then Peter heard a voice that said, "Peter, get up and kill and eat these animals." But Peter responded, "No Lord, I can't eat these unclean animals." Then

the angel answered him, "Do not call what God has cleansed common or unclean." Then the sheet was taken back up into the sky.

The Jews including Peter and the apostles felt that they were the chosen people, and that Gentiles were not worthy of salvation. God was trying to teach them that Christ died for all people, and He wants to save Gentiles just as much as Jews. Many Gentiles had listened to the preaching of Peter and the disciples, but there had been no effort targeted at them. God was preparing Peter to accept the invitation to preach the gospel to a Roman and wanted him to realize that both Jews and Gentiles who accepted the gospel were the same in His eyes.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the men sent from Cornelius arrived at Simon's house. Then the Spirit spoke to Peter and said, "There are 3 men looking for you. Go with them because I have sent them." When he went downstairs and met the men, he asked who they were and what they wanted. They said, "Cornelius, a centurion who is a God-fearing man, and even respected by the Jews, was told by an angel to come find you at this house and ask you to come teach him."

Peter was obedient to God and agreed to go with the messengers. The next day he took 6 Jews with him as witnesses because he knew that he would be called on to explain his behavior. When Peter entered the house, Cornelius treated him with reverence and respect and bowed down and touched his feet. Horrified at the idea of someone bowing down to him, he took Cornelius by the hand and lifted him up and said, "Stand up, I am a man just like you." While Peter was on his way, Cornelius had gathered a group of family and friends and now there was a large gathering who were anxious to listen to what Peter would say.

Peter started by saying, "You know that it is against our laws for me to be here in your house talking to you, but God has shown me that I should not treat any person as unclean. Because of that I came when you called without making any fuss about it, so please tell me why you sent for me." Cornelius then told Peter about his vision, and said, "We are all gathered here now to hear what God wants you to tell us." Peter said, "I can see that God doesn't see any difference between people from different nations, but anyone can be accepted by Him." Then Peter told them about Jesus, His life, miracles, crucifixion, resurrection, and how He is back in heaven now, representing the human race and their interests. As Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on the people gathered, and the Jews that came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was also given to Gentiles. Then Peter said, "Since these have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, does anyone see any reason they should not be baptized in the name of Jesus?"

Cornelius was the first well-known Gentile convert but there would be many more to follow. From that household, many more Gentiles in that city and beyond would be converted to the Christian faith. There are many in the world today, some poor, and seemingly unimportant, as well as people with great power and influence, who are responding to the Holy Spirit and looking for something better. It is difficult and takes courage for them to go against the ways of the world, but they are ready and waiting to hear the gospel of salvation. They will like Cornelius be obedient to the light they have and will be open to receive more light when God arranges for it. God calls men and women to this job of sharing the gospel, but it is the Holy Spirit that will convert the souls. Those who are converted can also be used by God to reach others like themselves.

When the church leaders heard that Peter had gone into the house of a Gentile and even ate with them, they were shocked and upset. But Peter explained the whole matter to them, starting with the vision he was given, and ending with the fact that the Holy Spirit was poured out on them. He said, "If God gave them the Holy Spirit, who was I to stand in the way, so I baptized them." When the church leaders heard this, they glorified God and said, "So it seems that God is also giving the gift of repentance and eternal life to the Gentiles as well."

Chapter 15—Delivered From Prison

This chapter is based on [Acts 12:1-23](#).

At the time, Herod Agrippa was king over the region of Judea, subject of course to the Roman emperor Claudius. He had been converted to the Jewish faith and put on a great show of keeping the ceremonies of the Jewish law. To keep his position secure, he tried to make the Jews like him. When he saw their battle against the new Christian church, he decided to help them by putting the disciple Jame in prison and then killing him by cutting off his head. When he saw that the Jewish leaders were happy, he threw Peter in prison as well.

It was Passover time, and the Jews were celebrating their deliverance from Egypt, and putting on a great show of their obedience to the law of God through keeping their religious ceremonies, but at the same time they were murdering the followers of Jesus. The church was very sad about losing James, 1 of the 12 disciples, and were now praying earnestly for Peter. The Jews were very happy about the death of James but only wished that it had been done more publicly. For this reason, Herod was planning to make a public show of the killing of Peter. The Jews were a little concerned that during Passover the crowds might be a little too big and hard to manage. They were also afraid that if Peter were allowed to defend himself at his trial, they would just be giving him a platform, many would sympathize with him, and his release might be demanded by the people.

While Peter sat in Herod's dungeon, the church was praying for his release. They plead with God for help, thinking that if Peter could be taken from them, no one was safe and the church might be destroyed. Meanwhile Jews from many nations had come for Passover and were worshipping in the beautiful temple that no longer had His presence. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had called the temple His Father's house, but near the end, Jesus said, [Matthew 23:38](#) And now, look, your house is abandoned and desolate. [Matthew 23:38 NLT](#).

Remembering how Peter and John had escaped from prison before, Herod assigned 16 soldiers, working in shifts 24 hours a day, to guard against his escape. But the more effort man uses to fight against God, the more His power can be demonstrated. His cell was carved out of solid rock, and he was even chained to two guards, and strong doors were securely locked. The night before he was to be brought out for trial and execution, an angel silently entered the cell where Peter was sleeping peacefully. The angel touched him to wake him up and said, "Get up quickly." Peter was barely awake, even thinking he might be having a dream, and as he stood up the chains simply fell off. Then the angel said, "Put on your coat and follow me." The two guards were in a deep sleep and remained motionless as

the heavy cell doors silently swung open and then shut after they passed through. Guards on the outside of the door were also in a deep sleep and remained motionless. The next set of doors opened and closed on their own as the first and the guards remained in deep sleep. The same happened with the 3rd and last set of doors and guards and Peter was on the street, still not sure if he was dreaming, when the angel suddenly disappeared.

Recognizing where he was, Peter went to the nearest house of believers and knocked on the door. A group was gathered there, praying for him at that very time. A young woman named Rhoda went to see who was knocking and recognized Peter's voice on the other side of the door. But she was so shocked and excited, she didn't open the door for him but ran back to the praying believers and said, "Peter is at the door." Lacking faith, they said to her, "You are crazy," but she insisted, and the knocking on the door continued. Finally, they went to the door and opened it, and they were amazed to see Peter standing there. Then Peter went in and told them how he had escaped from prison, and everyone was happy that God had answered their prayers.

Later that day, people were already gathering for the execution when Herod sent men to bring Peter from his prison cell. The guards had all been told that they would be executed if the prisoner escaped, and the guards at the outer doors, not realizing anything was wrong, allowed the men to enter. When they finally reached the inner cell, the guards were still there with the chains still fastened to their wrists, but Peter was gone. Then men returned to Herod and reported what they saw, and in a rage even though he knew it was not their fault, he ordered all the guards to be killed.

Sometime later Herod threw a great festival in Caesarea, designed at least in part to hear the praise and love of the people. He would give them a great feast and lots of wine, showing evidence of his great wealth. At one point Herod stood up to speak, and the sunlight reflected in all directions from the gems and gold of his royal robe and crown. The guests who were drunk with wine, were dazzled by what they saw, and they shouted out, "It is the voice of a god and not a man." Some of these same voices at the trial of Jesus had shouted, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" They could not recognize in the poor, humble person of Jesus the king of the universe, but they were ready to worship a proud and cruel king as a god because of his wealth and splendor.

Suddenly Herod became pale and bent over in pain. Moments before he had been accepting the praise and worship of the people, and now he realized that God must be punishing him. He thought about his persecution of the followers of Jesus, his murder of the disciple James, and the miraculous events that had saved Peter from

the same fate. He now realized he had taken out his anger on the prison guards and had them killed even though he knew Peter's escape had been miraculous. Herod knew the law of God that said, [Exodus 20:3](#) "You must not have any other god but me. [Exodus 20:3 NLT](#). He now realized that he had allowed himself to be worshiped as a god and now he was being punished for it. Now the same angel that had delivered Peter from prison brought the judgment of God upon Herod and he died in great pain and mental agony.

The experience of Philip being told by an angel to go to a specific place to meet someone who was searching for truth, and the messages to Cornelius and Peter show how close heaven is to earth, and how familiar God is with details of our lives. Even if we do not see them, we can be certain that angels from God are following His commands to carry out His will here on earth. It is like angels continually going up and down a ladder between heaven and earth, bringing comfort, courage, and hope to people on earth. We cannot see them in their spirit form, but if we are tuned to spiritual things, we can hear them speak to us. But there are times, and we may never know at the time it is happening, that angels appear in human form, and encourage and protect.

There is a spiritual war going on and earth is a battlefield. [Psalm 34:7](#) For the angel of the LORD is a guard; he surrounds and defends all who fear him. [Psalm 34:7 NLT](#). It is their job to look after the precious souls that Christ gave His life to save. [Hebrews 1:14](#) Therefore, angels are only servants--spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation. [Hebrews 1:14 NLT](#).

Chapter 16—The Gospel Message in Antioch

This chapter is based on [Acts 11:19-26](#); [13:1-3](#).

Persecution drove the disciples out of Jerusalem, and the result was that the gospel was spread far and wide. The disciples worked mostly among the Hebrew and Greek speaking Jews which could be found in most cities throughout the world. The Jews in Antioch, a large city in Syria were receptive to the gospel message and many people believed and joined the church. Antioch was also known as a city that had a lot to offer pleasure seekers, because of its beautiful location, wealth, and culture. Some of the pleasurable activities were immoral or sinful.

When the leaders in Jerusalem heard about the great number of people joining the church, they sent Barnabas to help. He was very happy to see everything that was happening and encouraged everyone to cling to the Lord. The work of Barnabas was blessed by God, and many more people joined the church. He became so busy that he felt he needed some help and decided to try to get Paul to join him in Antioch. At that time Paul had been preaching in areas around Syria and Cilicia [[Galatians 1:21](#)], and he agreed to join Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas worked well together and over 2 years of faithful ministry, brought many people to a saving knowledge of Jesus. It was in Antioch where the name Christian originated, because Christ was all they ever talked about. This example of always talking about Christ should be followed by church members everywhere.

Sometimes God calls great leaders, like Paul and Barnabas to His work, but He wants everyone to contribute to the work in their own way and according to their talents. God can bless their efforts, and they may reach some who might not have been reached any other way. Today, God needs people to help spread Bible truth, and it is not just preachers but doctors, nurses, door-to-door bible workers, and anyone who can share their knowledge of the love and power of God.

As Paul worked with Barnabas in Antioch, he remembered His call by God to be a missionary to the Gentiles. "Go, for I will send you far from here unto the Gentiles." [[Acts 22:21](#)]. In preparation for this job, God had brought Paul into very close connection with Himself, giving him visions of heaven, and showing him mysteries that have been secret since the beginning of the world [[Romans 16:25](#)]. Paul and the apostles were privileged to understand mysteries that had not been revealed to previous generations. The mystery is this: Those that believe in the good news of salvation all share equally in the riches that God gives to His children [[Ephesians 3:5-6](#)].

The work of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch was greatly blessed by God but neither had yet been recognized by the church as ministers of the gospel. The Holy Spirit

spoke to the leaders of the church in Antioch and said, "Set aside Barnabas and Paul for the work that I have called them to do." So, in a service with fasting and prayer, hands were laid on them, and they were commissioned by the church to teach, preach, baptize and organize new churches.

The church consisted mainly of Jews at this time, and there would be a lot of resistance to welcoming Gentiles. By giving His life to save all people, Christ broke down the wall separating Jews and Gentiles, uniting them together into one church [[Ephesians 2:14](#)]. Now God wanted it to be made very clear that that it was His will and His command to bring Gentiles into the church, and these men were chosen by Him for this task. Paul had been called by Jesus Himself more than 3 years before on the road to Damascus, and now this call was formally recognized by the church.

Through His true church, God can let the world know what He wants it to know, and it will bring light to the world. The church is made up of many members, and God doesn't give information or knowledge to one while leaving the rest in darkness. People can have greater confidence in their work if they are working together with the church toward a common goal. Trusting one's own judgment and independent spirit when it goes against the advice of those that God has placed in positions of leadership is like ignoring the voice of God. Anyone who thinks they must hear every truth directly from God or the Holy Spirit are in danger of being deceived by Satan. God desires that all members should be united with each other and the church, and that all believers will work in an organized way to give the good news of salvation to the world. Paul considered this ordination by the church to be a starting point for his ministry to the Gentiles. It was this event that recognized his leadership role as an apostle in the Christian church.

While the church in Antioch was growing, some of the apostles in Jerusalem continued to preach, even though there was great danger in doing so. Jews from all over the world continued traveling to Jerusalem for the yearly festivals. Many of these who had studied the prophecies earnestly were expecting the soon arrival of the Messiah. With the preaching of the apostles, and the Holy Spirit working on the hearts of these pilgrims, many were converted. When they returned home, they carried the good news with them and began to share it where they lived. Peter and John felt called to work among the Jews at home and continued to do so. [Acts 2:36](#) "So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!" [Acts 2:36 NLT](#).

Chapter 17—Heralds of the Gospel

This chapter is based on [Acts 13:4-52](#).

After their ordination, Paul and Barnabas were obedient to the call of the Holy Spirit and set off on their first missionary journey, going first to Seleucia, and then to Cyprus. After Stephen was killed, some who fled the persecution went to Cyprus, and it was from there that people carried the gospel to Antioch [[Acts 11:20](#)]. Cyprus was where Barnabas was from [[Acts 4:36](#)], and accompanied by Paul and a relative named John Mark, he returned to his Island home.

Mark's mother, also a Christian lived in Jerusalem, and their home was always a place the disciples were welcome when they need a place to rest. It was on one of these occasions that the young Mark informed Paul and Barnabas that he wanted to go with them on their missionary trip.

When the team arrived at Salamis, they preached in the Jewish synagogue and then went on to the island of Paphos. The governor of that country was careful and wise man named Sergius Paulus who was interested in what Paul and Barnabas were teaching and had even asked for a private meeting with them. But there was a man named Elymas, also known as Bar-Jesus, who was a magician, and a false prophet, who was trying to turn him away from the truth. Here can be seen the forces of evil working against the spread of the gospel and specifically fighting for the soul of one person.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul said to Elymas, "Child of the devil and enemy of all that is good, will you never stop trying to interfere with God's plans? The hand of God is upon you, and you will be blind for a while." When Sergius Paulus saw this miracle, he was amazed by the power of God and accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those doing the work of God can expect that Satan and his followers will try to interfere, but God is stronger and can confuse their efforts.

From Salamis, Paul and Barnabas went on to Perga in Pamphylia. The journey was very difficult and dangerous, and they were tired, hungry, and cold, but they trusted in God to protect them. They continued even with the hardships because they were filled with love for people who didn't know the love of Jesus and the salvation He offered. It was at this time that Mark, overwhelmed by fear and discouragement, couldn't take it anymore and left them to go home. Mark had done good work in easier conditions but was not used to suffering such difficulty. Paul judged Mark harshly for abandoning them, but Barnabas thought he still had potential and could develop into good worker for God. Barnabas was right about Mark, and Paul even admitted it later [[2 Timothy 4:11](#)].

After Mark left them, Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch in Pisidia [modern day Turkey] and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. After the reading, the Jews asked the visitors if they had any words of encouragement to share. Since he was invited to speak, of course Paul accepted and stood up to speak. He began with the history of Israel and spoke of the things God had done to and for them, starting with the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. He reminded them of how a Savior had been promised from among the descendants of David. Then speaking of much more recent history, told them of the preaching of John the Baptist and how he encouraged people to repent and be baptized. When some people began to wonder if he was the Messiah, John told them that the One they were looking for would follow him, and would be so great, he would not even be worthy to take off His shoes. Then with great power, Paul spoke of Jesus as the One they had been waiting for, and that He was the Savior of all people.

Paul went on to talk about how the Jews in Jerusalem continued to read about the coming Messiah every Sabbath, and yet they didn't recognize that Jesus was the One they were waiting for. Even the chief priests and rulers didn't recognize it, and what's worse, even though He had done nothing wrong, they decided to kill Him. They even asked Pilate to help them out by crucifying Him. After He died, He was placed in a tomb, but God raised Him up from death and He was seen by many people over a number of days.

Paul went on to say, everything that happened including the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, was prophesied in the Scriptures. These words David wrote were God's words about Jesus. "You are My Son, and today I have become Your Father." [[Psalm 2:7](#)]. [Psalm 16:10](#) For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your holy one to rot in the grave. [Psalm 16:10 NLT](#). These words written by David were not about himself because he died and his body did rot in the grave.

Having just reminded his hearers about the prophecies of the Messiah, Paul then spoke of repentance and forgiveness for their sins. According to the law of Moses, all are condemned to death, but through the death of Jesus, there is forgiveness. The Holy Spirit was with the words spoken, and many Jews believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and many Gentiles believed that salvation was also available to them. After the Jews had left the synagogue, the Gentiles came to Paul and Barnabas and asked if they could preach the same message again next Sabbath. On the next Sabbath, it seemed the whole city had come to the synagogue to hear the word of God, but when the Jews saw the crowds that came to hear Paul, they were jealous and started arguing with them about the things they were saying.

Then Paul spoke out boldly saying, "This message of good news and salvation was first offered to you, but when you rejected it, we offered it to the Gentiles. Now

God has commanded us to offer salvation to the Gentiles, and it will be like a light to the whole world." When the Gentiles heard this, they were very happy that they could be considered children of God, and they spread the good news throughout the whole region. This was prophesied by the prophet Hosea. "Those who were called, 'Not My people,' I will say, 'Now you are My people.' And they will respond, 'You are our God.'" [[Hosea 2:23](#)]. Jesus Himself said as much, "The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation that bears fruit." [[Matthew 21:43](#)]. "Make disciples of all nations." [[Matthew 28:19](#)].

In offering the good news of salvation to the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas were not ignoring the Jews, but they simply offered the gospel to all people regardless of their nationality. But their effort and energy were directed more toward people who had less or no knowledge of God and Jesus. Paul wrote this to Gentiles, "There was a time when you were living apart from Christ because the Jews excluded you from citizenship and made it hard for you to learn about the promises He made to them. At that time, you lived without God and without hope, but now you have been shown that Christ accepts you, and that you have been brought close to Him through His blood." [[Ephesians 2:12-13](#)]. "Now you Gentiles are no longer foreigners and strangers, but you are equal citizens with God's people and are all part of His family." [[Ephesians 2:19](#)].

Paul never tired of building up the kingdom of God, especially among the people who had been looked down on by the teachers in Israel. His message everywhere he went was always that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords [[1 Timothy 6:15](#)]. Any belief in salvation must be built upon Christ, the living and main foundation stone. It is large enough and strong enough to support the weight of the entire world. Paul wrote, "You are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, but Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone [[Ephesians 2:20](#)].

Because of the success of the spread of the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia, the unbelieving Jews there became jealous and stirred up some deeply religious Jews, both men and women, to persecute Paul and Barnabas, and to drive them out of town. The apostles left, rejoicing because of the words of Jesus, "Blessed are you when men make fun of you, and persecute, and lie about you for My sake. Rejoice and be very happy, because your reward in heaven will be great. The prophets who went before you were also treated the same way." [[Matthew 5:11-12](#)]. The apostles were also comforted that the believers they left behind were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit."

Chapter 18—Preaching Among the Heathen

This chapter is based on [Acts 14:1-26](#).

Paul and Barnabas next went to Iconium and went to the synagogue where they found many Jews and Greeks who believed. But as seemed to happen everywhere, unbelieving Jews worked against them and caused trouble for them. The apostles were not discouraged, because many people chose to believe, even though the unbelieving Jews were doing everything they could to stop them. This time the Jews went to the city officials and lied that Paul and Barnabas were dangerous men, and that they were recruiting people to rebel against the government.

When the apostles were brought in for questioning, the city officials were surprised that these men were not at all what the Jews claimed. They found them to be good, honest, law-abiding citizens, and even felt the morals and order of the city would be improved by what Paul and Barnabas were preaching. The efforts of the unbelieving Jews only seemed to bring more attention to the teaching of Paul and Barnabas, and as a result more people were converted. This made the jealous Jews angrier, and they decided to take matters into their own hands by stirring up a mob to hopefully kill the apostles. Friends who weren't even believers warned the apostles of the evil plans of the Jews. Rather than bring this trouble upon the city and the new believers, Paul and Barnabas left in secret before they could be attacked and stoned by the mob.

There have always been people who rejected light from heaven, then strongly opposed the work of God's messengers. This is often accomplished by lying to the people and interfering with the missionaries' access to them. But God does not allow this interference to remain permanently, and eventually doors will open.

After leaving Iconium, the apostles went to Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia. In Lystra there were so few Jews, that there was no synagogue, so Paul and Barnabas hoped to avoid the Jewish prejudice and persecution. The people in these towns were heathen, many of whom worshipped Jupiter, and when the apostles explained to them the gospel of Jesus Christ, they tried to understand in terms of their own religious beliefs. So, Paul and Barnabas told them about the God who created the world they see around them, and that Jesus Christ was His Son.

As Paul was telling the people about the miracle working power of Jesus, and how he went about healing the sick, he noticed a crippled man who looked like he believed. Paul thought to himself, this man has enough faith to be healed, so he asked the man to stand up which he did and then started to walk around and even began jump up and down.

When the people saw the miracle, they were amazed and said, the gods have come down among us as men. They decided that Barnabas must be Jupiter because of his kindly elder appearance, and Paul must be Mercury because he was the main speaker. Without the apostles' knowledge, the people immediately began preparing a sacrifice to honor their gods. When they discovered what was happening, the apostles tore their clothes and ran among the people trying to get their attention and telling them to stop, saying, "We are just men like you, and we are trying to teach you about the God who created these things you worship as gods." After great effort by Paul, he was finally able to stop the sacrificial service.

Certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium had heard about the success of Paul and Barnabas in Lycaonia and decided to go to Lystra and put an end to them. The people had been very disappointed when they were told that their gods had not come down among them, and now the Jews were able to convince them that Paul and Barnabas were evil people and should be put to death. They even convinced the people that they should not let Paul defend himself, because if they did, he might trick them into believing him with magic. Allowing themselves to be stirred up into a satanic frenzy, they grabbed Paul and threw stones at him until they thought he was dead. Thinking that his end had come, Paul recalled his part in the stoning of Stephen. When they were done, the mob dragged Paul outside the city and left him, thinking he was dead.

The new converts of Lystra were saddened by what had happened and gathered around the body of Paul. As they were weeping, Paul suddenly lifted his head, then got up and praised God. Then the believers rejoiced, feeling like another miracle had happened, and their faith was strengthened. Among these new believers was a young man named Timothy who would later become a faithful co-worker of Paul and a leader in the church.

The day after Paul was stoned, the apostles went to Derbe, where many souls were led to accept Christ as their Savior. After this the apostles decided that since they had left Lystra in such a hurry, they should go back and check on the new believers. While there, they set up a church and chose people for positions of leadership, so the believers could have an organized way to meet and strengthen and encourage each other. The apostles went back through Iconium and Antioch, in fact they went back to all the places they had left new believers and established churches for all of them. The idea that believers can support and encourage each other by worshipping together is implied by the words of Jesus. [Matthew 18:20](#) For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them." [Matthew 18:20 NLT](#). Even though Paul was on the move so much, he did not forget the new believers and churches he had set up. And leaders like Timothy rose up from among the new believers and followed the example of the apostles.

Chapter 19—Jew and Gentile

This chapter is based on [Acts 15:1-35](#).

Upon arriving back in Antioch where they had begun their missionary trip, Paul and Barnabas gathered the believers to tell them about how God had blessed their work for the Gentiles [[Acts 14:27](#)]. The church in Antioch was large and growing from both Jews and Gentiles of all classes and nationalities. While there, some Pharisees from Judea, who were believers asked, shouldn't these Gentiles need to be circumcised and keep the entire ceremonial law in order to be saved? In fact, many Jews including those from Antioch felt that if the Jewish laws and ceremonies were not kept by all members, the church would lose its Jewish distinctiveness. The Jews who argued for this failed to realize that these ceremonies pointed forward to the death of the Son of God, which had been fulfilled, and so were no longer needed.

Before his conversion, Paul had thought of himself as a perfect law keeper [[Philippians 3:6](#)]. But because of salvation through the death of Jesus, Paul now understood those ceremonies much better than before. He also understood the difference between the ceremonies and the Ten Commandments, which he believed should still be kept in every detail. The question about Jewish ceremonial laws that had been raised was starting to cause great division in the church. So, it was decided that Paul and Barnabas should go to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem to get a decision about how the church should proceed on the question of circumcision and Jewish ceremonial laws.

In Jerusalem, the representatives from Antioch requested a gathering of the apostles and leaders of the church to get an answer to their question. Along with circumcision, the ceremonial law forbidding the eating of meat offered to idols also came up. It was thought that in Gentile lands, it might be difficult to know when buying meat from the market if it had been offered to idols somewhere along the way. The members of the council discussed the question in a calm, orderly way. Then, Peter spoke up to remind everyone how God had given him a vision leading him to understand that the Gentiles were not to be thought of as unclean, and how the Holy Spirit was also given to the Gentiles. He added, why would you burden these new Gentile believers with so many Jewish ceremonies that even we and our ancestors have had difficulty keeping. When speaking of Jewish ceremonies, Peter was not talking about the Ten Commandments.

After Peter spoke, then Paul and Barnabas were able to speak without interruption, and they proceeded to tell the council all the wonderful things including the miracles that God performed among the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit then impressed

the council members that all the ceremonial laws should not be forced upon the Gentile Christians. Then James stood up and announced his final decision, "It is my decision that we do not trouble the Gentile converts with all of our ceremonial laws."

James, giving his final decision seemed to imply his position of leadership in the council. The Catholic church has claimed the Peter was the first Pope and leader of the Christian church, but this seems to indicate otherwise.

This decision didn't mean there were no Christian principles that new believers were asked to live by. The council sent in writing that the Gentile Christians should avoid sexual immorality, and the following 3 things regarding the meat they ate: 1) meat offered to idols, 2) animals that were choked to death, 3) blood or meat that had blood still in it. They were advised to keep the Ten Commandments and try to live holy lives. Lastly, they were told that anyone telling them they needed to be circumcised was not speaking for the council. Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas were then sent back to Antioch with the decision of the council which was the highest authority for the church on earth.

The entire church was not asked to vote on the issue, but men of God which included the apostles and some elders were moved by the Holy Spirit and made the decision for everyone. Many Jews especially those living in Jerusalem near the temple were not happy with the decision. They had thought of the Christian church as an extension of Judaism and saw that this was taking the church in a very different direction, especially with all the Gentile converts. Many of these dissatisfied people blamed Paul and accused him of not keeping the Jewish ceremonial laws. Unfortunately, even some of the disciples were uncomfortable with the decision of the council. This was evident when at a later time Peter visited Antioch and at first mingled freely with the Gentiles, but when some Jews who strongly pushed the ceremonial laws came, Peter started acting like them, treating the Gentile Christians as second class citizens. Even Barnabas was swept up in this action, then Paul openly confronted Peter and told him this was wrong. He said, "If you being a Jewish Christian have even laid aside some of the ceremonial laws, why would you expect the Gentiles to live as Jews?" [[Galatians 2:13-14](#)].

Peter accepted the reproof from Paul and changed his behavior accordingly. This showed the weakness of human beings, even from someone like Peter who had been with Jesus. It showed that if he could make mistakes, anyone could, but it also showed that Peter was not perfect, nor was he the boss over all the apostles. Paul often stood alone in his ministry, but he always stood firm on the principles he believed in. He realized that the church should always stay under the influence of the Holy Spirit and not the desires of men, and that tradition should not be

honored more than truth. Paul received truth directly from God throughout his ministry because he maintained his connection with God. He was personally taught by God that the Gentile Christians should not be burdened with Jewish tradition. But even though he was directly taught from God, Paul understood the importance of the church having a God led council to hold the believers in unity with each other. This incident shows how Paul recognized this authority. He also wrote, "God's ways are not disorderly, but peaceful." [[1 Corinthians 14:33](#)]. Peter wrote, "Those who are younger should accept the authority of the elders, and everyone should show humble respect to each other." [[1Peter 5:5](#)].

The church in Antioch was blessed by the presence of Judas and Silas who both had the spiritual gift of prophecy, and of course Paul and Barnabas. Now, not having to convert the Gentiles to Judaism in addition to Christianity, the church grew and prospered.

Chapter 20—Exalting the Cross

This chapter is based on [Acts 15:36-16:6](#).

After a while back in Antioch where the first missionary journey had begun, Paul suggested that they go out again to visit the new churches they had started to see how they were doing. Paul had a love for the new converts and wanted to make sure they were staying faithful to God but also growing individually in holiness and the fear of God. He wanted each new church to become strong enough, so they were not dependent on him, but growing in their own spiritual walk with God.

Barnabas was ready to go and suggested they take Mark again, but Paul felt that Mark had deserted them when things got rough and was not willing to give him another chance. They were in such strong disagreement, that they split up and Barnabas took Mark, and went to Cyprus, and Paul chose Silas and went to Syria and Cilicia. With Silas, Paul eventually went back to Lystra where he had been stoned and was very happy and relieved to see that the believers there had stayed faithful and strong in the face of great opposition.

Timothy was very happy to see Paul again and was convinced that he should devote his life to full-time service as Paul was doing. Paul saw the potential in Timothy but after his experience with Mark, was careful about trusting someone so young, but he did begin training him. Paul also had some concern about how Jews would react to Timothy because even though his mother was a Jew, his father was a Greek. He had been taught from the Scriptures from the time he was a child by his mother and his grandmother. Finally, after realizing how faithful and reliable Timothy was, Paul chose him to go on a missionary trip with him. His mother and grandmother must have felt rewarded and pleased to see him selected by the great apostle.

While Paul himself did not believe circumcision was needed for salvation, he also realized the prejudice of the Jews against Gentiles and those who were not circumcised. Because they would sometimes be preaching in Jewish synagogues and wished to convert Jews as well, Paul thought it best that Timothy be circumcised. Paul had experienced all kinds of prejudice and persecution and wished as much as possible to remove any stumbling blocks to people they would be ministering to.

Paul and Silas both took great interest in mentoring and training Timothy for Christian service. Paul would teach and quiz him about sacred history, and Timothy would ask Paul for advice rather than making hasty decisions. He was always concerned with whether his actions were God's will and was open to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Anyone who studies the Bible deeply and opens

themselves to be taught by the Holy Spirit can like Timothy develop into great workers for God. While more than ordinary effort is required to prepare a person for the work of saving souls, it is the power of God that produces the results. It is the grace of God that brings salvation and gives us power to live holy lives in this sinful world. While we wait for our Savior, Jesus Christ, to return, He can turn us into people that don't seem to fit in this world and are always trying to do good works [[Titus 2:11-14](#)].

Before going to new places, Paul and his companions revisited the places they had already been, to see how they were doing and to give them the decision from the council about the Jewish ceremonial laws. They found the churches well established in the faith, and increasing daily in membership. Paul felt great responsibility to the new converts, wishing they would be faithful, and that they would continue to grow in their walk with God. He wanted them to deeply study the Scriptures for themselves, and eventually they would begin to do the work Christ did. It is a law of life that natural abilities which are not exercised and developed fade away and disappear. The good news of salvation loses its life-giving power if it is not shared.

Paul felt he had a God given responsibility to share the good news of salvation, and to point people toward Jesus. If he didn't do this, he felt his own salvation would be in question. His great desire was that the church would be built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, and not that of a human being. His knowledge, ability to speak, the miracles done through him, and even his vision of heaven, would be meaningless if he failed to point people toward Jesus. Paul wished that the people he had a hand in bringing to Christ would live clean and pure lives as children of God, and that they would be like a light shining in a world of darkness [[Philippians 2:15](#)].

After visiting the churches that had been started in the region of Pisidia, Paul and Silas took Timothy with them to Phrygia and the region of Galatia. The Galatians worshipped idols, but they rejoiced when they heard they could be free from the guilt and the hold sin had on them. They were taught that they could have the righteousness of Christ by having faith in His sacrifice to pay the price for sin. The human race was lost to sin because they had broken the law of God, but Christ came to suffer the consequence for the law that was broken, even though He was perfectly obedient to it. Through this act of Christ, many would begin to understand the love of God for the people of this world. When they heard this news, the Galatians accepted it, received the Spirit, and became children of God through faith in Jesus [[Galatians 3:2, 26](#)].

The job of the missionary is not to talk about themselves, but to always point people to Christ and His sacrifice for them [[2 Corinthians 4:5-6](#)]. The death of

Christ means everything to us. It proves God's great love for humanity and allows Him to accept us into the family of heaven, and Churches would be much more successful if they talked about it more. Paul said, [Galatians 6:14](#) As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died. [Galatians 6:14 NLT](#). We have the privilege to boast about what Christ did for us when He died on the cross, and by doing so we bring light into the darkness of this world. We can show our thankfulness by giving our lives to Him so that we can become His brothers and sisters in heaven.

Chapter 21—In the Regions Beyond

This chapter is based on [Acts 16:7-40](#).

In Troas, Paul received a vision of a man saying, "Please come to Macedonia and help us." Macedonia was in modern day Europe where the gospel had not been taken yet and Paul felt that God was calling them to go there as soon as possible. Luke was now traveling with Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and they all left Troas, passing through Samothracia, and Neapolis, on their way to Philippi, the most important city in Macedonia.

On Sabbath they went to the river where they talked to some women who were praying there. One, named Lydia worshiped God and she was very open to the new truth, and she and her whole household were baptized, and she asked the apostles to stay at her house while they were there.

As the apostles went about town teaching and preaching, a woman who was possessed by a spirit kept following them around saying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, showing us the way of salvation." The woman was possessed by an evil spirit, and her master made money by her predictions. Since what she said was the truth, one might think, what is the harm. But Satan knew that if she acted like she supported the apostles, then anything they said or did would be credited to the same spirit that possessed her. Paul finally got tired of her distraction, and spoke with the power of the Holy Spirit, casting the demon out of her. Immediately she was in her right mind, showing that the spirit that the woman was possessed by had to obey the Spirit that Paul spoke with. Being in control of her own mind, the woman became a follower of Christ, and her masters realized they could not make money off her saying anymore.

Many others in the city, who had also been profiting off Satan's power realized the danger these men posed to their business. So, they gathered a mob and dragged the apostles before the mayor of the city and said, "These Jews have brought trouble to our city, teaching things that go against our customs, and Roman laws." The mob grew violent, even tearing off the apostle's coats and whipping them, with the approval of the authorities. After being whipped, they were thrown into prison with their feet securely locked in stocks. The whipping had been very painful, but the apostles didn't complain and instead were heard singing. This caused Paul to think about the how he had done the same to the followers of Jesus, and how he was happy to now be on the right side of truth.

When the mob was dispersed, the city authorities had some time to think about what had been done. They began to hear good stories about the men they had just punished. They saw that the woman who had been possessed was peacefully in

control of her own mind instead of causing trouble like she used to do. They began to wonder if they had been caught up with the mob and acted unlawfully? They decided that in the morning, they would release the men and ask them to leave town.

During the night angels went to the prison and the ground trembled like an earthquake. Because of that, prison doors broke open, and miraculously, chains fell off them, and a bright light filled the prison. The man in charge of the jail was woken up by the earthquake and when he saw all the cell doors wide open, he knew he would be held responsible for escaped prisoners and thought that killing himself would be better than the punishment he would receive. But then he heard the voice of Paul which said, "Don't hurt yourself, we are all here." The power of God had even restrained the other prisoners from escape. The jailkeeper had heard stories and concluded that these men were not dangerous criminals. He thought of the words spoken by the possessed woman, "These men are servants of the Most High God, showing us the way of salvation." Then he said to them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

The apostles answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." The jailer washed and cared for the wounds of the apostles and then took them home with him where everyone in his household believed and was baptized. When the city officials sent officers to release the apostles, Paul said, "We are Roman citizens, and have been unlawfully beaten us in public, and thrown in jail even though we have not been condemned. And now they want us to leave quietly? No, tell the officials to come here themselves and release us." When the city officials heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were very afraid, because they could be in great trouble for what they did to them. Then they quickly went to the jail and apologized for what had happened and then begged them to leave the city.

The freed apostles went to Lydia's house and encouraged the believers, then following the command of Jesus to not stay where they were not welcomed, they left. Many people had heard the stories of what had happened, and Lydia, the jailkeeper, and other believers were the start of the church in Philippi.

Understanding how much Paul willingly suffered for the gospel of Jesus made the new believers treasure it even more and they devoted themselves to the cause of Christ. The church in Philippi suffered persecution [[Philippians 1:29-30](#)], but they were faithful [[Philippians 1:3-5](#)].

Since its start, there has always been a battle between the church of God and those who are under the control of evil spirits. [Ephesians 6:12](#) For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the

heavenly places. [Ephesians 6:12 NLT](#). Now as time on earth is coming to an end, Satan is doing all he can to distract people from truths necessary for salvation. He has human agents who are organized to create confusion, rebellion, and opposition to the law of God. While wickedness is reaching new heights, many so called ministers of the gospel are preaching "Peace and safety." But God's faithful messengers will move forward as in battle against the powers of darkness, fighting for the souls of those who are within reach of their influence.

Chapter 22—Thessalonica

This chapter is based on [Acts 17:1-10](#).

From Philippi, Paul and Silas went to Thessalonica where they were invited to speak to a large group of Jews in the local synagogue. Because of their recent beating, they had to explain what had happened, and how God had delivered them from prison. They communicated this in a way that lifted up God and not themselves. In his sermon, Paul preached from the writings of Moses, and the prophets, proving that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah that had been promised in their holy scriptures.

Adam received the promised first: [Genesis 3:15](#) And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." [Genesis 3:15 NLT](#). And to Abraham: [Genesis 22:18](#) And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed--all because you have obeyed me." [Genesis 22:18 NLT](#). Moses wrote: [Deuteronomy 18:15](#) ... "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ... ¹⁸ I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him. [Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 NLT](#). The Messiah was to come from the tribe of Judah, [Genesis 49:10](#) The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor. [Genesis 49:10 NLT](#). Prophets further narrowed it down to the house of David [[Isaiah 11:1](#); [Jeremiah 23:5-6](#)]. Even His birthplace was prophesied: [Micah 5:2](#) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf. [Micah 5:2 NLT](#).

His ministry was prophesied: [Isaiah 42:1](#) "Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring justice to the nations. ² He will not shout or raise his voice in public. ³ He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. ⁴ He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth. Even distant lands beyond the sea will wait for his instruction." [Isaiah 42:1-4 NLT](#).

Great details into His suffering and death were predicted: They will strike Israel's leader in the face with a rod [[Micah 5:1](#)]. [Isaiah 50:6](#) I offered my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mockery and spitting. [Isaiah 50:6 NLT](#). [Psalm 22:6](#) But I am a worm and not a

man. I am scorned and despised by all! ⁷ Everyone who sees me mocks me. They sneer and shake their heads, saying, ⁸ "Is this the one who relies on the LORD? Then let the LORD save him! If the LORD loves him so much, let the LORD rescue him!" ... ¹⁷ I can count all my bones. My enemies stare at me and gloat. ¹⁸ They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing. [Psalm 22:6-8, 17-18 NLT](#). [Psalm 69:8](#) Even my own brothers pretend they don't know me; they treat me like a stranger. ⁹ Passion for your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. ... ²⁰ Their insults have broken my heart, and I am in despair. If only one person would show some pity; if only one would turn and comfort me. [Psalm 69:8-9, 20 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 53:1](#) Who has believed our message? To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm? ² My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. ³ He was despised and rejected--a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. ⁴ Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! ⁵ But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. ⁸ Unjustly condemned, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people. [Isaiah 53:1-8 NLT](#).

His resurrection also: [Psalm 16:9](#) No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety. ¹⁰ For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your holy one to rot in the grave. [Psalm 16:9-10 NLT](#).

It was even prophesied how His death covered the penalty for our sins: [Isaiah 53:10](#) But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands. ... ¹² I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among the rebels. He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels. [Isaiah 53:10, 12 NLT](#).

Paul told the Thessalonians how he had persecuted the followers of Jesus, and how he was converted on the road to Damascus. He told them of how before his

conversion, he was confident because he was a Jew who kept all the ceremonial laws. But he didn't realize that those laws were meaningless without Christ. Then he told of how Christ was continuing His work for our salvation in the sanctuary in heaven, and how He would come again with great power and glory to set up a kingdom on earth.

Paul preached to the Jews about Jesus Christ, reading from their own Scriptures for 3 Sabbaths in a row. Some Jews believed, but also many Greeks, and many powerful women as well. But the Jews who didn't believe were jealous of the influence Paul had.

The Jews were being closely watched by the Romans because of a recent insurrection in Rome and now they thought they could turn this mistrust against the Christians. They looked for and found some troublemakers and used them to stir up a mob which went looking for the apostles. They attacked the house of Jason, but Paul and Silas were not there, so they dragged him and some others that were with him to the city officials. They shouted out, "These men have been turning the world upside-down with their teaching and have now come here to do the same. They are teaching things that are against the law of Caesar, and they claim they have another king named Jesus." To calm the mob, Jason and those who were with him were arrested, and to stop any further attacks, the believers sent Paul and Silas at night on to Berea.

If we teach truth that is not popular with the world, we should not be surprised to meet opposition, even from those who claim to be Christians. But we must continue to hold up Jesus Christ as the only hope of salvation for the world.

Chapter 23—Berea and Athens

This chapter is based on [Acts 17:11-34](#).

The Jews in Berea were more open minded than those in Thessalonica, and they studied the Scriptures daily to determine if the things the apostles taught were true. When they concluded that it was true, many believed, including some honorable Greek women. This study was not a casual occasional reading of the Scriptures, but daily study, comparing one text with another, and angels from heaven were beside them helping them to understand the truth. If more people would study the Bible as the Bereans searched their Scriptures, there would be more people who are loyal to the law of God, and the truths from the Bible. Some Bible truths are unpopular, and when people reject them and instead accept the lies of Satan, they will be held accountable for the light they rejected.

The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica were not content with driving the apostles from their own city but followed them to Berea where they also found troublemakers to stir up against them. To avoid violence, Paul was moved on to Athens, and some of the new believers went with him. In being chased from one city to the next, Paul recognized the fulfillment of the work God had called him to. [Acts 22:21](#) "But the Lord said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!'" [Acts 22:21 NLT](#). After arriving in Athens, the Bereans who had traveled with Paul returned home with a message for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. Those two had stayed behind and had been teaching the new believers in Berea.

Athens was the center of many forms of heathen worship. Unlike Lystra where Paul first met with the common, uneducated people, here he met with the people who were looked up to for their knowledge and culture. There were idols of gods everywhere, and statues of heroes from the past who had come to be worshipped as gods. The city of Athens had beautiful buildings, and art and poetry to glorify its long history and its heroes, making the whole city seem like one big art gallery. But the people there knew nothing of the one true God.

Paul was not silent while waiting for Silas and Timothy to join in him in Athens but went to the synagogue to talk to the Jews and also went to the market every day to talk to whoever would listen. Soon, some important and powerful men in Athens heard about a single man who was teaching about a new and strange religion, so they set up a meeting with him. Some who thought very highly of themselves said to each other, "What will the babbler have to say to us?"

After Paul began speaking, it became apparent to everyone that Paul was no ordinary man, but could answer their logic with sound logic, and their philosophy

with philosophy and science with science. When he spoke, people from all social and economic levels could understand clearly what he was saying. Because the things Paul was teaching were religious in nature, the people warned him that Socrates had been condemned to death when he tried to teach about new gods. But Paul was not afraid and kept preaching, so finally he was invited to speak on Mars Hill, one of the most sacred religious places in Athens. This would be a more private and quiet conversation without the noise of crowds and uninterested people. Poets, artists, philosophers, scholars, and wise men gathered to hear what Paul had to say.

Calmly and without fear in front of all these important people, Paul spoke. "Men of Athens, I think I am correct in assuming that you all have religious beliefs. As I looked around, I even saw that you have an altar to and worship the Unknown God. I am here today to tell you who this Unknown God is. In this place of altars, images and shrines to different gods, I say to you that this Unknown God cannot be represented by an image made by man. All the images on this hill were created from man's imagination, and none of them are alive, so man is greater than all of them. But this Unknown God made the world and everything in it, and it is He who gave life to everything. The heavens cannot even contain Him so how much less could a temple made by human hands."

At that time, in fact, most of the time in earth's history, people's rights as human beings were determined at birth. Being born into a family of wealth and power gave a person more rights. But the teaching of Christianity is that all people are equal in the kingdom of God. But since we are all made by God, our value and rights come from Him.

Before Jesus came to earth, the world was in darkness. The heathen could not be held accountable for their idolatry because they didn't know better. But now that Jesus brought light and truth to the world, God expects people to repent, and to find salvation through Him. All people are equally in need of salvation, from the poorest of the poor, to the richest and most powerful kings on earth. All will be judged one day by the Man Jesus who was raised from the dead. When Paul mentioned resurrection from death, some of the people laughed, and some said we have heard enough for now.

The Athenians thought highly of themselves, their culture, knowledge, and their religion. They clung to their idolatry and turned away from true religion. Some who listened to the words of Paul were convinced of their truth, but they refused to humble themselves and admit that they needed to be saved. It is the power of the Holy Spirit, and not well-spoken words that converts the sinner, and those who keep rejecting the inner voice of that Spirit cannot be saved.

Though many people in Athens did not accept the gospel, some did, among them Dionysius, who was a highly respected citizen. Paul's approach to the people of Athens can be an example to all Christians. If he had attacked their gods and heroes of the past, he might have suffered the same fate as Socrates, but he used their own religious beliefs to introduce them to the true God. Great men and women in the world today will also have to decide for themselves if they will accept the truth of salvation through the death of Jesus. If they reject it, they will bear the consequences of their own choices and sins.

To people who are rich, intelligent, and powerful, the gospel can seem too simple or ridiculous because they are used to using their own resources to get what they want. [1 Corinthians 1:18](#) The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. ¹⁹ As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent." [1 Corinthians 1:18-19 NLT](#). [1 Corinthians 1:27](#) Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. ²⁸ God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. [1 Corinthians 1:27-28 NLT](#).

As happened in Athens in Paul's day, many great and powerful people will reject the gospel of salvation, but some will humble themselves and be willing to learn at the feet of Jesus, and to accept Him as their Master. It is hard to convince someone who has everything that they need Jesus, but the Holy Spirit will provide the strength and wisdom needed for any situation. He is able to do more than the wildest imagination can think of for those who trust Him.

Chapter 24—Corinth

This chapter is based on [Acts 18:1-18](#).

In Paul's day, the Greek city of Corinth was one of the most important cities in the world. People from all over the world came to Corinth for both business and pleasure. This is where Paul went after leaving Athens, and he met and stayed with a Jewish couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who would become very good friends and fellow workers for the cause of Christ.

Venus was one of the favorite goddesses in that city, and worship of her included many immoral practices for which the Corinthians were known, even among other heathens. Paul took a different approach in his efforts in Corinth than he had in Athens. Here he decided he would not try to use logic, or philosophy, but to just preach about Jesus. [1 Corinthians 2:2](#) For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness--timid and trembling. ⁴ And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. [1 Corinthians 2:2-4 NLT](#).

Jesus was a poor Jew who was rejected by His own people. Could the Greek Corinthians be convinced that He was what the world needed to lift humanity out of darkness. Today, the cross is a symbol of Christianity, but it doesn't really bring to mind much of the realities of how it was used and what it said about the people who were crucified. Back then it was a horrible and shameful way to die, and to say that a person who was crucified could save humanity seemed kind of ridiculous.

To Paul, the cross was everything. The fact that the Father allowed His Son to suffer and die like that was proof of His love for all humanity. After Paul was converted, he had a great desire to share what he knew with everyone so they could experience the same conversion. If he ever lacked motivation to share the gospel of salvation with anyone, one thought of the cross was enough to motivate him to go through any hardship that was necessary to share the love of God with people who didn't know.

To the Jews, Paul used the Scriptures to show that Jesus was the Messiah that had been prophesied to come. Even the fact that they rejected and killed him was prophesied. He tried to show his listeners that repentance was the only thing that could save the nation from destruction. The Jews were moved by his earnestness, but eventually they rejected the gospel, and moved by the same Spirit that led them to crucify Jesus, would have killed Paul if God had not protected him. At least 1 Jew, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue believed and everyone in his household

was baptized. This only increased the hatred of the Jews, and since they couldn't argue with Paul's logic, they resorted to lies.

Silas and Timothy had Joined Paul and now together they would concentrate their effort on the Gentiles. As they spoke to the Gentiles, the apostles avoided clever speech and logical reasoning and simply told them about the Creator and Ruler of the universe. Their love of God and His Son Jesus was obvious to everyone who listened to them. They knew that any who were unhappy with their life would be drawn to Jesus as He said: [John 12:32](#) And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." [John 12:32 NLT](#). True to these words, many Corinthians believed and were baptized. The apostles realized that any new converts would potentially face the same dangers they did, and felt some responsibility, but this was about eternal life or death.

Paul was somewhat discouraged by the hatred of the Jews and the wickedness of the Corinthians and was wondering if the new believers could survive as a church. He was about to leave when God appeared to him in a vision and told him, "Do not be afraid to speak boldly for Me because I have many people in this city." Paul understood this to mean that he should stay, so he did. The apostles did not only preach in public, but they also spoke to small groups in homes. They also ministered to the sick, comforted those who were experiencing trouble, and lifted those who were oppressed.

Paul taught that the message of salvation didn't make sense with human reasoning, but it was a mystery that could be revealed by the Holy Spirit. He reasoned, if the rulers of the world understood it, they would not have crucified the Son of God. He said that eyes have not seen, and ears have not heard the things that God has prepared for those that love Him. Now that we have received the Holy Spirit, we can understand the things of God more clearly.

Paul was an impressive public speaker and before his conversion, he used to try to sway his listeners with his grand speeches. Now he didn't want fancy words to move his listeners, so he used simple words instead. Many people responded to his efforts and turned from their idols to worship the living God. As a result, a large church was started in Corinth, with many people who had turned from their idolatry. This success caused the Jews to be jealous, and they began to cause trouble, by forming a mob and dragging Paul before Gallio, who was the governor of Achaia. With loud angry voices, they accused Paul of persuading people to break the Jewish religious laws by worshipping God incorrectly. The Jewish religion was allowed, and even protected by Roman law, so the Jews thought that if they could accuse Paul of breaking their religious laws, the governor would turn him over and allow them to judge him. Gallio was disgusted with the Jews for their

racism and because they thought they were so righteous. He said to them, "If this was a matter of wickedness or even immorality, I would hear you out, but because you are accusing him about words and names relating to your laws, I will have nothing to do with this, so get out of my courtroom."

For the first time, since Paul had started his missionary journeys through Europe, the mob took Paul's side. While they were still in the courtroom, the mob grabbed Sosthenes, the ruler of the Synagogue, and began to beat him, and Gallio didn't even try to stop them. This was a victory for the Christians in Corinth, and Paul was able to stay and strengthen the church. If Paul had been forced to leave, the new believers and the young church would have faced many difficulties from the Jews in Corinth.

Chapter 25—The Thessalonian Letters

This chapter is based on the 2 books of [Thessalonians](#).

When Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth from Macedonia where they had been, he was very happy to be reunited with them. The good news they brought from the new believers in Thessalonica made him even happier, making him wish that he could visit them in person. But since this was not possible, he decided to write them a letter.

Paul began his letter with thanks to God for them: [1 Thessalonians 1:2](#) We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. ³ As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ. [1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 NLT](#).

Many of the Thessalonians had turned from idols to worship the true and living God and by suffering because of it, they were like the apostles and even Jesus. Paul told people everywhere he went, about their faithfulness, which meant they were examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Thessalonians burned with enthusiasm for their Savior, which turned them into true missionaries and the church grew.

Paul wrote about how in his first visit to them that when he preached to them, he didn't try to win them as converts by misrepresenting the truth, or by only speaking pleasing words. We tried not to be a burden to you; in fact, we treated you as a mother caring for her young children. We also thank God that you received the message from us as the word of God and not of men.

In the first letter, Paul instructed the Thessalonians about the state of the dead. He said, "I want you to understand that people who have died are asleep, but because Jesus died and rose from the dead, when He returns from heaven, the dead in Christ will rise up from their sleep first, and then those who are still alive, will meet the them and the Lord in the air." This was comforting to them, because they had been looking forward to the return of their Lord, and were saddened when friends and loved ones died, not knowing what would happen to them. This teaching brought clarity to the church about what would happen to believers who died before Jesus returns.

When he was in Thessalonica, Paul had taught the new believers about the signs of the times. He wrote that some things must happen before Jesus returns in the clouds of heaven. But signs were not for the purpose of knowing the day and the hour of His return, because that would be no more predictable than a thief coming into your house at night. In fact, when people think there is peace and safety,

things can suddenly change to destruction. But just as you can prepare yourself and protect yourself against thieves coming to your house, you can also prepare yourself for the coming of Jesus. Put on the armor of God, where faith and love are like a breastplate, and the hope of salvation is like a helmet.

All Christians who are watching and ready are also working energetically to spread the gospel. We should share our Master's love for our fellow human beings and be willing to work hard for their salvation. The Thessalonian church was organized, and people had jobs to do to keep it operating smoothly. There were elders, and deacons, and there were people who had authority. But they also had to deal with "busy bodies," people who did no practical work for the church but pushed their own fanatical ideas and doctrines on others. Many heathen religions included sexual activities in their idol worship, and Paul reminded the Thessalonians in his letter to avoid sexual sins. He reminded them that God wants the members of His church to be holy.

Paul felt a parent-like responsibility for those who joined the faith because of his ministry. He wanted them to grow and mature in their faith and when he wasn't with them, he prayed that God would keep them from evil and help them to turn into missionaries for the gospel. A good sign of true conversion is love for God, but also others in the church, which Paul called brotherly love. He also told them that he used them as examples to other churches of having faith strong enough to survive persecution and hard times.

Paul also encouraged the church members to do something useful and practical with their hands, so they would not lack what is needed, but also be able to help those who have needs. May the Lord increase your love to one another, so it is as much as our love for you. May He keep your heart blameless and holy before our Father. Counsel those who are troublemakers, comfort those who are distressed, and be patient with all people. Don't return evil for evil that is done to you, pray continuously, and be thankful for everything. Even if you are not doing something wrong, avoid situations where people might think you are doing evil.

In his first letter, Paul mentioned the second coming of Christ, and some misinterpreted it to mean that it was so near that they need not worry about daily tasks and planning for tomorrow. In his second letter, he tried to correct this misunderstanding. He said that there were prophecies of major things that would happen in the world having to do with the church before Christ would return. The church would fall away from God, and a man of sin would put himself above God and sit in the temple expecting to be treated as God. Paul wanted to be very clear about these things because people could get discouraged if the second coming didn't happen right away. He put it in writing so no one could say that he was

teaching the immediate return of Christ, which would result in much disappointment when it didn't happen. Paul went on to point out that the prophet Daniel wrote of a religious power that would rise to make war on God's people. But even though they were not to expect the immediate return of Christ, they should not get weary of telling others about it.

Paul wrote a warning for those who reject the message of truth. The Spirit of God would be withdrawn, and they would be left believing lies. He finished his letter with a prayer that grace and peace from God, and their Lord Jesus Christ would be a comfort and support to them.

Chapter 26—Apollos at Corinth

This chapter is based on [Acts 18:18-28](#).

When Paul left Corinth, he stopped at Ephesus on the way to Jerusalem for one of the annual festivals. While there, he went to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews and was so well received that they asked him to stay longer. He said he couldn't but promised to return if God allowed, but left Aquila and Priscilla to continue what was started.

After Paul had left Ephesus, a Jew from Alexandria named Apollos, who knew the scriptures very well and was a good public speaker came to town. He had been converted by the preaching of John the Baptist and preached accurately the way of the Lord as John the Baptist had done. One day in Ephesus, he was speaking at the synagogue and Aquila and Priscilla were in the audience. When they heard him, they were impressed but realized he had not learned of Jesus whom John prepared the way for. So, they taught him about the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, and he accepted the message from them and became one of the most powerful preachers for Christ.

Apollos was immediately ready to continue spreading the new gospel he had received and wanted to go to Achaia. So, the church in Ephesus wrote a letter of recommendation to the church of Corinth, where Apollos started going from door to door, convincing many Jews from their own Scriptures, that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul had planted seeds that Apollos was not watering with great success. Some were so impressed with him that they said he was better than Paul, and it caused a division in the church between those who looked to Paul as their leader, and the ones who looked to Apollos.

When Paul was planting the seed in Corinth, everything was new to them, so he kept his teaching very plain and simple. He also took that approach so that they would be convinced by the truth and the power of God and not by impressive and convincing sermons [[1 Corinthians 2:1-5](#)]. Many of the new Corinthian believers had no foundation in spiritual things, and Paul said they were like babes in Christ, and as such they should be fed the milk of from the Scriptures and not the meat [[1 Corinthians 3:1-2](#)]. They should have been growing but were still like the disciples when Jesus said to them, [John 16:12](#) "There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. [John 16:12 NLT](#). In fact, jealousy and fighting among the new believers had prevented the Holy Spirit from helping them to grow. They might have been wise in worldly knowledge but were like babes in the knowledge of Christ. [1 Corinthians 2:14](#) But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for

only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. [1 Corinthians 2:14 NLT](#).

So, Paul tried to bring them along slowly. He didn't immediately begin telling them how bad they were but instead tried to give them lessons that Jesus had used. If they received these teachings, they would be lifted from worldliness and sin to purity and righteousness. What Paul did the most in his teachings was to point people to Jesus and His sacrifice for them. He realized that understanding the character of Christ would help them to love Him and have faith in Him. Only then could they have faith in the saving power of His death on the cross. Those who are saved and taken to heaven will study and sing about the love of God and His willingness to suffer and die for them throughout eternity. To God, the price paid on the cross shows the value He places on a human being.

If God is love, why doesn't He take everyone to heaven? The truth is, a person who loves to sin, would hate being in heaven. The human heart must be changed by the grace of God, so that the natural sinful desires die. Only then would heaven be a place they would love to be.

Finally, getting back to the topic of people who were claiming to be followers of Paul or Apollos. Paul said that both of them and all the apostles and other missionaries were all human beings like them, and all depended on God for success. This was Paul's response to the Corinthians about this: [1 Corinthians 3:4](#) When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world? ⁵ After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. ⁶ I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. ⁷ It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. ⁹ For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building. [1 Corinthians 3:4-9 NLT](#).

Paul went to Corinth first, and his job was to plant the seed of the gospel in the hearts of the Corinthians. Others followed, including Apollos, and watered the seed that was planted there. God calls some to plant and others to water, but He is the one who makes the seed sprout and grow into a plant which produces more seed. For this reason, all glory should go to God and not the human workers. God understands that people have different gifts and abilities, so he calls them each to the work that they can do best. When everyone does their job, not seeking glory for

themselves, it is like different notes forming chords to produce beautiful music, which should bring glory to God.

Workers for God should not be competitive with each other but should be kind [[Romans 12:10](#)]. They should each be using their gifts, doing what they do best, working together with one goal. One should not set themselves up as a standard to judge others by, nor should they disrespect others, but should instead encourage one another. God alone will be the judge of every human being and will reward each one as He sees fit.

God is dishonored when one minister is so beloved and others are rejected. Sometimes He sends a particular person to a group that they might not have chosen for themselves, because that is what they needed. Human beings cannot see what is best for them as clearly as God can, so they should gratefully accept whoever God sends them. If one single worker or minister becomes too beloved and others are rejected, the favorite one has become an idol. If one wishes to be the most effective worker for God, they should pray very hard for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on them. They should reject human wisdom, and not seek to lift up themselves, then the Holy Spirit will be able to bring many people out of darkness into the light, who will become followers of Christ and not the human instrument.

The same power of the Holy Spirit that was poured out on Paul, Apollos, Silas, Timothy, Peter, James, and John is available to us today. But those who reject that power and depend on their own wisdom, while ignoring those whom God has called to positions of authority, can easily be used by Satan. Some may think they are being impressed with ideas by the Holy Spirit, but if they reject the advice of those whom God has placed in positions of authority, and trust only on their own wisdom, they are in danger of receiving directions from the enemy.

There was no disagreement or jealousy between Paul and Apollos. But when the people of Corinth began taking sides, Apollos became uncomfortable and left. He even refused to go back to Corinth until much later when the church was in a much better spiritual state. This is what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: [1 Corinthians 1:12](#) Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not! [1 Corinthians 1:12-13 NLT](#). [1 Corinthians 3:21](#) So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you—²² whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, ²³ and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. [1 Corinthians 3:21-23 NLT](#).

Chapter 27—Ephesus

This chapter is based on [Acts 19:1-20](#).

After a short visit to Jerusalem, Paul returned to Ephesus. On this trip through Asia Minor, he visited the churches he had started on his earlier trip. Ephesus was the business center of this part of the Roman Empire with a busy harbor. Since people from many countries passed through this city, it was a good place to spread the message of the church.

Jews now lived all over the world, and many were expecting the coming of the Messiah. Because of the annual trips to Jerusalem for the festivals, many had heard John the Baptist preach, and some had heard about Jesus. In Ephesus, Paul met 12 men who considered themselves disciples of John the Baptist and had some knowledge of Christ and wanted to teach what they knew. When Paul asked if they had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they said they were baptized by John but had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. So, he taught them about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and about His commission to tell the world about Him, and to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [[Matthew 28:18-19](#)]. Then he told them of the promise of the Holy Spirit that was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

These men received Paul's teaching with great joy and were baptized in the name of Jesus. When Paul put his hands on them, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, which gave them the ability to speak other languages, and to prophesy. Now they were ready to go out to the other cities in Asia Minor as missionaries. These men were not as good at public speaking as Apollos, but they were humble and teachable, which made them good missionaries for Christ after they were trained. Their willingness to be taught should be an example to everybody. Even people who don't seem to have the necessary gifts for being missionaries can become successful workers for Christ if they commit their lives to Him and allow themselves to be taught. [Psalm 119:130](#) The teaching of your word gives light, so even the simple can understand. [Psalm 119:130 NLT](#).

Many people today do not know that the Holy Spirit has been promised to all believers, yet nothing is clearer from the word of God. The sap that travels through the vine and provides it with life and growth is given as an example of the Holy Spirit by Christ Himself. Exactly how the Spirit brings spiritual life and growth is beyond our human understanding, but the effects are described in the Bible. Paul describes a unity and growth of knowledge to the point where we can be considered mature, even measuring up to the standard Christ has for us [[Ephesians 4:13](#)]. With growth comes new knowledge and accepting that knowledge may require action. Just like

the 12 men who were baptized by John, when learned about Jesus they wanted to be baptized in His name.

When Paul went to a new city, he usually started by teaching in the synagogue. In Ephesus, he did this for 3 months, debating and trying to convince people about the truth of the kingdom of God. At first, he had some success, but when the Jews eventually rejected the news of salvation through Jesus which they often did, their hearts became hard and they became violent in their opposition. When this happened, Paul stopped preaching in the synagogue, but continued teaching in the school of Tyrannus, a well-known teacher.

Ephesus was the most beautiful city in Asia Minor, but also the most evil in terms of idolatrous superstition and sexual sins. It was famous for the temple and the worship of the goddess Diana. The idol representing the goddess was said to have fallen from the sky and it had markings on it which were interpreted by magicians who had a great amount of power over the people. There were even books explaining the meaning and power of the marking on the image.

God chose to perform many miracles through Paul at Ephesus, and it was as if power flowed from his body so that even things that touched him and were then brought in contact with the sick healed them and even caused demons to leave those they possessed. The miracles were performed in the name of Jesus and could not be copied by the magicians and sorcerers. People began to believe that Jesus was more powerful than their goddess Diana and Paul became more respected and honored than the most powerful magicians.

Practicing sorcery, casting spells, and magic through the power of evil spirits was not allowed by Jewish law. The punishment for any of these actions was death, but occasionally a Jew here or there did practice sorcery. At the time in Ephesus, there was a group of Jews who travelled from town to town supposedly casting out demons. Among them was a man named Sceva who had 7 sons. They found a demon possessed man and said to him, "We command you in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches to come out." The demon answered, "I know Jesus and Paul, but who are you?" Then the demon possessed man jumped on them and beat them all up, so they ran out of the house naked and badly hurt. This showed that the name of Jesus was holy and should not be used lightly. Then everyone was amazed and the name of Jesus was held in great respect. As a result of this many of the new believers who had held on to their magic decided to completely give it up, and they all brought their books on magic and burned them up. So many books were burned that their value was estimated to be 50,000 pieces of silver [millions of dollars]. If kept, these books would have been a temptation to their owners. If sold, they would have become a temptation to someone else.

Many people who think that sorcery is a thing of the past believe they can communicate with the dead loved ones. Satan and his angels are well able to appear looking and speaking like a dead loved one. [Ecclesiastes 9:5](#) The living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, nor are they remembered. ⁶ Whatever they did in their lifetime--loving, hating, envying--is all long gone. They no longer play a part in anything here on earth. [Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 NLT](#). But if the living think they are talking to their dead loved ones, whom they believed and trusted, then Satan is able to tell them anything he wants and in this way gains control of them. Communicating with demons is spiritualism and many people are unknowingly practicing it.

Satan still works through people today as he did through magicians of old. They will not appear like the image we have of magicians from ancient times but will look like regular people who can tell people things about themselves, predict the future, or do other things normal people can't do. If people could see spirits, they would see evil angels working behind the scenes to make these special gifts possible. Satan tempts people with attractive things that appear innocent, and by the time they realize what it really is, they are trapped like a fish on a hook.

Chapter 28—Days of Toil and Trial

This chapter is based on [Acts 19:21-41](#); [20:1](#).

For more than 3 years, Ephesus was the hub of Paul's missionary work. The church was growing and from there spreading to other parts of Asia, with both Jews and Gentiles joining. For a while Paul had been planning in his mind a trip through Macedonia, Achaia, then back to Jerusalem, and then Rome. Feeling he should not leave Ephesus yet, he sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to Macedonia.

In Ephesus there was an annual festival for the goddess Diana that many people came to the city to attend. The festival had been a grand celebration with virtually the entire city participating, but now this new and growing group existed, that not only didn't participate, but taught that Diana was a false god. In fact, it went farther than that, because even some people who didn't join the new church, were beginning to lose confidence in Diana as being a real god. For this, the new church believers were ridiculed without mercy, but the lack of harmony for the festival was still felt.

Regardless of whether Diana was a god or not, there was also a business interest at stake. A silversmith named Demetrius called together his fellow smiths to discuss the impact Paul and his teachings were having on their business. Corresponding with the drop in interest at the temple and the festival, was the drop in purchases of the small shrines and images of the temple and the goddess. Demetrius said to those he had gathered, "Sirs, you know that we have become wealthy by selling these silver idols, but now this Paul has convinced many people that things made with hands are not gods. This will put us out of business, but worse than that, the temple of our great goddess Diana will be abandoned, and this will affect all her worshippers throughout Asia, and even all the world." This speech had the effect he was looking for, as all the people became angry and began chanting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

Pretty soon the whole city was in an uproar, and they looked for Paul. The time for him to be a martyr was not now because his work for God was not finished yet. The church members hid him and angels protected him, and when the mob couldn't find him, they grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus and dragged them into the theater. Paul was very concerned about the safety of his friends and wanted to go into the theater to speak to the mob. But the believers would not allow him to do that, and what's more, some of the city officials which were friendly to him begged him not to come into the theater. Things were already getting out of control with the mob shouting different things and many didn't even know why they were there.

The Jews, wanting to separate themselves from Paul and the new church chose Alexander, a craftsman to speak to the crowd to explain why they were gathered. But as soon as the mob saw that he was a Jew, they went wild and started a chant, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

Finally, after 2 hours, when there was a brief pause in the chant, a city official stood up to speak to the crowd. "Men of Ephesus, who doesn't know that the entire city worships the great goddess Diana, and that the image the fell down to us from Jupiter? Since these facts cannot be questioned, why are you even gathered here today. Be careful not to do anything against these men that you cannot undo. They are not thieves, have not stolen anything from the temple, and are not blaspheming your goddess. If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have any legal complaint against them, the courts are open to them and there are judges to hear their case. If anyone else here has any legal complaints against these men, the courts will hear them as well. But as it is, we are in danger of having to answer for the actions of this mob today, so I beg you to please leave peacefully."

Paul was relieved that the mob was dispersed without any lives being lost. And through the wisdom of the city official who calmed and dismissed the crowd, Christianity did not get a bad reputation. He then called the believers together, to say good-bye and then left for Macedonia, taking with him Tychicus and Trophimus, who were 2 of the new Ephesian believers.

Paul had invested a lot of time, effort, and tears in the people of Ephesus. He had been opposed by the Jews. In fact, he wrote later to Timothy about how Alexander had caused him a lot of trouble. [2 Timothy 4:14](#) Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm, but the Lord will judge him for what he has done. [2 Timothy 4:14 NLT](#). And he was also opposed by Gentiles, but mostly for financial reasons. In Ephesus, the craftsmen and the temple priests were the ones who would lose financially from people accepting the gospel.

Paul felt a great sense of responsibility for the new members that were coming into the young church because of his work. He spent many sleepless nights praying for them and was greatly saddened when he heard of those who fell into sin. He wrote letters to many of these churches, some for correction and reproof, and some for counsel and encouragement. Paul didn't complain about the suffering he went through for the cause of Christ, but scattered throughout his writings, can be gleaned a bit of what he experienced. He suffered cold, hunger, thirst, danger on land and sea, whipping, prison, danger from Jews and from Gentiles. It would be fair to say he was discouraged at times but never gave up. He knew that Jesus had walked this path of suffering ahead of him and he intended to be faithful until his job on earth was done.

Chapter 29—A Message of Warning and an Earnest Request

This chapter is based on the [1 Corinthians 1-6](#).

This letter was written to the Corinthian church when Paul was in Ephesus. He had worked in Corinth for a year and a half teaching them about the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ but had also taught them about their responsibilities as Christians, and how to be faithful. Paul understood that those who were young in the church needed more protection and guidance until they grew into more mature Christians. He begged them to completely surrender themselves to God, because if they didn't it would mean they were hanging on to some sins. Those who surrender completely to God will receive power from Him to overcome sin and temptation.

The members of the church in Corinth were surrounded by idolatry and temptations to sexual sins, but while Paul was with them, his faith, prayers, and words to them kept them faithful. But when he left, evil angels were still there to tempt, and some unconverted people among the church members became like weeds that sprung up among the wheat. The evil spread like a weed dropping its seed and sprouting more weeds. Soon more than a few members who had truly put away their bad habits returned to them.

Paul got a letter from the church asking for advice, but not mentioning the sin growing in the church, but he was impressed by the Holy Spirit about what was truly going on. At this time, he got a visit from some people from the household of Chloe, a respected family in Corinth. He was told that the church was greatly divided, and false teachers were telling people to ignore the words of Paul. At the same time pride, idolatry, and sexual sins were increasing among the members of the church.

Paul would have gone to them but that was not the will of God at the time, so instead, he sent Titus with a letter to them. With great clarity he answered their questions and offered advice which if followed would have brought them closer to God. He warned them of the danger of continuing in sin and tried to rekindle the flame that had burned in them when they were first converted. Paul's love for the Corinthians was seen by the tender way he greeted them in the letter. He reminded them of the Holy Spirit that they had received when they were first converted and told them it was a privilege for them to continually become more like Christ.

Paul showed his knowledge of the division that had arisen in the church and encouraged the members to stop fighting among themselves but instead be joined in unity. Paul didn't try to make them guess where he got this information, but told them that out of concern for them, members of the house of Chloe had told him about their fighting. In his letter Paul didn't call out the false teachers by name, to

avoid making them angry and driving them out of the church. He reminded them of the foundation of Christ that he had laid for all of them to work together to build upon. The advice and lessons Paul taught were inspired by God to be applicable to all people, at all times, in all places, and under all conditions.

Paul felt it necessary without naming the person, to call out the sexual sin that was even frowned upon by unconverted Gentiles. He begged the church to not accept this type of behavior in its members, but to separate themselves from him so that this wickedness doesn't spread and grow like yeast.

He also addressed the lawsuits that members were bringing against each other, reminding them that Christ Himself had given advice on how to deal with conflicts between members. [Matthew 18:15](#) "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. ¹⁶ But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector. [Matthew 18:15-17 NLT](#). Then he added, "Why would you take your disagreements in front of unbelievers. Don't you know that those who are saved will judge the world and even angels? Is there not a wise man among you who is capable of judging disputes among brothers? And why is someone doing wrong to his brother? And you who have been wronged, why not just take it rather than going to court?"

Satan is always trying to stir up conflict between church members. Those who have too much pride and love themselves more than God will always put themselves first. If they think they have been wronged, they will do almost anything to guard their pride and their rights. Lawsuits between church members make the church look bad and gives outsiders a reason to make fun of her. It also gives Satan a victory which wounds Christ again.

In this first letter to the Corinthians, Paul showed them that Christ offers power to keep them from sin and to give them perfect holiness. If we accept salvation, we belong to Christ, because He paid a great price for us. Because of this we should bring glory to God with both our body and spirit which belong to Him. He also wanted to make sure they didn't deceive themselves into thinking that sinners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul had an unusually sharp mind for understanding spiritual truth, but he also had a rare gift for relating to people and knowing how to motivate them to a better spiritual life. He loved the new Corinthian believers and wanted to see the Christian growth that would help them resist temptation. He knew that Satan was

not happy to lose them and would be tempting them every day to fall back into their former lifestyle. He also knew that through prayer and the power offered by Christ they could resist temptation. So, he described this to them as the armor of God that would protect them against the attacks of the enemy.

The Corinthian believers were young in the faith and still did not understand the full glory of God or how their character could be changed. It was as if they were only seeing the early light of dawn, compared to the full brightness of the sun at noon. Paul wanted them to grow in their faith until they could see the full glory of the good news of salvation.

Chapter 30—Called to Reach a Higher Standard

This chapter is based on [1 Corinthians 8-15](#).

Paul didn't want to leave the Corinthian believers with the wrong idea about what it means to be a Christian. He used warfare, and armor language to describe the battle between good and evil. Then he gave them another clear parallel from sports, which was the foot race. At the time foot races were celebrated events, watched by kings, and the rich and powerful. Young men who came from wealthy or important families wished to prove themselves in this way.

The competition was extremely tough and the strictest and hardest training was required if one even wanted to have a chance to win the race. The training was not just running, but also included diet, avoiding harmful things like drugs and alcohol, and even mental training. Every muscle and nerve must be in peak condition and under the control of the mind in order to succeed.

The race had strict rules and judges to enforce them, and anyone who broke a rule or cheated was disqualified. Taking part in the extreme training and the race was not without risk. With strong mental control over the body, one might push themselves to the point of collapse, bleeding from the nose and mouth, or even death. But the possibility of lifelong injury and death were considered acceptable risks for the small chance of being honored as the winner of the race.

The winner crossed the finish line to the sound of cheering from the great crowds that gathered to watch. A laurel crown [a circle of a thin leafy branch of the laurel plant], that was highly honored by ancient Greeks, was placed on the winner's head and a palm branch in his right hand. He was praised and even songs were sung in his honor. Even his parents and the city he came from received honor for producing such a great athlete.

Paul drew parallels between the race and the battle between good and evil. They included self-sacrifice, discipline, and commitment needed to win the race. He stressed the importance of keeping the body physically healthy for the spiritual battle, especially by bringing the appetite under control. Good habits must be formed, and emotions must also be brought under control. Study God's word and try to understand it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All of this could be considered preparation or training for the race, and when it comes to running the race, the greatest effort must be put into it, especially toward the end when the runner may be tired.

While the parallels exist for the race, the rewards cannot compare. The laurel crown cannot compare to the crown of glory given to the winner of the Christian

race. If this is the case, how much more should we be willing to put in the training, effort, and sacrifice for the spiritual race. [Hebrews 12:1](#) Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. [Hebrews 12:1-2 NLT](#).

Jesus also gave an example of what we should be willing to give up to gain eternal life. [Mark 9:43](#) If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands. ... ⁴⁵ If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one foot than to be thrown into hell with two feet. [Mark 9:43, 45 NLT](#).

Another place the race example breaks down fortunately is that in the ancient foot race, only one person could win. In the Christian race, all who put in the effort to become like Christ can be winners and be saved. While it is not only the fastest or strongest that wins, the reward given to every winner will be in proportion to the effort and energy they put into the race. Paul, who was not one to do things halfway, ran the race of the Christian life with strict discipline, keeping his natural desires under control. Everything he said, did, and desired were brought under the control of the Spirit of God.

Paul knew the Corinthians would experience a never-ending struggle if they continued their journey toward Christ's ideal for them. But he begged them to persist and press forward to the goal of perfection in Christ. Then he gave them a little history lesson about Israel as God's church, starting with the miracles surrounding the exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. But then when Israel longed for the sins of their former life, they made an idol and then had a feast for the worship of the idol, then they fell into sexual sin and God punished them.

Paul warned them about overconfidence and boasting that they could stand on their own, because if they stopped praying and asking for help from God, they would fall to the temptations of their former life. But he added that God would not allow them to be tempted more than they could bear, and He would even give them strength to resist the temptation.

Then Paul told the Corinthians about how it was possible to be a bad influence on someone even if you weren't doing something wrong. For example, if you ate some meat that was typically associated with idol worship, even if you were strong in your faith, someone weaker in the faith might misunderstand and be tempted to

follow you by actually worshipping the idol. So, he said, "Whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. Don't give anyone, whether Jew, Gentile, or church member a reason to think you are dishonoring God."

To apply Paul's words to today, substitute things that people love and worship now for idols, but the self-indulgence of appetite other harmful things are the same. Just saying you are a Christian doesn't make you one, even if you know the Bible.

Members of the church should be in complete harmony even though there are many jobs and every person is different, just like the parts of the body all work together to make a human being. The human body is made up of many parts as the church is made up of many members. If the foot says, 'I am not a hand, so I am not part of the body,' does that make it so? If the ear says, 'I am not the eye, so I am not part of the body,' does that make it so? If the body only had an eye, how would it hear, and if it could only hear, how would it smell? The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need for you, or the head to the feet, I have no use for you. There should be no division in the church, just as the parts of the body do not fight with each other. If one member suffers, the rest of the members should suffer with it, and if one member is honored, the rest of the members should be happy for them.

Then in words that have been a blessing to many down through the ages since they were written, Paul wrote about the importance of love: [1 Corinthians 13:1](#) If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. ³ If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. [1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NLT](#). No matter how rich or powerful or important a person thinks they are, if they do not love their fellow humans, they are not a disciple of Christ.

[1 Corinthians 13:4](#) Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. [1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT](#). [1 Corinthians 13:13](#) Three things will last forever--faith, hope, and love--and the greatest of these is love. [1 Corinthians 13:13 NLT](#).

Another issue that Paul was addressing with this letter was that some of the members were claiming there was no resurrection. He laid out the overwhelming evidence that Jesus was resurrected, and then added, "If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised from the dead, and then there is no point to our

preaching and your faith is meaningless." Paul went on to describe in detail what would happen at the resurrection, [1 Corinthians 15:51](#) But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! ⁵² It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. ⁵³ For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. ⁵⁴ Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. ⁵⁷ But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. [1 Corinthians 15:51-57 NLT](#).

With the glorious resurrection and the everlasting life awaiting those who believe, Paul encouraged the church to remain faithful. [1 Corinthians 15:58](#) So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless. [1 Corinthians 15:58 NLT](#).

Once the letter was sent, Paul then waited anxiously to see how it would be received. Was he too harsh on those he corrected? His warnings and reproofs were given out of his love for them, and he hoped that those to whom they applied would not be so offended as to leave the church.

Chapter 31—The Message Accepted

This chapter is based on [2 Corinthians](#).

When Paul finally left Ephesus, he set off on a trip planning to stop at many places in Europe that he had visited before. The first stop was at Troas where he found some interested listeners. He was disappointed that Titus was not at Troas because he was hoping to hear how the Corinthians had responded to his letter. Paul was interested in how all the young churches were doing and that is why he was making this trip, but he was especially anxious to learn about how the Corinthians were doing.

Paul's worry was finally relieved when Titus caught up with him and told him of the wonderful change that had happened in Corinth after they received his letter. This news was such a relief to him that he decided to write another letter to tell them how happy he was to hear the good news about them. He apologized for the first letter being so harsh and told them how happy he was that it was so well received and brought such great changes. Paul was not only concerned about the Corinthian church but carried a great weight of concern for all the new churches that he had had a hand in starting. He was extremely distressed by false teachers who taught their own doctrines and turned the members against him.

In his second letter Paul showed his joy in his words, [2 Corinthians 1:3](#) All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴ He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. ⁵ For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. ⁶ Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. ⁷ We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us. [2 Corinthians 1:3-7 NLT](#).

Paul considered their return from the sins and bad things he corrected them about as a reconversion, and he gave God the praise for this change of heart. [2 Corinthians 2:14](#) But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. ¹⁵ Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume. And who is adequate for such a task as this? [2 Corinthians 2:14-16 NLT](#).

In that day, it was customary for a victorious general to return with a lineup of captives, showing off the people he had defeated. On these occasions people were assigned the task of burning incense, and as the captives marched through it, for many it was the smell of death. But for some whom the winners chose to save, it was a smell of life and freedom.

Now that the immediate danger to the Corinthian church was past, Paul praised God but now he wanted the Corinthians to begin spreading the gospel to many more people. Thinking of the great responsibility and the amount of work, Paul wrote, "Who is adequate for such a big task?" On the other hand, some people were asking who gives someone the authority for this work? Some accused Paul of authorizing himself for this great work. Sometimes church members moving from one place to another might carry a letter of recommendation with them so that the new church would know what they are capable of doing. In Paul's case, he said that the changed lives of the Corinthian believers was all the proof he needed that he was called to this work. They were his recommendation letter.

Being a minister of the gospel is the greatest honor that a person can have. But none should boast and all should realize they are dependent on the power of God for their success. They should with Paul say, "We cannot accomplish anything on our own, but are dependent on God who has called us to the ministry." A true minister realizes that they are doing the work that Christ did during His ministry, which is to lead sinners to a better way of life, and in the end, salvation. The Holy Spirit gives him energy and spiritual wisdom, and power to tear down the stronghold of Satan. People are led to love God and to ask, "What should I do to be saved?"

[2 Corinthians 4:1](#) Therefore, since God in his mercy has given us this new way, we never give up. ² We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don't try to trick anyone or distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know this. ³ If the Good News we preach is hidden behind a veil, it is hidden only from people who are perishing. ⁴ Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God. ⁵ You see, we don't go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. [2 Corinthians 4:1-6 NLT](#).

[2 Corinthians 4:7](#) We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great

power is from God, not from ourselves. [2 Corinthians 4:7 NLT](#). God could have had angels spread the good news of salvation, but he chose weak imperfect human beings to do it. He wants His glory to shine through them to bring light to the world darkened by sin. Everything they do should bring honor, glory, and praise to Him.

[2 Corinthians 4:8](#) We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹ We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. ¹⁰ Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. [2 Corinthians 4:8-10 NLT](#). Many messengers of Christ suffered, and some were killed, but that suffering and death brought spiritual life. Because of this, it would be good if the church would not add to the burden and difficulties faced by those actively working to spread the gospel.

The apostles did not preach the gospel to get rich or to get recognition. They devoted their lives to it so they could save souls. [2 Corinthians 8:9](#) You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich. [2 Corinthians 8:9 NLT](#). Jesus never turned from the path of humiliation and sacrifice until it led to His death on the cross. Paul wanted every single person who read or heard his letter to understand how much Christ gave up to save them. He was the Majesty of heaven, worshipped by angels, but set that aside and chose to become not just a human being, but a humble servant, who died the death of a criminal on the cross [[Philippians 2:8](#)]. Paul hoped that those who realized how much Jesus sacrificed for them would put away selfishness from their lives.

It is impossible for us to explain the love of God with human words, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Beside the humiliated and suffering Christ was God whom we call the Father, who is so glorious and powerful we cannot even approach Him. He willingly participated in the plan to save humanity so that He could welcome us as His children. [1 John 4:9](#) God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love--not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. [1 John 4:9-10 NLT](#). [1 John 3:1](#) See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. [1 John 3:1 NLT](#). Every true disciple will be moved by this love of God and should show it by their lives so that sinners will be led to Christ.

Chapter 32—A Generous Church

The church needs workers and workers need to be paid, so Paul explained how that should work for God's church on earth. He started the topic by asking some questions: [1 Corinthians 9:7](#) What soldier has to pay his own expenses? What farmer plants a vineyard and doesn't have the right to eat some of its fruit? What shepherd cares for a flock of sheep and isn't allowed to drink some of the milk? ⁸ Am I expressing merely a human opinion, or does the law say the same thing? ⁹ For the law of Moses says, "You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain." Was God thinking only about oxen when he said this? ¹⁰ Wasn't he actually speaking to us? Yes, it was written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest. ¹¹ Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren't we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink? ¹² If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ. ¹³ Don't you realize that those who work in the temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the temple? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings. ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it. [1 Corinthians 9:7-14 NLT](#).

In the Israelite economy, the Levites who ran the temple are paid from the tithes donated by the people [[Hebrews 7:5](#)]. This was the job given to the Levites by God [[Deuteronomy 18:5](#)]. God considered it robbery when the Israelites didn't pay a 10th of their income to the temple or Levites. This model was to be carried over to the Christian church, where gospel workers were paid out of the tithes collected by the church. Simply put, "Those who work deserve to be paid." [[1 Timothy 5:18](#)]. In the Israelite system, generosity was encouraged, which could go to support the cause of God, but could also be used to support the poor. Collections beyond the tithe were to be given voluntarily, and cheerfully. The law given through Moses said that when a field was harvested, the corners and anything dropped should be left for the poor. Firsts were also dedicated to the Lord such as, first fruits of each harvest, first wool from shearing the sheep, first born of all animals, and a price was paid for the first-born son. These firsts were to be brought to the tabernacle and would be part of the income for the priests.

The Christian church today is much larger and more widespread than the Israelite nation has ever been and God expects its members to be just as generous as He asked of the Israelites. The words to them can apply directly to members of the Christian church. [Malachi 3:10](#) Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be

enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! [Malachi 3:10 NLT](#). If Christians were faithful in paying their tithes and offerings, there would be no need for special events such as bazars, lotteries, or dinner parties to raise money for the support of the gospel.

People will be tempted to use all their income for their own enjoyment, and many do, but when asked for some to support a cause of the church, they become less generous. Some will give from a sense of obligation, but they will give much less than they spend on things that they don't even need. This shows that they don't truly love God, nor do they care about the salvation of others. Those who covet and keep money that belongs to God, He considers thieves [[Malachi 3:8-9](#)]. But the Christian who truly loves Christ will give freely and happily of their time and money for the spread of the gospel.

The spirit of giving is the spirit of heaven. God gave up His son as a sacrifice to save humanity, and Christ gave up everything including His life to save us. But the spirit of selfishness is the spirit of Satan, which results in misery and death.

When people give up their jobs to work full time to spread the gospel, God expects the members of the church to support them. If these workers are left to suffer from not being able to satisfy their basic needs, God is not happy. The pastor has a responsibility to keep his congregation informed of these needs, and when he doesn't, not only does the cause of God suffer, but the members miss out on the blessing of giving.

Even the poor should be encouraged to give to God so they can also share in the blessings of giving. [Mark 12:43](#) Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. ⁴⁴ For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on." [Mark 12:43-44 NLT](#). As a percentage of what she had, she gave far more than the rich.

When talking to the Ephesians, Paul reminded them of the words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." [[Acts 20:35](#)]. In his letter to the Corinthians, he wrote, [2 Corinthians 9:6](#) Remember this--a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. ⁷ You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." [2 Corinthians 9:6-7 NLT](#).

Paul pointed to the Macedonians as an example of people who didn't have much but gave generously. First, they gave themselves completely over to the Lord [[2](#)

[Corinthians 8:5](#)], then they were moved to give money to support His cause. In fact, when Paul tried to keep them from giving so much out of the little they had, they begged him to take it. Through Titus first, and then through his letter, Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to become excellent in the act of giving. Not because they were being compelled to give but because they were eager to give. The Corinthians were also encouraged to give in proportion to what they had [[2 Corinthians 8:6-12](#)].

[Proverbs 3:9](#) Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. ¹⁰ Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine. [Proverbs 3:9-10 NLT](#). Giving to God does not lead to poverty, in fact it is the opposite. [Proverbs 11:24](#) Give freely and become more wealthy; be stingy and lose everything. [Proverbs 11:24 NLT](#). [Luke 6:38](#) Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full--pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back." [Luke 6:38 NLT](#).

Chapter 33—Difficult Working Conditions

Paul taught that full-time gospel workers should be paid by the church, but there were times when he worked above and beyond his missionary work to support himself. Learning a trade which often involved physical labor was common among the Jews. In fact, if parents didn't teach their children some kind of trade to earn a living, they disobeyed the instructions from the Lord given through Moses. In Paul's case, he had learned to make tents, and during his missionary journeys, there were times when he earned his own living.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, he told them he supported himself with his labor, in addition to his church work because he didn't want to be a financial burden for them. [1 Thessalonians 2:9](#) Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God's Good News to you. [1 Thessalonians 2:9 NLT](#). [2 Thessalonians 3:8](#) We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked hard day and night so we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We certainly had the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to give you an example to follow. [2 Thessalonians 3:8-9 NLT](#).

In Thessalonica, there were some who refused to do manual labor, and instead were busybodies with all their free time. While there Paul set an example by working with his hands to earn a living even while he continued to preach to gospel. [2 Thessalonians 3:10](#) Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "Those unwilling to work will not get to eat." ¹¹ Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people's business. ¹² We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living. [2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 NLT](#).

In the history of the world, Satan has often been able to slow down the work of God's people by working from within. This was the case in Paul's day and during the Reformation as well. Satan would find people who appeared to be very enthusiastic about the cause, but were unbalanced, and under his influence, rather than God's. Some would appear to be so devoted to the cause, they would spend all their time on "Spiritual things," but neglect caring for their families. Some would even twist Scripture texts, claiming that it was a sin to work.

In Corinth, Paul realized that the people were suspicious of the motivation of outsiders, so to make sure they didn't think he was trying to get rich from his gospel work, he worked to earn his own living. While there he became friends with a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who were tent makers, so he lived with them, and worked as a tentmaker to pay for himself, but on Sabbath he would teach

in the synagogue. Paul even accepted some financial support brought by Silas and Timothy from the Macedonian churches to avoid being a burden to the Corinthians. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he explained that he did this to show he was different from false apostles who claimed to be like him [[2 Corinthians 7:12](#)].

On his second missionary journey, Paul was happy to have the company and help of Aquila and Priscilla when he went back to Ephesus, and they continued to support themselves and the work by making tents. This manual labor did not prevent Paul from also working very hard at spreading the gospel for the 3 years he was in Ephesus. In fact, this very work put him in contact with people that he might not have otherwise met. Paul didn't just enjoy the money he earned by only spending it on himself, he shared some with his fellow workers Luke and Timothy. Sometimes he even went hungry so he could relieve the needs of others.

Toward the end of his ministry Paul could show his calloused hands and say, [Acts 20:33](#) "I have never coveted anyone's silver or gold or fine clothes. ³⁴ You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply my own needs and even the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵ And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" [Acts 20:33-35 NLT](#).

Work is a blessing, and laziness makes the Spirit of God sad. A still pool of water is not clean, but a flowing stream brings health and happiness to the land. Avoiding physical labor will make a person weak, but embracing it will bring strength and give endurance, even for the work of the gospel. Many people take and consume, but do not give, and the blessings God gives them are kept for themselves and not shared. The usefulness of young people who think they have been called by God to be pastors depends on how hard they are willing to work. They should exercise self-discipline and grow more like their Master so they can show His goodness, love, and truth. They should not choose it because they think it is an easy way to make a living. About this line of work, Paul wrote, [1 Corinthians 4:11](#) Even now we go hungry and thirsty, and we don't have enough clothes to keep warm. We are often beaten and have no home. ¹² We work wearily with our own hands to earn our living. We bless those who curse us. We are patient with those who abuse us. [1 Corinthians 4:11-12 NLT](#). Paul was always ready to work as a tentmaker, when necessary, but he never slacked off on his primary job which was to win souls for Jesus.

Paul gave an example of how people who work at other jobs can still share the gospel. His friends and fellow tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla did not quit their jobs for full-time ministry, but they did teach Apollos, so that he could exercise his

talents for full-time work as a preacher of the gospel. Many people who have never been ordained have an important role in saving souls. The need for missionaries who can support themselves with a job unrelated to gospel work is great. But there are some who should devote all their time to gospel work without worry of how they will care for their families. The church should recognize these individuals and encourage and support them. But even if it doesn't, those who recognize the call to full-time ministry, should move forward in faith. The Jordan river was not dried up for crossing until the feet of the priests stepped into the water. When those whom God has called step forward in faith, if necessary, God will send angels to prepare the way and make it possible to do the work God has called them to do.

Chapter 34—A Sacred and Most Important Job

Through His life and ministry, Christ showed us what God is like. He made the world for people, and it provides life giving sun and rain for both good and evil people [[Matthew 5:45](#)]. God does not live for Himself and the life of service Jesus lived is a demonstration of that. Jesus said, [Matthew 20:26](#) ... Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave.²⁸ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." [Matthew 20:26-28 NLT](#).

The work Christ started on earth is to be continued by people as His representatives on earth. It is a great responsibility to be called to the job of building up His church, because that is the work Christ started, and it can only be accomplished with wisdom and power from Him. This responsibility is not unlike that of ancient watchmen on city walls, watching to warn the people inside the city of coming dangers. It was normal practice for the watchmen to communicate with each other to make sure they were alert and unharmed.

The following words of God to the prophet Ezekiel, show how serious this responsibility should be taken. [Ezekiel 33:7](#) "Now, son of man, I am making you a watchman for the people of Israel. Therefore, listen to what I say and warn them for me.⁸ If I announce that some wicked people are sure to die and you fail to tell them to change their ways, then they will die in their sins, and I will hold you responsible for their deaths.⁹ But if you warn them to repent and they don't repent, they will die in their sins, but you will have saved yourself. [Ezekiel 33:7-9 NLT](#). Christians are like watchmen on the walls, with the knowledge of God, their job is to warn people of the coming danger. Satan will attack and they are in danger of falling to his temptations. The words of God to Ezekiel say that He will hold the watchmen responsible for the death of those who are lost.

The watchman has a responsibility, but they also have the privilege of being co-workers with the Holy Spirit, who can work through them to tell men and women of their danger. The watchman must always be alert and never sleep on the job, and likewise the Christian should always be ready to warn the sinner and tell them of their danger. They are not concerned with their own comfort and ease and their motivation to do this work is not money, but the sense of duty as a watchman.

Those who serve in the army of God will have to endure hardship as the enemy attacks, but they don't have to rely on their own strength. But this strength doesn't come without a constant connection to God through prayer and study of His word. Because they realize the need for strength from above, they don't take credit for their victories, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, the message of salvation is

heard loud and clear in the mind of the hearer. When people truly realize the incredible power available to them, they will not limit their goals to what they think they can accomplish with their own strength and ability.

The attacks of Satan are especially difficult for those who are suffering depression. When trust is not placed in God, it is easy to become overwhelmed with problems. Paul experienced more hardship as a missionary than most men, and this is what he said, [2 Corinthians 4:17](#) For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. [2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NLT](#).

Pastors should mingle with their church members so they will know the difficulties they face and will know how to speak to their needs from the pulpit. They should visit them in their homes and pray with them and point them toward Christ. The Holy Spirit will give them the words to speak that will be just what their listeners need to hear. While some things are customized to the hearers, some things apply to all people. [Acts 20:20](#) I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. ²¹ I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike--the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus. [Acts 20:20-21 NLT](#).

Jesus went to people's homes, healing and comforting them. He blessed little children and encouraged their mothers. He made Himself like a servant as he served the needs of all. Bringing hope to people was like eating and drinking for Him. All who work for Christ should learn from His example, and only then will they accomplish what they are supposed to.

Some people have failed as pastors or missionaries because their interest and attention are divided. The disciples Jesus called left their jobs and followed Him. Pastors cannot do their jobs properly if they are trying to run a big business on the side. Their attention would be divided, or the work of Christ might even be their second priority. [2 Timothy 2:4](#) Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. [2 Timothy 2:4 NLT](#). Satan tempted Christ with the riches of the world, knowing that if He had accepted, the world would have been lost. Pastors should not desire to be rich. [1 Timothy 6:10](#) For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. [1 Timothy 6:10 NLT](#). Pastors should also preach that people should not put their trust in worldly riches. [1 Timothy 6:17](#) Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be

in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. ¹⁹ By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life. [1 Timothy 6:17-19 NLT](#).

The ministry of Paul has lessons for pastors and missionaries today. His heart burned with a love for people and a desire that they would be saved, so he put all his effort into the work of winning them over to Christ. Few men have sacrificed as much and worked as hard as Paul did to do the work God called him to do. Paul's example was also to not forget the church he helped to start, but to revisit and encourage them in the Lord. He also looked for young people among them, such as Timothy and Titus, that could be trained to lead or to follow him as missionaries.

Paul described his work this way: [Colossians 1:25](#) God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you. ²⁶ This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. ²⁷ For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory. ²⁸ So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. ²⁹ That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me. [Colossians 1:25-29 NLT](#).

[2 Corinthians 6:3](#) We live in such a way that no one will stumble because of us, and no one will find fault with our ministry. ⁴ In everything we do, we show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. ⁵ We have been beaten, been put in prison, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. ⁶ We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love. ⁷ We faithfully preach the truth. God's power is working in us. We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack and the left hand for defense. ⁸ We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. ⁹ We are ignored, even though we are well known. We live close to death, but we are still alive. We have been beaten, but we have not been killed. ¹⁰ Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything. [2 Corinthians 6:3-10 NLT](#).

Paul's words to Titus show how serious young people should take their calling from God, [Titus 2:6](#). In the same way, encourage the young men to live wisely. ⁷ And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching. ⁸ Teach the truth so that your teaching can't be criticized. Then those who oppose us will be ashamed and have nothing bad to say about us. [Titus 2:6-8 NLT](#). Missionaries who go throughout the world trying to save the lost for Christ are most precious in His sight.

God is calling for people who are willing to leave their jobs, businesses, and even their families if necessary to become missionaries for Him. Many have answered the call, and some have even lost their lives as a result, but the knowledge of God has been spread to many lands. Every person is precious to Christ because He gave His life to save them, so no human cost or effort could be considered too great to save them. Those who have truly answered the call of God will have a deep desire to save souls for Him. They will be like the watchmen on the wall who feel responsible for the lives of those they are protecting. When Christ's victory over sin is finally complete, these missionaries will be counted among those who were called, chosen and faithful [[Revelation 17:14](#)].

Chapter 35—Salvation for the Jews

This chapter is based on the book of [Romans](#).

When Paul arrived in Corinth for the second time, he was warmly welcomed by those whom he had brought to the faith on his first visit. Many of them were now strong in their faith and had matured as Christians. This provided a welcome rest for Paul from having to deal with conflicts and problems. Because of this he found time to think about his long-desired trip to Rome, the capital of the Empire and the known civilized world. A church had already been started there, and Paul wanted their cooperation to organize the spread of the gospel to other countries including Spain. So, he wrote a letter to them to begin laying the groundwork for his visit, and to tell them about these plans.

In the letter Paul explained the good news of salvation and showed how promises which were at first only given to the Jews, were now available to the Gentiles as well. He clearly explained how faith in Jesus allows His perfection to cover our forgiven sins, so we can appear perfect before God. Hundreds of years later, this truth brought light to the darkness that weighed down on Martin Luther and helped him to explain how the death and blood of Jesus can wash away the stains of our sin.

Also in this letter, Paul wrote of his great desire that Israelites would recognize Jesus as the Messiah and accept Him as their Savior. [Romans 9:1](#) With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. ² My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief ³ for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed--cut off from Christ!--if that would save them. ⁴ They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshipping him and receiving his wonderful promises. ⁵ Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. [Romans 9:1-5 NLT](#).

God had chosen Israel so He could bring blessings to the entire human race through them. From among them prophets were given promises of a Savior who would be rejected and killed by the very ones who should have been the first to recognize Him. Paul quoted from the prophets, [Romans 10:20](#) And later Isaiah spoke boldly for God, saying, "I was found by people who were not looking for me. I showed myself to those who were not asking for me." ²¹ But regarding Israel, God

said, "All day long I opened my arms to them, but they were disobedient and rebellious." [Romans 10:20-21 NLT](#).

Israel rejected Jesus but God did not reject them. [Romans 11:1](#) I ask, then, has God rejected his own people, the nation of Israel? Of course not! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² No, God has not rejected his own people, whom he chose from the very beginning. Do you realize what the Scriptures say about this? Elijah the prophet complained to God about the people of Israel and said, ³ "LORD, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too." ⁴ And do you remember God's reply? He said, "No, I have 7,000 others who have never bowed down to Baal!" ⁵ It is the same today, for a few of the people of Israel have remained faithful because of God's grace. ... [Romans 11:1-5 NLT](#).

Israel stumbled and fell, but that didn't mean they couldn't get back up. When they fell, salvation was offered to the Gentiles, which would hopefully make the Jews jealous, so they would want this salvation also. But if the Gentiles benefitted from the Jews rejecting the gospel, how much more might they benefit if the Jews accepted it.

Though the nation of Israel rejected Jesus, there were individuals, John the Baptist being one of the first, who recognized and accepted Him as the Messiah they had waited so long for. It was these Jewish believers that were the start of the Christian church, whom Paul refers to as a noble olive tree that had some branches broken off. The branches broken off were the Jews who rejected Christ, and the Gentiles, he adds, are like a wild olive tree, some of whose branches were grafted onto the good tree. Then he warns the Gentiles, don't boast, because you are not the root of the tree, but branches that are supported by the root. Also, if some of the natural branches were broken off, those which have been grafted on can just as easily be cut off. Then he adds, if you who came from a wild olive tree were grafted onto the good tree, how much more can branches which originally came from the good tree be grafted back onto the same tree.

[Romans 11:33](#) Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! ³⁴ For who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? ³⁵ And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? ³⁶ For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen. [Romans 11:33-36 NLT](#).

When Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, many Jews were sold into slavery and dispersed all over the world. For 1,800 years they wandered the world with no

place to call home and have often been hated and persecuted. During this time, there have been Jews who have remained faithful to God and suffered in silence. Some have come to recognize that Jesus whom their ancestors rejected and killed was indeed the Messiah Israel had always been waiting for. It is these Jews that Isaiah is referring to: [Isaiah 10:21](#) A remnant will return; yes, the remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. [Isaiah 10:21 NLT](#). From the time of Paul until now, the Holy Spirit has been calling both Jews and Gentiles to repentance. That is what Paul means when he says, [Romans 2:11](#) For God does not show favoritism. [Romans 2:11 NLT](#).

In the last days, when the gospel is preached to people who have not heard it before, among them will be many Jews from all over the world. When the Old Testament is explained in the light of the New, many will recognize Christ as the Savior of the world. Many will then accept Him as their Redeemer, and the words of Jesus will be fulfilled. [John 1:12](#) But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. [John 1:12 NLT](#). Among the Jews will be some like Saul of Tarsus who will spread the gospel with great power. [Isaiah 29:22](#) That is why the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, says to the people of Israel, "My people will no longer be ashamed or turn pale with fear. ²³ For when they see their many children and all the blessings I have given them, they will recognize the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob. They will stand in awe of the God of Israel. ²⁴ Then the wayward will gain understanding, and complainers will accept instruction. [Isaiah 29:22-24 NLT](#).

Chapter 36—Apostasy in Galatia

This chapter is based on [Galatians](#).

While Paul was in Corinth, some bad things were happening in some of the churches he had started. Some Christians from Jerusalem were spreading false teachings in the church including among the new believers in Galatia. Going against the decision of the Christian general council in Jerusalem, they were including some Jewish traditions with the truths of the gospel, and also teaching sensualism, which is to open yourself to receive truth from your senses.

The Galatian church was in great danger, and Paul was very worried about them, so he wrote a letter to them. After his greeting, he didn't waste any time getting to the point. [Galatians 1:6](#) I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News ⁷ but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. ⁸ Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. ⁹ I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed. [Galatians 1:6-9 NLT](#).

[Galatians 3:1](#) Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. ² Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ. ³ How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? ⁴ Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it? [Galatians 3:1-4 NLT](#).

Paul was moved by the Spirit to be gentle in his reproof of the Corinthians, but blunt to the Galatians. Being too harsh on the Corinthians might have caused them to reject his teachings, but being too gentle on the Galatians might not have woken them up from the danger that threatened them.

In the letter, he reminded them of how he was converted, and how through divine power he was able to understand the great truths of the gospel. He explained the difference between being taught by men and hearing it directly from Christ. He also told them how he was inspired by God to write these words of reproof to them. Then he begged them not to listen to these false teachers but to return to what they learned when they were first converted. He added that these false teachers were unholy and did bad things in secret and didn't live according to their

own teaching. In the end, what they were really teaching was that you had to earn God's favor by doing certain Jewish ceremonies, rather than being born again as Jesus had taught [[John 3:3](#)]. Satan adapts his attacks to fit what is popular at the time. Today, it seems he has swung to the opposite extreme, where he tries to get people to believe that since we are saved by grace and the death of Christ, we don't need to keep the Ten Commandments.

Paul wasn't trying to make himself out to be more important by saying he was an apostle called by Christ and acknowledged by the council in Jerusalem as a missionary to the Gentiles. But he wanted people to know who had authorized him to preach, and that those who dismissed his teachings and authority were going against God.

Together with the Holy Spirit's power, Paul's words had the desired effect of bringing many back to their original faith in the gospel. Their lives showed that they had the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control [[Galatians 5:22-23](#)]. God was glorified and many more people joined the church.

Chapter 37—Paul's Last Visit to Jerusalem

This chapter is based on [Acts 20:4-38; 21:1-16](#).

The time for Passover was approaching, and Paul very much wanted to be in Jerusalem for the festival. He still had a great desire to lead more Jews to a faith in Christ, and he also wanted to bring the financial support the Gentiles had donated for the poor in Jerusalem. He also hoped to be able to break down the wall, even if only partially, between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Paul was in Corinth at the time and was preparing to take a ship back home. Just before boarding the ship, he was told that there was a plot by the Jews to kill him. The growth of the church, combined with the teaching that Jews no longer had to keep the ceremonial law, and that Gentiles were equal to Jews in the eyes of God, made him many enemies. [Colossians 3:11](#) In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. [Colossians 3:11 NLT](#).

In response to this warning, Paul changed his route and decided to miss Passover but hopefully still be in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Luke was traveling with him, and they were bringing a very large offering collected from the churches in Asia. Because so much money was donated, Paul wanted to bring representatives from some of the churches, so traveling with him were: Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.

Paul and Luke stayed with the believers in Philippi for Passover, and since the church members there were so loving, they had a very peaceful stay of 8 days. Then they met the others at Troas and stayed with the believers there for 7 days. On the last day a large group gathered to spend time with their beloved teacher, and Paul had so much to say, they stayed all day and into the night. They were meeting on the 3rd floor of a building, and Paul was still talking at midnight when a young man named Eutychus, who was sitting on a windowsill, dozed off and fell to the ground. The congregation rushed down and then cried out in sadness when they found him dead. Paul prayed and asked God if He was willing to bring Eutychus back to life, and He did. Then Paul said to the people, don't worry, he's alive. Then they went back up to the 3rd floor room, and he continued talking until daybreak.

As the ship was about to leave for Assos, Paul wanted some time alone, and since it was a short distance, he decided to travel by land. He had a lot on his mind, including the danger he was putting himself in by going to Jerusalem, so he spent a lot of time in prayer. From Assos, he rejoined the group and continued to Miletus, near Ephesus. He would have loved to make a stop and spend some time with the

church members in Ephesus, but since he was in a rush to get to Jerusalem by the Day of Pentecost, he couldn't. So, he had the idea of sending a message and asking if they would come meet him at Miletus, which they gladly did. [Acts 20:18](#) When they arrived he declared, "You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now ¹⁹ I have done the Lord's work humbly and with many tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. ²⁰ I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. ²¹ I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike--the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus. [Acts 20:18-21 NLT](#)."

Paul always held the law of God up as being very important, but not because it had power to save us. Sinners must repent for breaking the law and by faith accept the blood of Jesus to receive forgiveness. If they don't, then they will have to suffer the consequences that they deserve for breaking the law.

Paul told the Ephesians that the Holy Spirit had made it very clear to him that he was supposed to go to Jerusalem, without telling him what would happen to him there. But the Spirit told other people along his journey, who told Paul that he would be arrested and put in chains. But these warnings did not worry him or scare him out of going to Jerusalem. He saw his life as a difficult race that he fully intended to finish without worrying about what might happen to him on this earth. Then he was inspired by the Spirit to tell the Ephesians that this would be the last time he saw them.

Paul could say with a clear conscience that he would not be guilty for any person who was not saved because he faithfully warned everyone everywhere he went. Fear of offending people or losing friends never stopped him from speaking the truth, including warning and correcting people. Pastors today should be willing to speak uncomfortable truths and not just say things that will make people feel good. If he knows someone in his congregation is sinning and he doesn't warn them, he is responsible for their soul. If people would keep in mind that every person they met was paid for by the blood of Christ, they would be more willing to tell people so that His sacrifice for that one individual was not wasted.

Seeing into the future, Paul warned the Ephesians, [Acts 20:29](#) "I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following. ³¹ Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you--my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you. [Acts 20:29-31 NLT](#)."

Paul knew his time and work were nearing an end, and he knew that he could not personally keep all the churches and new believers safe from Satan's attacks. But

he knew that God loved them more than he did, so he said, [Acts 20:32](#) "And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself. [Acts 20:32 NLT](#). Then wanting to make sure no one used him as an example to try to get rich by working for the church, he said, [Acts 20:33](#) "I have never coveted anyone's silver or gold or fine clothes. ³⁴ You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply my own needs and even the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵ And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" [Acts 20:33-35 NLT](#). Then Paul prayed for them, and they hugged, and especially because he said they would never see him again, they cried as they walked him to the ship.

From Miletus they sailed to Coos, then Rhodes, and then Patara where they had to change to another ship that was sailing to Tyre. They had to wait for a week before the ship would continue, so they stayed with a small group of believers there. During that time, several of the members received messages from the Holy Spirit, warning Paul of the trouble he would face if he went to Jerusalem. They tried to convince him not to go there, but he told them he wasn't afraid of suffering or prison and refused to change his plans. At the end of the week, Paul prayed for the members there and then continued to Caesarea. There he spent a few happy and peaceful days in the house of Philip, the evangelist, who was one of the first 7 deacons. There Paul was warned again, this time by a prophet named Agabus, that if he went to Jerusalem, he would be arrested and that his hands and feet would be bound by chains there. But Paul said, [Acts 21:13](#) ... "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but even to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." [Acts 21:13 NLT](#).

Having been warned so many times by the Holy Spirit though other people, it was hard for Paul to be happy as he approached Jerusalem. He was sad as he thought of all the Jews who hated him and were constantly plotting to put an end to his ministry. He thought about how Jesus had gone to Jerusalem and was rejected and killed there. Jews who hated him had been spreading rumors and lies about him but almost worse was the fact that apostles and elders in Jerusalem were not defending him, and possibly even disagreeing with his methods. But Paul was not discouraged because he knew he was obeying God in what he was doing and hoped that the Holy Spirit would convince the other apostles to support his work.

Chapter 38—Paul a Prisoner

This chapter is based on [Acts 21:17-40; 22, 23](#).

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, some church members welcomed him, and the next day he went to visit James and the elders of the church. Paul handed over the offerings that the Gentile Christians had donated for the poor Jewish Christians. The amount of money was much more than the Jewish elders had expected, but because of their prejudice against the Gentiles, they didn't really appreciate the sacrifice of the givers. At those times many of the Jewish elders of the church were still clinging to their ceremonies and prejudice against the Gentiles. They had not appreciated the work that Paul was doing among the Gentiles. Even though it was obvious that God was working among the Gentiles, there were some Jews who thought it was their right to decide how that work should proceed.

It had been a number of years since the big decision by the council in Jerusalem to not burden the Gentiles with most of the ceremonial laws. All the elders had agreed back then but over time some had fallen back into their desire to preserve Jewish ceremonies throughout the church. These elders were now threatening to no longer support Paul and the missionaries to the Gentiles unless they agreed to require Jewish ceremonies to be kept.

Paul had been obedient to the Spirit that called him and taught him what to say. ¹ [Corinthians 2:10](#) But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. ¹¹ No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. ¹² And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. ¹ [Corinthians 2:10-12 NLT](#). In addition to being obedient to the Holy Spirit, Paul had gone along with the original decision of the council years ago, and God had blessed the church with great growth.

After handing over the money, Paul shared with the elders the wonderful things that God was doing among the Gentiles. After hearing the report and seeing the generous offering, they glorified God. They realized they had been wrong about Paul's work and saw that salvation through the death of Christ was equally available to both Gentiles and Jews. But instead of admitting they were wrong and changing their ways, they still wanted Paul to do something to prove that he himself had not rejected the ceremonial laws. There were 4 Jews who had made a Nazarite vow [[Numbers 6](#)], and they needed to ceremonially purify themselves, shave their heads, go to the temple, and offer a sacrifice. Paul was asked to pay the expenses for the 4 men and go to the temple with them so that Jews would see that

he still honored the ceremonial laws. This suggestion was not motivated by the Holy Spirit, but by fear of the Jews.

Because of Paul's respect for the elders, and his desire not to be a stumbling block to the weak, and to be all things to all people, he agreed to do this. Sadly, this compromise by Paul did not have the desired effect but instead brought on the events which led to the loss of his freedom for the rest of his life. It deprived the church of one of its strongest leaders and brought sorrow to many Christians in foreign lands.

On the last day of purification for the 4 men, Paul was in the temple courtyard with them, speaking to a priest about their sacrifice which he was going to pay for, when some Jews from Asia recognized him. Filled with hatred for him, they rushed at him shouting, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere to break our laws and to disregard our temple." They had seen Paul in Jerusalem with Trophimus, an Ephesian Christian, and without any evidence shouted, "He has even defiled the temple by bringing Greeks in here with him." This accusation was false, but it served their purpose to stir up a mob against Paul. Soon others began to shout out the accusations in the temple, and the rumors even spread throughout the city. The mob dragged Paul out of the temple courtyard and were beating him to death, when the Roman captain Claudius Lysias took some centurions and their soldiers to the center of the violence. When the soldiers showed up, the mob stopped beating Paul when they arrested him and put him in chains.

Claudius Lysias had no idea who Paul was or why the Jews wanted to kill him, but he intended to find out. Immediately the mob began shouting many different accusations against him, but they all added, "Away with him." As they were climbing the castle steps, Paul said to Lysias in Greek, "May I say something." Surprised, Lysias answered, "You speak Greek? I thought you were that Egyptian rebel who had 4,000 murderers as followers." Paul answered, "I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia and a citizen of no small country. Please give me a chance to talk to the people."

When he was given permission, from the stairs, he spoke to the crowd in Hebrew saying, "Men, brothers, and fathers, listen to what I have to say to you." As soon as they heard their native language, they became quiet and listened. Paul continued, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, but I was a disciple of Gamliel right here in this city. I was taught how to keep the law perfectly and did so with all my energy and wanted to make sure everyone else was keeping it just as you are doing today." The crowd remained quiet as he continued, "In fact I was so zealous for God and our laws that I persecuted the followers of Jesus, even killing them when I could." But then Paul

went on to tell them how he had been converted, and how he had intended to work among his own people, trying to convince them about who Jesus really was. But God had told him that he must take this message to the Gentiles instead.

As soon as the people heard that they began shouting again. As far as they were concerned, anything offered by God belonged to the Jews alone, and even what they rejected could not be shared with the Gentiles. So, the people shouted, "Away with this man, he is not fit to live." The people even threw off their outer coats and started to throw dust in the air as they shouted. So, the captain said, let's whip this man and then question him. As they were about to carry out this plan, Paul asked the centurion near him, "Does the law allow you to whip a Roman citizen who has not been condemned of a crime?" Immediately the centurion told the captain that Paul was a Roman citizen. When the captain asked, "Are you really a Roman citizen? It cost me a lot of money to buy my freedom and become a citizen." Paul, answered, "I was born a free man and a citizen of Rome." Now the captain was afraid because he had chained a Roman citizen that hadn't been condemned.

The next day the captain called the Jewish chief priests to explain to him what Paul was accused of? Paul himself had been a member of this council that he now stood before, and he spoke to them calmly and confidently. "Men and brothers, I have lived with a clear conscience before God up to this very day." At that the high priest Annas, commanded that Paul be slapped on the mouth, to which Paul responded, "God will strike you for breaking the law by ordering me to be hit." Then having been a member of this council himself, he easily turned them on each other by shouting out, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and am standing before you today because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead."

The council was mostly made up of two political parties, the Sadducees, who believe there is no resurrection, angels, or spirits, and the Pharisees who believe in all 3. The two parties began to argue among themselves with the Pharisees saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man. If a spirit or angel has spoken to him, let's not fight against God." The Sadducees still really wanted to kill him, and when they began to physically fight over Paul, pulling him back and forth, the chief captain sent in soldiers to rescue him from being torn into pieces.

After this happened Paul began to wonder if his choice to come to Jerusalem was not the will of God. So far, he had made the Jewish religion, and their God, look bad to the Romans. Paul had not been afraid to suffer and die when he decided to come to Jerusalem, but now he wondered if he had made a mistake? What would happen to the new churches he had started? Would these same men who were trying to destroy him, do the same to these young churches? In discouragement, Paul prayed, and that night, God brought him some comfort by appearing to him in

a dream and said, "Cheer up Paul, for even as you have spoken up for Me in Jerusalem, you will also speak up for Me in Rome." Paul had wanted to go to Rome to spread the gospel for a long time now and thought that his chance to do that was gone now that he was a prisoner, but now God told him that he would do just that.

Meanwhile, Jews were still plotting to kill Paul. 40 men who really hated him got together and made a vow that they would be cursed if they ate or drank anything before they had killed him. They went to the chief priests and elders to work together toward their common goal. They told the chief priests about their vow and asked them to get Paul out in the open so they could kill him. They said ask the Roman captain to bring Paul back to the council for more questioning and they would be ready to kill him on the way. It so happened that Paul's nephew, the son of his sister, happened to hear of the plot and went to tell him about it. Paul asked the centurion to take the boy to Claudius Lysias to tell him about the plot, after which Lysias told him not to let anyone know he had told them. Then Lysias didn't even wait for the request from the Jews but immediately began planning to transfer Paul to be safely held by Governor Felix. He called 2 centurions and told them to take their 200 men plus 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen. They were to leave at 9 o'clock that same night with Paul on horseback to take him safely to Felix. Jerusalem already had frequent cases of violence involving the Jews which always had the chance of getting out of control causing Rome to have to use their military might to put down the rebellion. Removing Paul from the region would take away that as a cause for violence.

An explanation of the reason for sending this prisoner to Felix was written and sent with the chief captain. [Acts 23:26](#) "From Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings! ²⁷ "This man was seized by some Jews, and they were about to kill him when I arrived with the troops. When I learned that he was a Roman citizen, I removed him to safety. ²⁸ Then I took him to their high council to try to learn the basis of the accusations against him. ²⁹ I soon discovered the charge was something regarding their religious law--certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death. ³⁰ But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I immediately sent him on to you. I have told his accusers to bring their charges before you." [Acts 23:26-30 NLT](#).

Paul was not the first servant of God who found protection among the heathen from the hatred of the Israelites. This was one more incident added to the long list times Jews had rejected God's messenger. This added to their hardness of heart against God and only made their destruction more certain. Jesus gave examples of the widow of Zarephath from Sidon and Naaman the Syrian who were considered heathen by the Jews but were more righteous in the eyes of God than His own

chosen people because they lived up to the little knowledge they had. The words of reproof from Jesus to the people of Nazareth applied not only to the unbelieving Jews, but also to the Christian Jews who failed to give their full support to the work among the Gentiles. God didn't want Paul's ministry to end so soon, but he allowed the choices made by all involved to take their course.

This was not the first or last time that a servant of God would be rejected by those who were supposed to be the people of God. How many times could the ministry of a faithful servant of God been useful for longer if they had been appreciated and accepted. When this happens, it can be seen as God removing the blessing He was trying to provide to His people by allowing the ministry of His servant to be cut short. Often the persecution is so great that death for the servant of God is considered a blessed release, and in some cases, their death might accomplish that which their work could not.

Chapter 39—The Trial at Caesarea

This chapter is based on [Acts 24](#).

Only 5 days after arriving at Caesarea, Paul's accusers led by the prosecuting attorney, Tertullus, arrived to press their case against him. Felix granted them an immediate hearing and the trial began. Tertullus opened by saying some nice things about Felix, [Acts 24:2](#) ... "You have provided a long period of peace for us Jews and with foresight have enacted reforms for us.³ For all of this, Your Excellency, we are very grateful to you. [Acts 24:2-3 NLT](#). But these compliments were nothing but lies according to the Roman Historian Tacitus who was quoted to have said about Felix, "In the practice of all kinds of lust and cruelty he exercised the power of a king, with the temper of a slave."² Everyone who heard these flattering words spoken by Tertullus knew they were lies. Then he began to lay out their case against Paul to Felix, trying to frame them as high treason against Rome. [Acts 24:5](#) We have found this man to be a troublemaker who is constantly stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the cult known as the Nazarenes.⁶ Furthermore, he was trying to desecrate the Temple when we arrested him. [Acts 24:5-6 NLT](#). Tertullus went on to say that they really didn't even need to trouble Felix with this matter because they were about to judge him by their own laws when Lysias used violence to take Paul from them.

Felix may not have been a good person, but he was not stupid, and he could see that Paul's accusers were not after him for the benefit of Rome. So, he asked Paul if he would like to respond to the opening statement of Tertullus, which of course he was happy to do. [Acts 24:10](#) ... "I know, sir, that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, so I gladly present my defense before you.¹¹ You can quickly discover that I arrived in Jerusalem no more than twelve days ago to worship at the Temple.¹² My accusers never found me arguing with anyone in the Temple, nor stirring up a riot in any synagogue or on the streets of the city.

¹³ These men cannot prove the things they accuse me of doing. [Acts 24:10-13 NLT](#).

[Acts 24:14](#) "But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a cult. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the prophets.¹⁵ I have the same hope in God that these men have, that he will raise

² Barnes, Albert, *Scenes and Incidents in the life of the Apostle Paul*, Zeigler, McCurdy & Co., Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, Springfield, 1809, p 333.

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Scenes_and_Incidents_in_the_Life_of_the/mlksAAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover&bsq=%22lust%20and%20cruelty%22

both the righteous and the unrighteous. ¹⁶ Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and all people. [Acts 24:14-16 NLT](#).

[Acts 24:17](#) "After several years away, I returned to Jerusalem with money to aid my people and to offer sacrifices to God. ¹⁸ My accusers saw me in the Temple as I was completing a purification ceremony. There was no crowd around me and no rioting. ¹⁹ But some Jews from the province of Asia were there--and they ought to be here to bring charges if they have anything against me! ²⁰ Ask these men here what crime the Jewish high council found me guilty of, ²¹ except for the one time I shouted out, 'I am on trial before you today because I believe in the resurrection of the dead!'" [Acts 24:17-21 NLT](#).

Felix was pretty familiar with the Jewish religion, and now he had a clearer picture of why the Jews wanted Paul out of the way. With Paul being a citizen of Rome, it was even Felix's responsibility to make sure he had a fair trial, and that would certainly not be the case if he let the Jews judge him on their own. But he also saw that if he released Paul, the Jews would cause trouble for him, so he kept Paul as a prisoner but gave him some freedom and allowed people to come see and take care of his needs.

Not long after his accusers returned to Jerusalem, Felix and his wife Drusilla had a private conversation with Paul. They were interested in learning more about this faith in Christ that he spoke of. Of course, Paul was always ready and happy to talk about his belief in the salvation available through faith in Christ and he gladly accepted this opportunity. Not many people would be willing to tell Felix that he needed to change his ways, but Paul was not afraid to do that. He explained what faith in Christ mean to him, and he spoke of the goodness, and justice of God and His law. He explained that keeping the law of God meant living a good life and not just doing what you felt like doing all the time and keeping the physical and mental powers in balance. He told Felix that a day of judgment would come for all people and that riches and power now would not give them any advantage, in fact misuse of those gifts might be a disadvantage. Failure to pass that judgment would result in eternal loss.

Paul was talking to everyone who was listening as he explained how Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins, and how the Jewish sacrifices and ceremonial laws all pointed to that one ultimate sacrifice. Holy people before the actual death of Christ were saved by their faith that the blood of their sacrifices represented the blood of the Son of God. God has a right to want us to love and obey Him and has made it very clear what is right and what is expected of us.

Drusilla was a Jew and had heard some of these truths as she grew up, but she had set them aside, and she had also closed her heart to the teachings of Jesus. But

much of what Felix was hearing was new to him, and the Holy Spirit was working on his heart. He felt that what Paul was saying was true, and that God knew about all the self-indulgent and cruel things he had done, and the thought that he would be judged for those actions filled him with terror. The Holy Spirit was trying to lead him to repent, but he pushed away these thoughts and told Paul to stop and that he would be called back at a better time. The decisive action of the prison keeper in Philippi was very different from that of Felix when they both heard the truth from the servants of God in chains. One chose to become a son of God and inherit heaven, but the other rejected that gift.

For 2 years nothing changed as Paul remained a prisoner. Felix talked to Paul a few more times, but his real motive now was that he was hoping for a bribe to get him to release Paul, but none was ever offered. Felix was finally called to Rome to answer for cruel and evil actions committed against the Jews. He decided that he would try to gain the favor of the Jews by leaving Paul in jail, but he was removed from office in disgrace and replaced by Porcius Festus.

Chapter 40—Paul Appeals to Caesar

This chapter is based on [Acts 25:1-12](#).

Shortly after taking over for Felix, Festus was in Jerusalem, and the Jews told him about Paul and asked if he would do them a favor by sending him to Jerusalem for trial. If he would agree, they planned to attack and kill Paul on the journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem. But Festus said to them, "It is not the Roman way to send a man to die before he has had a chance to answer for the crimes with which he is accused." He told them that they could go back to Caesarea with him and bring their accusations against him there if they wanted. That is not at all what they wanted, but they had no choice but to prepare for another trial in Caesarea.

This time without a lead attorney, the Jews listed their charges against Paul, all without any proof. Paul responded to each charge, showing how it was false. It soon became very clear to Festus that the Jews had no provable case against Paul for which he should even be kept in jail, much less put to death. Still wanting to work with the Jews, Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried there by the Sanhedrin. Knowing how that would go, Paul decided to exercise his right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard by Caesar. Festus didn't know about the plots to murder Paul, so he was surprised by his appeal to Caesar, but said, "You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you will go."

Once again, a servant of God was being protected against the hatred of his own people by the heathen. In the future, people who claim to be representatives of Christ will like the Jewish priests and rulers, persecute God's true servants. In that day, the true people of God will need to have courage to stand firm on God's word. Satan will do what he does, which is to trick people into thinking that good is bad, and bad is good. When it seems that the darkness of evil is the worst, that is when the light of God's people will be most visible. When it seems they have lost all support, God is still with them.

Chapter 41—Almost You Persuade Me

This chapter is based on [Acts 25:13-27](#); [26](#).

While waiting for transportation to Rome, Paul had the opportunity to share his faith with King Agrippa II, who was the last of the Herods. Agrippa and his wife Bernice came to Caesarea to visit Festus and while there, Festus told them about an interesting case that had been left for him by Felix. This man, Paul, who is in my jail was being accused by the Jewish priests and rulers of many things, but it mostly seemed to be about some person named Jesus who had been killed, but whom Paul said was alive.

Being familiar with the Jews, Agrippa said he would be very interested in hearing what Paul had to say. So, the next day with honor guard, royal ceremonies, and fancy robes, Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice entered the room where they would hear Paul. In great contrast to this wealth and power, Paul was brought in bound with chains. Unseen angels were in that courtroom, and if they had shown themselves, the governor, king, and guards would all have fainted like those at the tomb of Jesus when only one angel appeared before them.

Festus introduced the prisoner, [Acts 25:24](#) ... "King Agrippa and all who are here, this is the man whose death is demanded by all the Jews, both here and in Jerusalem.

²⁵ But in my opinion he has done nothing deserving death. However, since he appealed his case to the emperor, I have decided to send him to Rome. ²⁶ "But what shall I write the emperor? For there is no clear charge against him. So I have brought him before all of you, and especially you, King Agrippa, so that after we examine him, I might have something to write. ²⁷ For it makes no sense to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying the charges against him!" [Acts 25:24-27 NLT](#).

When he was given permission to speak Paul said, [Acts 26:2](#) "I am fortunate, King Agrippa, that you are the one hearing my defense today against all these accusations made by the Jewish leaders, ³ for I know you are an expert on all Jewish customs and controversies. Now please listen to me patiently! [Acts 26:2-3 NLT](#). Paul began by talking about his conversion, from hater and persecutor of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth to sincere believer and missionary to share what he knew. He then explained how the life of Jesus on earth fulfilled every single prophecy the Jews had about a Messiah who was to come. And that the purpose of His coming was to die to save the world, and so even though it looked like he failed in shame on the cross, He had succeeded, and then He gained the victory over death as well and then returned to heaven. Before He returned to heaven, He appeared to Peter, James, John and the other disciples, and then last of all after

returning to heaven he appeared to Me on the road to Damascus. Since that time, I was obedient to the voice and the command of Jesus and have been telling everyone who will listen in Jerusalem, all Judea, and in foreign lands, to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus.

This is why the Jews hate me and have been trying to kill me, but with God's help, I will continue to tell everyone I can, both small and great that everything that Moses and the prophets wrote would happen were fulfilled by Jesus. Everyone had been quietly listening, and when he paused, Festus spoke up, "Paul you are insane. Too much study has made you crazy!" Paul responded, "I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. Everything I am saying is completely true." The king knows the things I have said are true because they did not happen in secret. Then Paul said, "King Agrippa, do you believe in the prophets? I know you do." The Holy Spirit was working on Agrippa, and he answered honestly, "You have almost persuaded me to become a Christian." Paul said, "I wish that not only you but everyone hearing me today would believe as I do and become a Christian like me, except for these chains."

Agrippa was done listening and rose from his throne and said, "This man has done nothing worthy of death or even imprisonment." Agrippa was a Jew, but he did not have the prejudice that blinded the Pharisees. He continued, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Chapter 42—The Voyage and Shipwreck

This chapter is based on [Acts 27](#); [28:1-10](#).

A centurion named Julius was put in charge of Paul and other prisoners who were also being sent to Rome. They boarded a ship at the port of Adramyttium, and Luke and Aristarchus travelled with him. Paul's spirit was greatly lifted by the presence of Aristarchus, whom Paul called his fellow prisoner [[Colossians 4:10](#)], though he accompanied Paul by choice to take care of him. Julius was very kind to Paul, and when they arrived in Sidon and he learned that there were Christians there, he allowed Paul to go to them to be refreshed. Paul was not in good health at the time, and he greatly appreciated this kindness.

After they left Sidon, head winds slowed their progress, and when they finally arrived at Myra in Lycia, Julius transferred the prisoners to a large Alexandrian ship which was headed for the coast of Italy. However, uncooperative winds still slowed their progress, until they finally arrived at a place called Fair Havens. They waited there for some time for favorable winds, but with winter approaching it was becoming dangerous to sail. Paul had the respect of both the sailors and soldiers, and they asked his opinion about whether they should stay put or find a better port to dock for the winter. Paul said, "If you go, the ship will be wrecked, the cargo lost, and our lives will all be in danger." But since Fair Havens was not considered a good port to stay in for the winter, the owner of the ship and some of the other passengers rejected this advice and hoped to reach Phoenix, which had a better port for the winter.

At first, they had a favorable south wind, but soon they found themselves in a terrible storm. The typhoon strength wind blew the ship near an island named Clauda, which provided a little relief from the storm winds. At that time, it was decided that they should bring the lifeboat on board because they were afraid it would be smashed to peices by the storm if they continued towing it. At the same time, the sailors tied ropes around the hull to try to keep the boat, which was leaking, from breaking apart. The next day, they threw some of the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. By this time, the mast was broken, and the sails were shredded and they had no control of the ship. They were already continually bailing out water, but the leak was getting worse, so to lighten the ship more, they even threw the ship's gear overboard.

For many days they were driven by the storm without seeing the sun or stars when Paul received a message from God. He called everyone together on deck and told them he received a message from God which was, [Acts 27:24](#) ... 'Don't be afraid, Paul,

for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What's more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.' [Acts 27:24 NLT](#).

On the 14th night the sailors heard waves breaking and they measured the depth of the water and realized it was getting shallower, so they dropped the anchor. When the first light of day arrived, they could see land but didn't recognize where they were. Some of the sailors were attempting to lower the lifeboat and abandon the ship but Paul told the centurion that to survive, everyone must stay with the ship. So, the centurion cut the ropes and the lifeboat fell into the sea. Then Paul spoke to everyone and said, "You have gone without food for 2 weeks. Eat something now and don't worry because not a single one of you will be harmed." Then he took bread and gave thanks to God for it, broke it and passed it out. When Paul and the 275 other people on board ate something, they threw the rest of the wheat overboard to lighten the ship. When the day grew a little brighter, they could see the shore better and a creek flowing into the sea and if possible, they hoped to run the ship ashore there. They cut loose the anchors, lowered the rudder and raised the sail. Finally, the ship got stuck on the reef where waves pushed it from either side and the ship began to break apart.

The soldiers now realized that to reach land everyone would have to swim and they wouldn't be able to keep track of all the prisoners. To prevent any from escaping, they decided they should just kill them but since Julius didn't want them to kill Paul, he didn't allow them to do as they planned. Instead, he said that everyone should jump into the water and swim to shore and those who couldn't swim should grab onto a piece of the ship to keep them afloat as they made their way to shore. When they took a headcount on shore, not a single person was missing.

The people who lived there told them the name of the Island was Malta, and they made a big fire to warm them up. As Paul was carrying some wood to throw into the fire, a snake came out of the bundle and bit his hand, so he shook it off into the fire. But the people who saw what happened realized it was a poisonous snake and said to themselves, "This man must be a murderer, because though he escaped death from the sea, justice will not allow him to live." But after a while, when nothing happened to him, they changed their minds and said, "He must be a god."

So, Paul and his friends had the opportunity to preach to gospel to the islanders. And for his sake all the survivors of the shipwreck were treated kindly. The island chief, named Publius, even took Paul and his friends into his home. It so happened that the father of Publius was sick with a fever and diarrhea and when Paul noticed, he healed him. When the rest of the island heard, every sick person on the island was brought to Paul and they were all healed. When they finally found a ship to leave, the islanders honored them with gifts and all the supplies they would need.

Chapter 43—In Rome

This chapter is based on [Acts 28:11-31](#); [Philemon](#).

When the centurion found out that an Alexandrian ship named Castor and Pollux had docked on the island for the winter, he was able to get all his prisoners aboard and continue on to Rome. They finally reached the coast of Italy, at the harbor of Puteoli. Julius kindly let Paul stay for a week with the small group of Christians in that city. Other Christians who had heard that he was coming traveled to Puteoli, some even from Rome which was 140 miles away.

On the 8th day, Julius and his prisoners began the journey by land to Rome. Julius was very kind to Paul, but he could not change the fact that he was a prisoner, chained to a guard at all times. Paul had wanted to go to Rome for a long time but not like this. To him, it seemed his hopes of winning many souls to Christ would be disappointed.

As they reach the Appii Forum, 40 miles from Rome, they join the crowd of many others who were traveling to Rome. Many of those travelers looked down on the chained prisoners, some making rude comments or making fun of them. But from time to time, people in the crowd recognized the grey-haired prisoner as the missionary who brought them to the Lord, and they threw their arms around him as a son might greet a father not seen for a long time. At times, so many people wanted to greet Paul that the whole company had to stop. The soldiers did not want to delay, but they had come to respect and admire the prisoner and they allowed it. All these unexpected loving greetings lifted Paul's spirits, and though his life had been hard, the fruit of his labor was sweet and he gave thanks to God.

In Rome, when Julius delivered the prisoners, he told them that Paul was not a criminal and didn't need to be kept in prison, so they allowed him to stay in his own rented house with one guard. They allowed anyone to visit him, and he was also allowed to continue to tell people about Jesus. There were many Jews in Rome and Paul wanted to be able to tell them about Jesus before the Jews who hated him could turn them against him. So just 3 days after he arrived, he invited the Jewish leaders to come visit him so he could explain the situation.

When they arrived, Paul said, [Acts 28:17](#) ... "Brothers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman government, even though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. ¹⁸ The Romans tried me and wanted to release me, because they found no cause for the death sentence. ¹⁹ But when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, I felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar, even though I had no desire to press charges against my own people. ²⁰ I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and so I could explain to you that I am

bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel--the Messiah--has already come." [Acts 28:17-20 NLT](#).

The Jews answered that they had not heard anything from the Jews in Jerusalem but had heard bad things about this new religion and wanted to learn more. So, a day was set for them to come back with anyone else who wished to hear and learn more.

When the day came, many people gathered at his house to hear what Paul had to say. For the entire day, from morning to evening, Paul spoke to them about the kingdom of God. He started with things they knew from the law of Moses, and the prophets, and explained how Jesus was the fulfillment of everything the Jews had been hoping for. He explained that true religion was not just about laws, rituals, and ceremonies, but that it was about having a personal relationship with God and being changed by Him. Paul didn't put down the Jewish ceremonies but explained that if they rejected Jesus, they had completely missed the point of all of it.

Paul explained that before he was converted, he had an idea of who the Messiah was supposed to be and, Jesus did not fit the picture, so he rejected Him. But when he was converted, he saw Jesus for who He really was, through spiritual eyes of faith. The spiritual relationship with Christ is closer, deeper, and more secure than any human relationship could possibly be. Some of the Jews listening believed and some did not, even with the Holy Spirit trying to help them to see the truth. They couldn't disagree with what he said but they refused to accept it.

Paul had a few months of relative peace before the Jews from Jerusalem, who hated him, arrived in Rome. Their attempts to kill Paul had been stopped by Lysias, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, all of whom believed Paul had done nothing worthy of death. Now the final decision rested with the emperor of Rome, and they would do what they could to influence him, but for now, they would wait and plan.

For 2 years, Paul was allowed to have visits from friends and any who wished to hear what he had to say. The soldiers in charge of him allowed him to preach about the kingdom of God to any who came and wished to listen. During this time, Paul also wrote letters to some of the churches he had started, encouraging them and warning them of dangers to their young faith. He also organized missionaries to those churches but also to places he had not been. In this way the influence of Paul was greater than it could have been from his own efforts, as others stepped up to do things he could not do. It would not be until he was gone that the church and those who worked with him would fully appreciate his knowledge, wisdom, advice and energy.

Paul had several close friends who were with him in the last few years and who helped and cared for him. Luke, the doctor, was with him from the time he went to

Jerusalem. Timothy, Tychicus, Demas, Mark, Aristarchus, and Epaphras were all mentioned by Paul as comforting him, carrying on his work, or suffering with him in prison [[Colossians 4:7-14](#)]. Sadly, Demas abandoned Paul and the cause of Christ for love of the world [[2 Timothy 4:10](#)]. Among the many who were converted during Paul's time in Rome was Onesimus, a runaway slave, whose master Philemon was a Christian in Colosse. The contact was made when Paul tried to relieve the suffering of a poor, hungry homeless person, and then shared the gospel with him. Onesimus accepted the words of life, confessed his sins, and became a follower of Jesus.

Paul became very attached to Onesimus because of his tender care for the apostle, but also because of his pure love for Christ and desire to spread the gospel. Paul saw that he could become a powerful missionary for Christ but first he must make right the wrong he did to his master. Paul convinced him to return to Philemon to ask for forgiveness and then take it from there. Not only had Onesimus run away as a slave, but he had also stolen from his master.

Paul was sending Tychicus with letters to some of the churches in Asia Minor and sent Onesimus with him. It was not an easy thing for a runaway slave to return to their master, but Onesimus was truly converted and did the right thing. Paul wrote a letter to Philemon, begging for him to forgive Onesimus, but also asking for his permission to allow Onesimus to return to work with him.

[Philemon 1:4](#) I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, ⁵ because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. ⁶ And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. ⁷ Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people. [Philemon 1:4-7 NLT](#). Paul was doing his best to convince Philemon to forgive and free Onesimus so that he could come back to him but also become a useful missionary for Christ.

Slaves had few rights, and runaway slaves could be punished or killed by their masters. Paul asked Philemon not to see Onesimus as a slave but as a fellow Christian brother who owed him a debt. Paul offered to pay Philemon for whatever Onesimus had taken but suggested that he could just forgive the debt.

Slavery was a cruel thing for one human being to do to another, but it was accepted practice at the time for wealthy and privileged people to own slaves. Some masters were kind to their slaves, but most were harsh and treated them terribly, making their lives miserable. In some cities slaves outnumbered the free citizens, and extremely harsh punishments was used to keep them under control. Paul was not trying to change the system or fighting to outlaw slavery. But in his writings, he

made it clear that all people, whether slave or free are all brothers, and sons of God. A slave who became a Christian was not to be treated as a slave but as a brother and equal member of the body of Christ. If not freed by their masters, Paul wrote that slaves should do their jobs well, as if they were working for Christ [[Ephesians 6:6](#)].

In Christianity, it doesn't matter if a person is a master or slave, king or subject, but all need the blood of Christ to cleanse them of their sins, and they are all equal in the eyes of God.

Chapter 44—Caesar's Household

The gospel has always been more accepted by the humbler classes. Those who are rich and powerful do not feel the need of a Savior like those who are poor, hardworking, or treated unfairly. It didn't seem like Paul, a prisoner would have anything to offer that the rich and powerful citizens of Rome would want. He did not like Moses and Aaron go into the palace at God's command to rebuke the emperor for his cruelty or oppression. Rome was like the center of the world at the time, and the emperor ruled over nearly every nation on earth, but in less than 2 years, the gospel found its way into the members of his household and palace. Paul was in chains, but the gospel cannot be held back by chains [[2 Timothy 2:9](#)].

The emperor Nero was an evil man with desires and cruelty like Satan himself. Many of the people in his court reflected his character, so it would seem like the last place on earth to find people to convert to Christianity. But Paul believed that even being a prisoner in chains could be used to spread the gospel [[Philippians 1:12-14](#)]. [Philippians 1:14](#) And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. [Philippians 1:14 NLT](#). In his letter to the Philippians, Paul gave them greetings even from the members of Caesar's household [[Philippians 4:22](#)].

We should not waste time thinking about why our current circumstances would make it hard for us to spread the gospel. Paul showed that he could be used by God when he was in prison, as well as when he spoke boldly before crowds. Sometimes when an active worker is forced to withdraw from public appearances, God can use this and accomplish things that might not have been possible otherwise. The gospel of Jesus Christ can make progress even if God's workers are sick, persecuted, or even killed. Many people have been converted after seeing the conviction of martyrs who were willing to suffer and die for Christ.

Jesus gave us an example by being perfect in a sinful world, that we can remain true and faithful to Him even though surrounded by evil as those in Caesar's household were. It is not by being shielded from all temptation that the character is developed. We can endure trials, hardship, and temptation through the grace and strength promised to us from God.

Chapter 45—Written from Rome

This chapter is based on [Colossians](#); [Philippians](#).

Though Paul was not one of the 12 disciples, his understanding of the gospel truth was equal to the most senior apostles. He was taught directly by God with many visions and revelations. He either went or was given a vision of heaven where he saw and heard things that could not be described by human language [[2 Corinthians 12](#)]. He understood as he wanted all God's people to understand as much as possible, the width, length, depth, and height of the love of God [[Ephesians 3:18-19](#)]. Paul was truly prepared for the great work of building up the church of God, not only at his time but through his writings to the end of time.

Paul's letters showed his desire for the new church members to grow in faith, knowledge, and understanding of the gospel truth, until they could measure up to the full standard of Christ [[Ephesians 4:13-14](#)]. The letters of Paul should not be thought of as just man's words, but teachings from God. In them are contained practical lessons, which should be studied by all church members, leading to eternal life.

In his letter to the Colossians written in Rome, Paul told them how happy he was to hear from Epaphras about their faith and Christian love they showed for all believers. He told them that he prayed for them continually that they would fully understand the will of God and would receive spiritual wisdom and understanding so they could always honor and please the Lord. There is truly no limit to the blessings that God wants to give to His children, if they will continue to grow in their knowledge of Him.

Paul made clear to the Colossian believers that it was through Jesus that God created all things. And it was through Jesus that humanity could have salvation from sin. [Colossians 1:15](#) Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,¹⁶ for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see--such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.¹⁷ He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. [Colossians 1:15-17 NLT](#).

Jesus Christ, the Son of God left all this and humbled Himself to save the world that had fallen. In fact, more than just being humbled, [Isaiah 53:5](#) ... he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. [Isaiah 53:5 NLT](#). He became a human being and learned what it was like to be hungry, thirsty, and tired. He lived in the world

as a man, was tempted as a man, yet He remained sinless. [John 1:14](#) So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. [John 1:14 NLT](#).

After being separated from God because of sin, the world has now been reconnected with Him through the sinless life and death of Jesus. Through Jesus, we can now be considered blameless, and holy, as if we had not done anything wrong.

The Colossian believers were surrounded by idolatry and all the attractive things associated with it, and they were in danger of being tempted to leave their simple newfound faith in Christ. Paul wanted the Colossian believers to know how much he had worried and wished for them to grow in their Christian faith and the knowledge of God so that no one could lead them astray. Jesus already warned that for some, "Their love would grow cold." [[Matthew 24:12](#)]. In fact, He warned that this would be a greater danger than persecution from enemies. Paul warned them more specifically, not to let anyone with new teachings, and religious philosophies of the world, to lead them away from their pure faith in Christ.

There are many philosophies today that can lead people away from a pure faith in the Bible. Deep spiritual thinking not based on the Bible, theories of evolution [how people evolved from lower forms of life], spiritualism [communicating with spirits, or those who have died], theosophy [a teaching that people can grow spiritually toward a universal standard of good, and a deeper understanding of reality], pantheism [the belief that God and the universe are one and the same and that He is in everything]. The real science of salvation is all about Christ, that He died for our sins, He was risen, and then He went back to heaven. Our source of truth is the Bible, and we should think of it as the voice of God to us. The only knowledge that we need is in the Bible, and it has the power to change our lives and to make us more like Christ.

Since its earliest forms of existence, the Holy Scriptures have been everything that is needed to tell people how to live. [Psalm 19:8](#) The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living. [Psalm 19:8 NLT](#). Those who worship God and keep His commandments will stand firm forever [[Psalm 15](#)]. [1 Corinthians 3:11](#) For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have--Jesus Christ. [1 Corinthians 3:11 NLT](#).

When they were converted, the Colossians promised to change the way they lived. Paul now reminded them of this choice and begged them to keep their promise. If you have new life in Christ, set your eyes on heavenly things, not earthly, and let

your old life remain dead. [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. [2 Corinthians 5:17 KJV](#). Sin is like a bad habit, but through the power of Christ we can break that habit. Those who were not religious, have become religious, those who have been drunk, have stopped drinking, the shamelessly immoral person has become pure. People who have been like Satan have become like God. The change that can happen by reading the word of God is miraculous, and we cannot understand it. But the choice to continue this change must be made daily, because old habits can return, so we must continue to depend on Christ's strength for victory.

The book of Colossians is full of good advice for those who are followers of Christ. We must give up everything that will turn us away from following God, and the truly converted person will be kind, humble, and patient. We should not be discouraged on our path to living the way God wants, because we are promised the power to reach this goal. There is no limit to how much we can grow in spiritual wisdom and knowledge. It is God's plan that human beings who have been changed will be His hands on earth.

The Philippian church sent some gifts to Paul through his good friend and fellow worker Epaphroditus. While he was in Rome Epaphroditus became so sick he almost died, but he recovered for which Paul thanked God. When Epaphroditus wanted to return to Philippi, Paul took this opportunity to send a letter to the church with him and thanked them for their gifts. Of all the churches that Paul had started, the Philippians were the only ones that sent him gifts. In his letter Paul greeted them with the grace of God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. He told them how thankful to God he was for them and assured them that God who began a good work in them would continue until Jesus returns.

Paul went on to tell the Philippians how the grace of God had been with him while he was in chains, and that the gospel benefitted because others became bolder about sharing their faith because of his state. This should show us that God can bring good out of something bad. And when we are tempted to think God is ignoring our problems, we should have faith that He is working for our good. This is the same as children realizing when they grow up that discipline was good for them. Then he gave the example of Jesus allowing Himself to be treated badly even though He was equal with God. He made Himself into a human being, but more than that, He lived as a servant and died the cruel death of a criminal on the cross.

[Philippians 2:12](#) Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the

results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. ¹⁴ Do everything without complaining and arguing, ¹⁵ so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. ¹⁶ Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. [Philippians 2:12-16 NLT](#).

Being saved takes a partnership of God and man. The person must make the choice and the effort, but they need God in order to succeed. Without the power of God, no amount of human effort could save a person from sin. Into the partnership, God brings perfect wisdom, compassion, and power, and we bring sinfulness, and weakness. God wants us to choose what is good, but He cannot give His help without our choice. The Holy Spirit works with the human's power of choice, and even if we are too weak to make the choice, if we are willing to be made willing, God can work with that.

The true Christian must not have divided loyalties and must surrender their will to God. They should listen to God by studying the Bible each day, and then do what it says. Day by day, God can work with us to perfect our character, so that we will be able to pass the final test. The Christian who allows God to do this for them will show the world what God can do for them.

[Philippians 3:12](#) I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. ¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. [Philippians 3:12-14 NLT](#).

Paul didn't act discouraged or defeated as a prisoner. He wrote, [Philippians 4:4](#) Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again--rejoice! [Philippians 4:4 NLT](#). [Philippians 4:18](#) At the moment I have all I need--and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. [Philippians 4:18-19 NLT](#).

[Philippians 4:8](#) And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. [Philippians 4:8 NLT](#).

Chapter 46—At Liberty

Paul accomplished a lot during his time in prison in Rome, and many were converted, and many were encouraged. When he first arrived in Rome, the soldier in charge of him was kind and allowed him to continue to spread the gospel from where he stayed. But after nearly 2 years, another was placed in charge of him and was not so kind.

Paul knew better than to expect justice from the emperor, but he trusted that God's will would be done. Nero was a very evil and silly man and was possibly more cruel than any ruler before him. In the first year of his reign, he poisoned his younger stepbrother who was the rightful heir to the throne. He murdered his own mother and wife, and it seemed there was nothing to evil for him to do. The things that went on in his court were so evil that people who were forced to participate in them hated themselves for it and were always worried about what he would suggest next. But the Jews were still not content to depend on this evil man condemning Paul and even tried to influence him through his second wife who happened to be a Jewish convert.

At this time God did protect his servant, and when Paul stood before Nero, he was declared innocent and released. Not long after his release, a terrible fire burned half of Rome, and many people thought the fire was started by Nero. To get the suspicion off himself, he accused the Christians of starting it, and as a result began to torture and kill many of them, even women and children. Paul had already left Rome, so he was not caught up in this round of persecution.

In his last short time of freedom, Paul tried to get the Greek believers and the believers from the east to get along better. His age was really beginning to show, and he felt the end was near, so he seemed to increase his efforts to take advantage of the little time that remained. He continued traveling from church to church strengthening them and warning them of false doctrines and encouraging them to continue winning converts to Christ.

Chapter 47—The Final Arrest

As Paul continued his work among the Christian churches, his Jewish enemies grew more desperate to kill him. This time they accused him of starting the fire in Rome even though there was no evidence. Because of this, he was arrested and thrown into prison. Since his first arrival, many people in Rome had been converted, but many of them had also been killed by Nero's persecution. Some of Paul's close friends and coworkers wanted to suffer alongside him as he was put in prison again, but he refused to allow them to put their lives in danger this way. This second time his imprisonment in Rome was much worse, as he was thrown into a dungeon where he would spend the last days of his life.

Alone in the dungeon, Paul felt deserted. Phygelus and Hermogenes left first, followed by Demas. Paul sent Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia, Tychicus to Ephesus, and when he wrote to Timothy, only Luke was with him [[2 Timothy 1:15](#); [2 Timothy 4:10-11](#)]. Now more than ever, with his age, sickness, and the discomforts of the dark, damp cell, Paul would have enjoyed the company of friends.

Paul was grateful for the kindness and dedication of Onesiphorus who visited him frequently, doing whatever he could to make him more comfortable. [2 Timothy 1:16](#) May the Lord show special kindness to Onesiphorus and all his family because he often visited and encouraged me. He was never ashamed of me because I was in chains. ¹⁷ When he came to Rome, he searched everywhere until he found me. ¹⁸ May the Lord show him special kindness on the day of Christ's return. And you know very well how helpful he was in Ephesus. [2 Timothy 1:16-18 NLT](#).

Even Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane wished for some sympathetic companionship. Paul never complained about the hardship and suffering he had to endure, but he did seem to miss human companionship in the dungeon. That is why he was so cheered by the visits of Onesiphorus.

Chapter 48—Paul Before Nero

When Paul finally appeared before Nero, there was little hope that he would be set free. There was a lot of anger toward Christians, and Paul had been accused of starting the fire. In Greek and Roman courts, people were allowed to have a defense attorney, but Paul was completely alone. Not a single one of the Christians in Rome dared to stand with him. [2 Timothy 4:16](#) The first time I was brought before the judge, no one came with me. Everyone abandoned me. May it not be counted against them. [2 Timothy 4:16 NLT](#).

Emperor Nero was at the height of his power, but at the lowest depth of evil. No one could question anything he did, kings were his humble subjects, and he controlled the most powerful military. Even though there were senators, and judges, none dared to do or say anything other than what Nero wished. The world trembled at his name. Paul on the other hand was a weak old man with no money, friends, or even a defense attorney. As the two men faced each other, there was a great difference between the face that showed a record of evil within, and the other that showed peace with God. Paul had no wealth, he had sacrificed personal wants and desires, his enemies had lied about his actions and intentions, he was hated, he was tortured, yet he continued to fearlessly follow in the footsteps of his Master.

The judgment hall was full of many people who were curious about what would happen. They were rich and poor, educated and uneducated, proud and humble, but most were lacking the knowledge that led to salvation. The Jews brought their charges against Paul, the same old ones, the charges that he was stirring up a rebellion against both the Jews and Romans, and they falsely accused him of setting the city on fire. Everyone was surprised to see how calmly this supposedly terrible criminal stood there with a peaceful look on his face. The judges looked closely at his face for signs of his guilt but could find none. So, when he was finally allowed to speak, everyone eagerly listened.

Once again, Paul was given an opportunity to share the gospel of salvation with an eagerly listening crowd of Jews, Greeks, Romans, and many other foreigners. Paul was filled with a desire for the salvation of all who would hear his voice. He cared nothing for his safety or the outcome of his trial. With the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul shared the good news of the free gift of salvation offered to all people, because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. He told of Jesus standing before the throne of God representing those who repented and accepted His death to pay for their sins. Paul's voice was strong and confident, and his words were heard like a shout of victory during the great noise of a battle. Even if he died, God lives, and His truth will win in the end. Like Stephen, many that day would look at the face of Paul as if it was the face of an angel [[Acts 6:15](#)].

Light shone into the minds of many people that day, and some followed where it led them. The truth spoken on that day would move nations and live on through the end of time. Nero had never heard truth like this before, and the Holy Spirit showed him his guilt. Light from heaven shone into that sin darkened soul and he trembled at the thought of the judgment he would face for his deeds. For a moment he desired the peace and purity of the gospel, but only for a moment, and Paul was returned to the dungeon.

Nero was back to his old self and not long after, he disgraced himself and his kingdom when in Greece. After returning home, he was doing some disgusting things with members of his court when a messenger brought news that Galba was at the head of an army that was marching toward Rome. People had had enough of Nero, and a mob was threatening to kill him and any who defended him. Nero was afraid he would be tortured by the mob and intended to end his own life but didn't have the courage to do it himself. Finally, as those who were coming for him were near, he found a slave who would help him to kill himself. That is how at the young age of 32, the evil and cruel Nero died.

Chapter 49—Paul's Last Letter

This chapter is based on [2 Timothy](#).

Having returned to his prison cell, Paul knew that at any moment a word from Nero could end his life. But he also knew that he had won a victory for the side of truth by preaching about Jesus to Nero and all who were listening in that courtroom. Not knowing how much time he had left, he wished he could see Timothy, whom he had left in charge of the church in Ephesus. Since Timothy's conversion, he had worked very closely with Paul, even suffering punishment and torture together with him. The two had a relationship like a proud father and a good and faithful son. Knowing that it could be months before Timothy could arrive in Rome, Paul wrote a letter asking him to come but also telling him everything that he wanted to say.

"My dear son Timothy, may you have grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and Jesus Christ our Lord. I thank God for you and pray for you continuously, night and day. Remember the faith that you share with your mother Eunice, and your grandmother Lois. The Spirit we received from God gives us power, love, and self-control. Don't be ashamed to talk about Jesus, or of me His prisoner, and be ready to suffer as I have for your faith. Remember that you received a holy calling from God even as I received a calling to be a preacher, apostle, and teacher to the Gentiles. Even though I suffer because of this calling, I am not ashamed because I am certain of who I believe in."

In his long ministry, Paul never faltered in his loyalty to Jesus, even though he was persecuted by the Jews or Romans, threatened by mobs, surrounded by criminals in prison, on a sinking ship, or standing before Nero. The great purpose of Paul's Christian life was to serve Jesus, and nothing could distract or scare him from doing that. He had great faith to go along with his strong will power and willingness to sacrifice for Christ. He said to Timothy, "Remember the things I taught you, and teach them to others. Be willing to suffer hard conditions as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

True ministers for Christ will not try to avoid hardship because they have power from a source that never runs out. As he grew closer to God, his desire to serve his master grew as well, and he taught what he learned to others who passed it on to others as well. Paul also said to Timothy, "Work hard so that God can approve of your effort, and so you will not have to be ashamed for not sharing the truth. Run away from things that tempt your youthful desires, but follow goodness, faith, love, and peace with others who follow the Lord with a pure heart. Don't get involved in foolish arguments that only start fights. Be gentle and teach with

humility those that are against the truth, and maybe they will escape from the devil's trap and accept the truth."

Timothy was also warned about false teachers, "In the last days there will be hard times. People will love themselves, they will be boastful, they will desire other people's things, they will have pride, they will disobey their parents, they will be ungrateful, unholy, and though they act religious, they reject the power of God. Stay away from these kinds of people. Bad people and false teachers will appear to be successful, and others will follow them but stay true to what you have been taught. Know the Bible which can give you wisdom about salvation. [2 Timothy 3:16](#) All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. [2 Timothy 3:16-17 NLT](#). If you look at life on earth as a battle against evil, the Bible is not only our protective armor, but also our weapon against sin.

The advice Paul gave to Timothy showed the importance of the pastor in keeping the church on track. He was to preach from the word of God, and not the writings of men. He should always be ready to speak the truth, whether in front of a large crowd or just a few people, to friends or enemies, and in good times or bad. He was to hate sin, and correct the sinner, but love the person. Be patient as Jesus was toward sinners but not so accepting that they don't realize change is needed. There is a danger that if they are too tolerant of sinful behavior, that they may even begin to participate in it themselves. Then eventually, instead of correcting the sinner, they may have become so blinded that they might congratulate them instead. Those who repeatedly ignore their sense of sinfulness may eventually reprove the godly who disapprove of it.

By pride of human wisdom, ignoring the influence of the Holy Spirit, and disliking the truths from the Bible, those who claim to be Christian teachers will turn away from what God requires. Paul said, [2 Timothy 4:3](#) For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will reject the truth and chase after myths. [2 Timothy 4:3-4 NLT](#). Paul is not talking about people who outright reject the truth, but those who claim to be Christians who reject teachings that rebuke their sins. Sadly, this even describes some ministers and church leaders.

In the Bible, God's law is clear, and He said that for all time, not even a punctuation mark will change. Jesus came to draw attention to the law and make it honorable. He taught that the law is based on the foundation of love to God and love to other people. In the Sermon on the Mount, He explained that keeping the

law goes beyond actions, and that it can be broken by thoughts alone. But the enemy of God has led most people to disobey His law, and they justify themselves by finding teachers and preachers who agree with them and also break God's law. Satan laughs when he can get people to think they are saved when they are not.

But when God's laws are rejected, what eventually follows is pride, love of pleasure, disobeying parents, and doing whatever feels good. The fix for this according to Paul is preaching the word of God from the Bible. God's will has been made clear in the Bible, and it is silly for people to question it. God's wisdom is perfect, so there is no need to question whether His commands are best for us.

[2 Timothy 4:5](#) But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you. [2 Timothy 4:5 NLT](#). Nearing the end of his letter, Paul wanted to pass on to Timothy the responsibility of guarding the church from false teachings. He recommended not getting distracted by worldly interests that would prevent him from devoting himself completely to the work of God. Cheerfully endure things that get in the way, people that say bad things about him, and those who wish to do harm to him.

Paul's life showed that he followed his own advice, which gave his words more power. He took very seriously the responsibility of his work and depended on God who is the source of justice, mercy, and truth. The death of Christ was the only thing that guaranteed his success, and the love of his Savior was what motivated him to continue his fight against his own desires and the enemies of the world.

The church today needs many people like Paul, who have the knowledge but also the personal experience in the things of God, and who are filled with great desire to share them with others. People who have been changed by God, who will not try to avoid difficulty and responsibility, but who are brave and faithful, with lips touched by God to preach from the Bible. It is because of lack of such workers that the word of God is not being finished. As faithful and weary workers for God who have given up everything for His sake die, who will step up to take their place? Will the apostle's call be answered?

Paul ended his letter with some personal words to other people, and then asked Timothy to come visit soon if possible. He mentioned how lonely he was because some of his friends had deserted him and some had gone because they were needed somewhere else. And then he added that if Timothy thought he couldn't leave Ephesus, that Tychicus was already on his way to take his place. Paul closed his letter by placing his beloved Timothy in the hands of the Chief Shepherd, who would always look after His flock, even when his shepherds on earth lost their lives.

Chapter 50—Condemned to Die

In Paul's final trial, Nero had been strongly impressed with his words and delayed his decision. But eventually the emperor's anger against Paul returned, partly because he couldn't stop the spread of Christianity, even in his own household. He decided that Paul must be put to death as soon as possible, and because Paul was a Roman and could not be tortured, he would have his head cut off. This was to be done in private so that his bravery would not result in more converts to Christianity. But even the soldiers who took care of him and heard his words were amazed by his cheerfulness even as he went to his death. They were amazed at how he forgave his killers, and as a result more than one of them accepted Jesus as their Savior and eventually lost their lives for their faith.

Shortly before his execution, Paul wrote these words for the Corinthian Christians, [2 Corinthians 4:6](#) For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. ⁸ We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹ We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. ¹⁰ Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. [2 Corinthians 4:6-10 NLT](#). Paul's confidence and peace are explained by the words of the prophet Isaiah, [Isaiah 26:3](#) You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! [Isaiah 26:3 NLT](#).

Anyone who was in the presence of Paul, could feel the peace of heaven that surrounded him because of his connection with Christ. The way he had lived his life gave more power to his preaching. Words can be debated with opposing views, but a changed life and a godly example cannot be argued against.

As he was taken to the place of his execution, Paul encouraged the few Christians who were with him. He reminded them of the promises that were given for those who were persecuted for doing right. He told them that even though there might be some hard times and temptation right now, that God would always keep His promise. Paul described this in his letter to Timothy this way, [2 Timothy 1:12](#) That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return. [2 Timothy 1:12 NLT](#).

As Paul stood where he would be killed, instead of thinking about what was about to happen, he was joyfully thinking about what would happen when his life on earth was over. Looking up toward heaven, he saw Jacob's ladder that represents Christ who connects earth and heaven, and man to God. He thought with confidence about the patriarchs and prophets that have put their faith in the God he was about to give his life for. He thought about the other apostles who didn't worry about their life on this earth but faced persecution and death to preach the gospel of Christ. He knew that down through the ages, there would be others who would face all kinds of torture and death because they fearlessly shared their faith in whom they believed.

Paul knew that his sins were washed away by the sacrifice of Christ and knew that he was precious to God. He believed the promise of Jesus, [John 6:40](#) "For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day." [John 6:40 NLT](#). As the sword of the executioner fell, his thoughts were on the second coming, and his resurrection when he would meet Jesus who will welcome him to everlasting joy.

His final testimony can be summarized in words from his last letter to Timothy: [2 Timothy 4:7](#) "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful." ⁸ And now the prize awaits me--the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing. [2 Timothy 4:7-8 NLT](#).

Chapter 51—A Faithful Under-Shepherd

This chapter is based on [1 Peter](#).

The book of Acts doesn't tell us much about the later life and work of Peter. In the years that followed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Peter worked hard to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the Jews who came to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. Peter's talents were of great value to the early Christian church that was growing in Jerusalem. Not only did he preach to unbelievers, telling them about Jesus the Messiah, but he also worked to strengthen the faith of those who believed.

Before Peter had denied knowing Him, Jesus had said, "When you are converted, strengthen your brothers." [[Luke 22:32](#)]. It was not until after the denial, and the resurrection of Jesus that Peter was converted. His sin, feeling terrible about it, and then his repentance helped him to understand that human will power is not enough to resist temptation sometimes. This prepared him to understand how the new believer must depend on Christ for strength to resist temptation and not on self.

Just before He returned to heaven, Jesus asked Peter 3 times, "Do you love Me?" [[John 21:15-17](#)]. This showed the others that Jesus had accepted Peter back to his place among the disciples, but it also told Peter what he should do. Feeding the flock was the job of a shepherd, and in this case, Peter was called to be a shepherd for the Lord's flock, working under the chief shepherd who is Christ. He was not only to find lost sheep and bring them into the church but also care for those inside. The only condition Jesus had for Peter to do this job was love for Him. No matter what Peter's other gifts might have been, without love for Christ, he could not be a shepherd of the flock. Other abilities are useful, but love of Christ is essential.

For the remainder of his life, Peter faithfully did the job that was given to him, proving that Christ's confidence in him was not misplaced. Forever after, he held up Jesus as the Messiah the Jews had waited so long for, but also the Savior of the world. He also recognized that his job as shepherd, was under the authority of the chief shepherd, Christ. His example inspired many others to give their lives to full-time ministry. As time passed Peter's influence as a teacher and leader grew, and though he worked mostly among the Jews, he also shared his testimony in many other countries.

When he was older, Peter wrote letters to the believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. His letters were written to encourage and strengthen the faith of those who were being persecuted, and those who were falling into temptation. The letter reveals an author who was deeply changed by the

suffering and forgiveness of Christ, and whose hope of eternal life was unwavering.

At the beginning of his first letter, Peter wrote: [1 Peter 1:3](#) All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, ⁴ and we have a priceless inheritance--an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. ⁵ And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. [1 Peter 1:3-5 NLT](#).

The early Christians were comforted by the hope of inheriting the new earth when they suffered persecution. [1 Peter 1:6](#) So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. ⁷ These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold--though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. ⁸ You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. ⁹ The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls. [1 Peter 1:6-9 NLT](#).

Peter's words were written for the benefit of Christians for all time but have special meaning for those in the last days. He wanted believers to know how important it is to not let your mind wander to evil thoughts. They should avoid reading, seeing, or hearing things that will give them impure thoughts. [1 Peter 1:13](#) So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. ¹⁴ So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. ¹⁵ But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. ¹⁶ For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy." [1 Peter 1:13-16 NLT](#).

Know that a great price was paid for your salvation, but that price was not paid with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Jesus, the Son of God. Paul wrote, [2 Corinthians 8:9](#) You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich. [2 Corinthians 8:9 NLT](#). Even though salvation was so costly, it is free to us. [Romans 6:23](#) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 6:23 NLT](#).

Your souls have been purified by obedience through the Spirit's power and by true love for fellow church members. Obeying the Bible produces good fruit which is the pure and true love for one another. This love comes from heaven and is completely unselfish. When the Bible is the guiding principle, the soul is born again into a form that will not die and decay, because the Bible is the word of God that lives forever. When a person is taught by the Holy Spirit, new thoughts are awakened, energy that was formerly unused is awakened to co-operate with God.

Jesus taught the disciples many things, but they were like seeds that did not sprout and grow until they were filled by the Holy Spirit. Then from time to time, they would remember something Jesus said, and they would truly understand it and apply it to their lives. In this way, Jesus continued to teach through them.

To help the believers remain true to God, Peter reminded them how privileged they were as followers of Christ. [1 Peter 2:9](#) ... for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

¹⁰ "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy." ¹¹ Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. ¹² Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. [1 Peter 2:9-12 NLT](#).

Peter told the Christians they should obey the laws of the government they lived under. Even though you are God's slaves and belong to His government, don't use that as an excuse to disobey your earthly government. Be respectful of everyone, including the king. His advice to slaves was to obey their masters, even if they are cruel, because God is happy if you can endure unfair treatment. Of course, you get no credit if you are beaten for doing wrong. Jesus is your example, and He did what was right even if He had to suffer for it. He never retaliated if He was wronged, He never tried to get revenge when He suffered. He left all unfairness in the hands of God who always judges fairly.

Peter's advice to women was to be pure in speech and action. Dress modestly, and don't try to make yourself look good by wearing jewelry, or fancy clothes, but try to look good to God by having a humble and quiet spirit. But this advice applies to all Christians, not just women. Jesus said you would know someone by their actions [[Matthew 7:20](#)]. True, internal beauty lasts forever, but external beauty goes away. It is not wrong to desire beauty, but we should first desire true internal beauty, which is what gives someone permission to enter the palace of the King.

With prophetic vision into the future, Peter said, [1 Peter 4:12](#) Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. [1 Peter 4:12 NLT](#). Trial is part of the process God's children must go through to become purified, similar to the way impurities are separated from the gold in the fire. Trials are also a form of discipline that God can use to shape character. He can also use trials to develop abilities which can be used for His work. God sometimes leads His children into circumstances where they can see the defects in their character that they might not have seen otherwise. God doesn't allow anything to happen to His children but that which is for their eternal good.

There was a time when Peter didn't see suffering and persecution this way. When Jesus told him about His coming suffering, Peter said, "God will never allow this to happen to You." [[Matthew 16:22](#)]. But after a long life of serving His Master, Peter learned from experience how God can use suffering, pain, and humiliation for good. That is why he could write, "Be glad because these trials make you partners with Christ in suffering, and in the end, you will have great joy when His glory is revealed."

Speaking to the elders of the church about their responsibilities, Peter wrote, "Don't expect to get rich for feeding the flock of Christ that is assigned to you. Don't act like rulers over them but be examples to them, and when the Chief Shepherd comes, you will receive a crown of glory." God's church on earth is made up of sinful human beings, who need tender care and discipline, to help them develop into workers for God on earth, and in the future to be ready for eternal glory. Pastors are needed who will not just tell people they are doing good, but will be willing to correct them when needed, and who will feed their flocks the bread of life. They also must have the power of the Holy Spirit within them so they can have a true unselfish love for those whom they are working for.

Another job of the under-shepherd is to be a peacemaker in dealing with those who are unhappy, envious, or jealous in the church. This must be done in a Christlike spirit as sins are pointed out, and some are convinced to ask forgiveness from those whom they have wronged. The pastor may be misjudged, or criticized, by those he is correcting. But in the words of the apostle James, "He needs wisdom from above which is pure, peace-loving, gentle, fair, and not pushy. True peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness." [[James 3:17-18](#)]. If the pastor thinks his job is only to preach, and ignores the work of dealing with people problems, his work is not acceptable to God. People that Christ died for will fall away because he doesn't do the work of personally caring for the flock.

The true spirit of a shepherd is to think more about the needs of others than himself. By going into the homes of his church members, he learns their needs, sorrows, and trials, and together with Christ can share their burdens. If he does this, angels will help him and even he will benefit from doing this work.

Peter also had advice for younger members of the church. He advised being humble and learning from the example of older members. He added, [1 Peter 5:7](#) Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. ⁸ Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. [1 Peter 5:7-8 NLT](#).

As Peter wrote this letter, many were already suffering persecution for the sake of their faith in Christ, but it was going to get worse. Many who were teachers and elders at the time would soon lose their lives in the persecution that would fall on the church. Also, evil people and false teachers would join the church, but they would be like wolves to the flock. But none should be discouraged if they would only keep their hope focused on Christ.

[1 Peter 5:10](#) In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. ¹¹ All power to him forever! Amen. [1 Peter 5:10-11 NLT](#).

Chapter 52—Steadfast Unto the End

This chapter is based on [2 Peter](#).

In his second letter Peter wrote to believers who had received the precious faith. ² [Peter 1:2](#) May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. ³ By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. ⁴ And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires. [2 Peter 1:2-4 NLT](#).

God promises to give us faith, good character, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, kindness, love for church members, and love for all people. These characteristics are like steps on a ladder toward salvation. So, Christ is our wisdom, righteousness, redemption, and the way by which we are made more like Him. It is for His glory that His representatives on earth become more like Him, so nothing is held back from those who truly desire His righteousness. The apostle John wrote these words of Jesus, "The way to eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ who was sent by Him." [[John 17:3](#)]. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, [Jeremiah 9:23](#) This is what the LORD says: "Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. ²⁴ But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken! [Jeremiah 9:23-24 NLT](#).

Perfection of Christian character is something all can achieve, because any help, or knowledge needed is freely available to us because of the sacrifice of Christ. On our own, with our own willpower, we can never reach this state of perfection, but Christ's life as a human being showed us that by co-operating with God as He did, we can in this lifetime also have a perfect character. But no matter how obedient we are, the only way we can appear perfect to God is when we cover ourselves with the righteousness of Christ.

The change of our lives to holiness is a continuous process of daily cooperating with God as He works to transform our lives. We put effort into forming good habits and in our struggle against temptation, and God does His part, multiplying our effort by His grace and peace, and giving us the blessings and strength needed. If we stop cooperating with God, and try to do it on our own, we will fail and even

lose the progress we had made. If we do not cooperate with God in this daily process of Christian growth, we will remember the sins of our past life and even forget that God has forgiven us.

For many years Peter had taught that the Christian life was one of continual growth. Work hard, he said, to show that you are among those God has called, and this will help you to never fall away. Then God will give you a grand entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I will keep reminding you of these things as long as I can, but Jesus has shown me that the time to give up my life on this earth is near.

Peter said that the things we teach you about the kingdom of God are not cleverly made-up stories, but we heard with our own ears and saw with our own eyes what Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. We heard the voice of the Father Himself saying to Jesus, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." But there is even better evidence that the things we teach are true, and that is the prophecies in the Bible. [2 Peter 1:19](#) ... for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place--until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, ²¹ or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God. [2 Peter 1:19-21 NLT](#).

But be on the lookout for false teachers who will speak false prophecies, some of which will even lead you to deny that Jesus is Lord. These people, though they were believers at first, are like dry wells and clouds without rain, and they will be worse off in the end than before they believed. Peter was also shown that in the last days there would be many people who would make fun of the truth and do whatever they felt like doing, but there would be some who would stay faithful to the end.

Peter always kept alive the hope in his heart of the return of Jesus as He promised, [John 14:3](#) When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. [John 14:3 NLT](#). To the faithful suffering trials, the fulfillment of the promise might seem long in coming, this is the assurance Peter gave them, [2 Peter 3:9](#) The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, ... [2 Peter 3:9-10 NLT](#). Since everything will be destroyed by fire, what kind of lives should you live? We have His promise of a new heaven and a new earth where the righteous will live.

"Beloved, if this is what you believe about the future, shouldn't you live in such a way that He will find you ready when He comes?" [2 Peter 3:17](#) ... So be on guard; then you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people and lose your own secure footing. ¹⁸ Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ... [2 Peter 3:17-18 NLT](#).

It was around the same time that both Peter and Paul were arrested by Nero and put in prison in Rome, where they would both end up giving up their lives for their faith. These 2 apostles who lived long productive lives spreading the gospel of their Lord and Savior, had not had much opportunity to work together at the same place and time. Now they both would die in the great capital of the Roman empire, and their blood would be like seed that would eventually produce a great harvest.

After his shameful denial, and after Jesus accepted him back as a disciple, Peter had always shown great courage in the face of danger. Now in his prison cell, he thought about Jesus' prediction about his death. [John 21:18](#) "I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go." [John 21:18 NLT](#). Since Peter was not a Roman citizen, he would be whipped and then crucified. But now instead of fearing death, Peter was happy that he could suffer and die because of his faith in Jesus, but he decided that it would be too great of an honor to die the same way He did. So, when he was about to be nailed to the cross, he asked to be hung upside down. And so died the great apostle, Peter.

Chapter 53—John the Beloved

John referred to himself as "The disciple Jesus loved." [[John 21:20](#)]. He was 1 of the 3 who were allowed to see Jesus glorified on the mountain, and also to see his agony in Gethsemane. It was his privilege to be asked by Jesus to take care of His mother. John was probably recognized this way because of how he responded to the love from Jesus. He clung to Jesus as a vine clings to a strong pillar, and he was brave enough to be the only one of the 12 to be at the cross when Jesus died. When he heard that Jesus had risen, he was the first of the 12 to reach the empty tomb.

Even though he clung to Jesus so closely, John had some character flaws. He and his brother were called "sons of thunder" by Jesus because of their temper and desire for revenge. One time he wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy a town of Samaritans because they had refused to let Jesus stay. Jesus never forced people to accept Him, and it is men motivated by Satan that try to use force to make people believe what they want. In fact, sometimes torture is used by men working together with evil angels to try to convert people to their idea of religion. But Jesus wants only voluntary choice and willing surrender.

On another occasion with their mother doing the talking, they tried to get Jesus to agree to give them the highest positions in His kingdom next to Him. But Jesus answered, [Mark 10:38](#) ... "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?" ³⁹ "Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!" Then Jesus told them, "You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. [Mark 10:38-39 NLT](#). Jesus' glory on this earth was a cross and, on his left, and right were 2 thieves. James would end up being the first to suffer death, following his Master in suffering, and John would outlast all the other disciples, suffering hatred and persecution during his long life.

Jesus understood what the brothers desired and tried to correct the misunderstanding of all the disciples. [Matthew 20:25](#) But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. ²⁶ But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. ²⁸ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." [Matthew 20:25-28 NLT](#).

After a long life of service to his Master, Jesus told John that whoever overcomes will be able to sit on a throne with Him and His Father [[Revelation 3:21](#)]. Those

who will be closest to Jesus in heaven will be those who experienced His suffering and demonstrated His love.

John told Jesus once that they had seen someone casting out demons in His name but because he was not one of them, they told him to stop. [Mark 9:39](#) "Don't stop him!" Jesus said. "No one who performs a miracle in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ Anyone who is not against us is for us. [Mark 9:39-40 NLT](#). The disciples thought they were protecting the honor of Jesus, but really, they were just jealous.

Late in his life, John wrote what true glory was. [John 1:14](#) So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. [John 1:14 NLT](#).

Jesus didn't love John because John loved Him, but it was the other way around. John wanted to become like Jesus, and he was changed by the love of Christ to be humble and selfless. More than the other disciples, John allowed himself to be transformed by the love of Jesus. Jesus loved all the disciples, but John was the most receptive to that love. He was the youngest, and possibly had more of a childlike trust, which caused him to open his heart to Jesus. Because of this Jesus was able to share His deepest spiritual lessons through John.

John wrote about the Father's love as few others could, and he did this because he felt the love of Jesus most deeply. His character showed characteristics of God, the grace and holiness of God shone from his face. He looked at Jesus until being like Him and talking to Him was all he wanted. [1 John 3:1](#) See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. ² Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. [1 John 3:1-2 NLT](#).

Chapter 54—A Faithful Witness

This chapter is based on the 3 letters by [John](#).

Along with the other disciples, John received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. This added a fresh new energy and power to his preaching as he shared the words and acts of Jesus with the people. His words were simple and beautiful, but full of power, allowing him to speak to all classes of people. The love he had for Jesus could be seen in his life, so his words and actions were in harmony, like different notes working together to make beautiful music.

Before He left them, Jesus said to His disciples, [John 13:34](#) So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. [John 13:34 NLT](#). They didn't understand His words at the time, but after seeing His suffering, resurrection, return to heaven, and after receiving the Holy Spirit, they understood. Then they could say, "We know how much God loves us because he gave up His life for us, so we should also be willing to give our lives for each other."

After the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to preach about their living Savior, and their greatest desire was to save souls. They showed Christ-like love for each other and the new believers. As long as the new believers maintained a close connection to Christ, they became more like Him and loved each other. But slowly a change came when they took their eyes off their Savior and started seeing faults in each other. Their love of Christ was replaced by a love for rituals and ceremonies, and they began to criticize the faults in others while ignoring their own. The happiness and joy they initially felt were gone and they would soon walk in darkness.

John saw this and realized that love between members was decreasing, so he wrote, [1 John 4:7](#) Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love--not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. [1 John 4:7-11 NLT](#).

If you love your fellow Christian brother, you are in the light, but if you hate him, you are in darkness. If you hate your brother, you are just as guilty as if you murdered him. Instead, you should be willing to sacrifice your life for your brother, even as Christ gave up His life for us. People inside the church are a much greater danger to it than people outside. Evil in the hearts of church members will

surely slow the progress of God's work. It is not natural for people that are very different to live peacefully together, so if all the members of the church can do so, it is evidence that they have the love of God among them. For this to be possible, they must allow God to shape their characters and to influence their choices.

Love for each other is so important that Jesus spoke of it as a new commandment. [John 13:34](#) So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. [John 13:34 NLT](#). It is a simple and beautiful command, but so very hard to obey. Many who claim to love God do not love their fellow believers, and many unbelievers notice this. Christians are all children of one heavenly Father, and they should get along together as a loving family. A Christian that has true unselfish love for their fellow Christian shows that they truly love God. A true Christian will also not allow a fellow Christian to sin without trying to save them from Satan's temptations. It is not possible for one who has not truly felt the love of Christ to lead someone to Him. God can only bless the work of those who truly love Him.

John wrote, "Don't just say that you love people, but show that you love them by your actions." "We love God because He first loved us." So much of what John taught was about love, because true love would affect every action, and push back bad influences of the world. [1 John 4:17](#) And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. ¹⁸ Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. [1 John 4:17-18 NLT](#).

John also wrote about forgiveness for sins. [1 John 2:1](#) My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. ² He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins--and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. [1 John 2:1-2 NLT](#). [1 John 1:9](#) But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. [1 John 1:9 NLT](#). [1 John 5:14](#) And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. ¹⁵ And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for. [1 John 5:14-15 NLT](#).

God doesn't ask us to do anything to earn forgiveness. Going on a long journey to ancient Christian sites, doing painful things or causing ourselves to suffer pain because Jesus suffered on the cross, will not earn forgiveness. Old Testament

scripture says, [Proverbs 28:13](#) People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy. [Proverbs 28:13 NLT](#).

In heaven, Jesus is working for His church, greatly desiring to apply His blood to pay the price for their sins. There is no limit to the number of sins His blood can cover. In the words of Paul, [Romans 8:38](#) And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow--not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. [Romans 8:38 NLT](#). It is not because we hold tight but because He does, that we are not separated from His love.

As the church grew, so did John's workload, as he tried to work with as many people as he could. There was great danger for the church because Satan was doing his best to slow down its growth. He found people within the church to spread false teachings. Some said that love was all that was needed, and the Ten Commandments no longer needed to be kept. Others taught that the Jewish ceremonial laws all needed to be kept and were more important than the blood of Christ for salvation. Some claimed Jesus was a good man but not God. And some pretended to be good Christians but were secretly continuing to perform sinful acts. This made John sad and he warned the church about it through his letter. Writing to a woman who had a lot of influence in the church, he warned, "Some are ignoring the teaching that Jesus was God in a human body. These people are deceivers, so don't allow them into your homes. If you encourage them to keep up the good work, you are taking part in their sin. Don't forget what you were taught when you first joined the church."

Today, we should be on the lookout for the same problems in the church. Many are teaching that love is the most important thing, and that telling someone they are sinning is not loving. We should love them but not leave them sinning without a warning.

John was sure of what he believed and taught because he had been so close to Jesus and listened to His teachings and saw His miracles. Not many had that same opportunity or experience, so his words have special power for us today. [1 John 1:1](#) We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. ² This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. [1 John 1:1-3 NLT](#). So may it be for every believer.

Chapter 55—Transformed by Grace

John is an example of how a life can change to be like Christ. By being willing to accept correction from Jesus and by daily watching His patience, humbleness, and not insisting on His own rights, John saw his own problems and wanted to change. It is not something that happens in an instant, but is a continual, gradual process. He admired his Master and he received power to become like Him. His fellow disciple Judas heard and saw the same things that John did, and did the same things as the other disciples, but his character was not changed. He clung to his evil desires, love of money, spirit of revenge, and dark thoughts until Satan gained full control of him.

These two are examples of people who claim to be Christians. Both are given the same opportunities, have access to the same teachings, and both have character flaws. But one listens, learns, and accepts the power to change, while the other only hears, and resists the power to change. The changes seen in the life of John are only possible through a close relationship with Christ. By daily looking at the beautiful character of Jesus, and allowing the power of God to change, the believer can be changed until they are like Him. [1 John 3:3](#) And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure. [1 John 3:3 NLT](#). [1 John 2:6](#) Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did. [1 John 2:6 NLT](#).

It is God's will that His people, the members of the church, become more and more like Him. But this cannot happen without choice, and the acceptance of the power of the Spirit, then their changed life can be an example to others of what is possible. Truly becoming like Jesus comes from having God living in us, and since God is love, all who have God living in them will be full of love [[1 John 4:16](#)]. Becoming like Jesus also takes self-sacrifice, [Matthew 16:24](#) ... Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. [Matthew 16:24 NLT](#). Having true love for God helps us to love other people and that should be like a sweet-smelling perfume to them. Finally, becoming like Jesus, which is called sanctification, doesn't happen in an instant, but is a process that happens over a lifetime. It is not an emotion filled moment, but the result of constantly putting our sinful nature to death and having Christ live in us. It takes effort, and discipline, and giving up activities we love that are not Christlike. In this world Satan is always trying to get us to sin, and to fail in our goal of becoming like Christ. As long as we live in this sinful world, we can never say that we have reached a state of being completely Christlike, but we can always be getting closer and closer.

None of the apostles or prophets, who were even willing to sacrifice their lives for God, ever claimed to be sinless. In fact, they admitted they had sinful natures, and claimed no goodness of their own, but trusted only in the righteousness of Christ. The closer we are to Jesus, the more we realize our sinfulness and the less we will feel like boasting about ourselves. [Romans 7:18](#) And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. [Romans 7:18 NLT](#). [Galatians 6:14](#) As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died. [Galatians 6:14 NLT](#).

[1 John 1:8](#) If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. [1 John 1:8-9 NLT](#). We are not good on our own, and salvation cannot be earned by anything good that we do, but obedience is the fruit of loving God and having faith in Him. [1 John 3:5](#) And you know that Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him. ⁶ Anyone who continues to live in him will not sin. But anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is. [1 John 3:5-6 NLT](#).

There are many people who live miserable lives trying to keep God's commandments on their own. They are like thirsty people walking in the dry desert. They lack faith in God, and they do not claim His promises. Even when they do succeed in obedience, they are not becoming more like Christ. God wants His children to be happy, obedient, and peaceful. Prayer is the proper way to succeed in the battle with sin. There are some things that God has promised will always be given when asked for in prayer. Forgiveness for sin, the Holy Spirit, wisdom and strength to do His work, and any other thing He has promised in His word.

True sanctification [being like Jesus], means perfect love, perfect obedience, and perfectly following the will of God. We are not perfect, but we can be continually advancing toward that goal. The reason many make no progress toward that goal is because they interpret their own will as the will of God. Others are on the path toward that goal but then get tired of denying their own will and resisting temptation. Jesus was our example, and He showed us the narrow path that we must travel to reach the kingdom of God. It is a battle with self, but we must follow on that narrow path, no matter the cost.

God paid a heavy price to save us from sin, so let us not hold back from Him what He bought. [1 Corinthians 6:19](#) Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, ²⁰ for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with

your body. [1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT](#). [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#) God's will is for you to be holy ... [1 Thessalonians 4:3 NLT](#). Your sins might seem like an unmovable mountain, but if you confess them to God and ask for forgiveness, He will forgive and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Jesus has a never-ending supply of power and grace to help us overcome, and covering us with His righteousness, wants to present us to the Father without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish [[Ephesians 5:27](#)].

Chapter 56—Patmos

In the first 50 years after its founding, the Christian church grew even though enemies tried to block it and tear it down. Eventually it grew to the point where the Roman emperor could no longer ignore it and joined the battle against it. What followed was terrible persecution and John worked hard to strengthen believers to remain faithful to God. If the faith of Christians wavered, the old servant of Jesus would remind them through word or writing, [1 John 1:1](#) We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. ² This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. [1 John 1:1-3 NLT](#).

John was old but still alive when Jerusalem and the beautiful temple were destroyed. He was the last living disciple from the original 12 who had been so close to Jesus during His ministry. His influence played a part in the conversion of many to the belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Redeemer of the world. The Jewish rulers who still fought against Christianity thought a great victory could be won if they could silence the last witness of the teachings and miracles of Jesus.

John was taken to Rome to be tried in court, where false witnesses accused him of plotting against the government. John responded to the charges in such a clear and convincing way that all who were listening were amazed. The emperor Domitian was filled with rage when he couldn't argue against the logic of John's response. But John's innocence meant nothing to him and to silence him, he condemned John to be thrown into a pot of boiling oil. John responded by saying that his Master patiently suffered torture and death to save the word and that he was honored to suffer for His sake. But God chose to miraculously save him even as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were saved from Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. When John could not be killed by the boiling oil, he was removed by the very men who threw him in. Since John could apparently not be killed, he was banished to the Island of Patmos [[Revelation 1:9](#)], a barren island in the Aegean Sea that Rome had used as a place to send prisoners to die.

But in this isolated prison, God and angels from heaven kept him company, and he received visions which would help the church for the rest of time. Things that would happen at the end of earth's history were shown to him in vision, and he wrote them all down. When his voice was finally silenced, his writings were like a lamp that could never be put out, bringing God's plan to every part of the world.

Removed from the daily pressures and responsibilities he had as the last living disciple, John could now take time to think about his life and the blessings he had received. He could also take more time to study the scriptures, and to notice the wonders of God's creation. Even in the rocky barren landscape he could see that there were great mysteries in the work of God's hands and it showed His power and glory. In this type of landscape, it was easier to see the effects of the great flood that covered the earth. Great rocks were carried to the surface by the waters that rushed up from deep under the surface of the earth. On an island, he was surrounded by sea, and he could envision the great waves and strong wind that God used to cleanse the world. He realized how small, powerless, and ignorant man is compared to God, and wondered how they could rebel against the ruler of the universe. In the rocky surroundings, he was reminded that Jesus is his Rock and shelter.

John was an old man now, and well past the age when people might think great things can be accomplished by them. Though John was sent to Patmos to limit his influence and ability to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, there were people on the island that he became friends with and shared the message of salvation with. Those who have lived a long life of service to God should not be looked on as old and useless by the younger generation. They should be seen as people who have talents and abilities that God can still use, but also people who have great experience and can give great advice. Though they may have accomplished great things, they made mistakes along the way, and this also allows them to provide good advice. Old people who have worked hard and suffered poverty deserve to be honored and respected. The Holy Spirit can still work through these old and tired workers to help younger less experienced workers to not be swept away by the current of evil in the world.

The life of the apostle John shows us that God does not always shield us from what wicked men do to us. But He can help us to gain something from the trial and hardship. His strength can be seen through us if we depend on Him when we are weak, and trials can also bring us closer to Him. Learning to depend on His power prepares us for bigger and more important jobs for Him in the future. Joseph was mistreated, lied about, and persecuted because he was faithful. David was hunted like an animal. Daniel was thrown to the lions because he prayed to God instead of the king. Job lost everything and became very sick, and his friends said it must be God's punishment, but he kept his faith in God. Jeremiah was thrown in a frightful pit because he told the king what God told him to say. Stephen was stoned because he faithfully preached about Jesus and His crucifixion. Paul was imprisoned, beaten, stoned, and finally beheaded because he was faithful to God's call. John

was banished to the island of Patmos because he refused to stop talking about Jesus Christ.

Jesus doesn't offer His followers worldly power and wealth, or a life free from trials, but He calls them to follow Him in self-denial and being mistreated. Wicked men and evil angels teamed up to make the life of Jesus difficult. Everything He did and said revealed the love of God, but He was met with terrible hatred and anger. Those who follow in the footsteps of Christ and have His Spirit will experience similar treatment. The style of persecution may change with the times, but the spirit of it is the same, and it has existed since the day Abel was killed. Since that time, Satan has always persecuted God's people, even having them tortured and killed, but if they remain faithful, they will have died winners. Wicked men can torture and kill the body, but they cannot take away a person's eternal life.

Trial and persecution cause the glory and character of God to be seen in His faithful followers. If they are hated and persecuted, they are receiving their education in the school of Christ. Their characters are purified and perfected in the furnace of trial. As they grow and become more like Christ, they will learn to hate sin and evil as He did. When they share in his suffering they can say with Paul, [Romans 8:18](#) Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. [Romans 8:18 NLT](#).

Chapter 57—The Revelation

At the time of the apostles, the believers worked so hard to share the truth that in a short time the gospel of the kingdom of God was spread throughout the known world and beyond. God's description of that period, symbolically given as the church of Ephesus was, [Revelation 2:2](#) "I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. ³ You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. [Revelation 2:2-3 NLT](#).

At the beginning, the church in Ephesus, with their young child-like faith, obeyed every word of God and they were filled with love for Jesus. They loved to do the will of God, and their highest priority was winning souls to Him. The church members got along perfectly with each other, and they also looked after orphans and widows. The world looked at them and concluded they had been with Jesus.

But after some time, the enthusiasm, their love for God and each other began to decline. One by one as the original members passed away, new members who had not taken the time or effort to learn from the founders and had grown tired of hearing the same old truths, began to lead. Wanting something new and fresh, they introduced new doctrines that were more pleasing and acceptable but not founded on the principles of the gospel. As these new doctrines were taught, disagreements began to happen, and many eyes were taken off Jesus. Holiness in the church was declining, and it seemed that Satan was winning. This was happening about the time John had been banished to Patmos, and all the other apostles had been killed. Never more had his voice been needed in the church. The enemies of the church began to believe that they might actually be able to win. Though John was exiled to Patmos to stop him from helping the church, God was still able to use him to help the church in a more powerful way, for the remainder of time.

It was the Sabbath when Jesus Himself appeared to John in His glory. [Revelation 1:10](#) It was the Lord's Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly, I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. ¹¹ It said, "Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea." ¹² When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. ¹³ And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. [Revelation 1:10-13 NLT](#).

John had seen Jesus in Gethsemane when He was sweating blood from his mental anguish. [Isaiah 52:14](#) His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from

his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man. [Isaiah 52:14 NLT](#). John had seen Him being mocked and tortured with a crown of thorns by Roman soldiers. He saw Him hanging on the cross at Calvary, being made fun of as He hung there suffering. Now John was privileged to see His Master in glory. [Revelation 1:14](#) His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. ¹⁶ He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance. [Revelation 1:14-16 NLT](#). When John saw this, he fell on his face like a dead man at the feet of Jesus [[Revelation 1:17](#)].

John was given special strength to survive being in the presence of Jesus and then he began to see the glory of heaven, and the throne of God. He saw into the future when those who would be saved by the blood of Jesus were wearing white robes in heaven and singing with the angels. He saw visions of the church at different times down through the close of history. He was given messages that would be important to the church then and in the future, and much of what he saw were symbols that would need interpretation.

This revelation was given to John to guide and comfort the church down through time, but many religious teachers have said the book is sealed and cannot be understood. Because of this many have ignored the book and not even tried to understand it. But the book was to be a revelation, meaning to reveal things, and Jesus said that those who read it would be blessed [[Revelation 1:3](#)]. [Revelation 22:18](#) And I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the words of prophecy written in this book: If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹ And if anyone removes any of the words from this book of prophecy, God will remove that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book. ²⁰ He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon!" Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! [Revelation 22:18-20 NLT](#).

The book reveals things and events from the time of John down to the end of time, when the battle between good and evil will end. But it even goes beyond that to when the people who are saved will be in heaven, and ends with the earth made new. Just because some things are hard to understand doesn't make the whole book useless. Jesus, who gave these truths to John can help any sincere student of the book to understand and receive a blessing from studying it.

All other books of the Bible are brought to a conclusion in Revelation. It is the book of Daniel whose prophecies of the end times were sealed [[Daniel 12:4](#)], and the book of Revelation helps to reveal their meaning. Jesus told John to write what

he saw and send it to the 7 churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea [[Revelation 1:11](#)]. The visions he saw were about things that were happening then and many things that would happen in the future. Some of the things John saw were symbols that were immediately explained such as: [Revelation 1:20](#) This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. [Revelation 1:20 NLT](#).

The characteristics of the 7 churches describe 7 time periods of the Christian church from then to the end. The fact that Christ is described as walking among the candlesticks symbolizes that He has been and always will be in contact with the church. Jesus is also our high priest in heaven, and He brings human beings back into a connection with God. Jesus keeps the flame burning on the candlesticks, because if it were up to human beings, they would go out. He is the watchman of the Lord's house, and He holds the 7 stars in His right hand, meaning that no church that is faithful to Him can fail. Ministers of the gospel are tools in the hand of Christ, and all the good accomplished by them is done through His power. If they depend on Him, His brightness will reflect off them to the world.

Toward the end of the 4th century, the church was already suffering from some false teachers. Peter had warned them, and now the revelation from Jesus to John had another warning to her. [Revelation 2:5](#) Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. [Revelation 2:5 NLT](#). The church needed correction, but it was given in tender love. [Revelation 3:20](#) "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. [Revelation 3:20 NLT](#).

For the faithful, John was given words of approval and promise. [Revelation 3:8](#) "I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can close. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me. ... ¹⁰ "Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown. [Revelation 3:8, 10-11 NLT](#).

John was shown that the church would suffer for the sake of Christ and received this assurance for her. [Revelation 2:10](#) Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life. [Revelation 2:10 NLT](#). And to those who remained faithful, this message

was given. [Revelation 2:7](#) ... To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God. [Revelation 2:7 NLT](#). [Revelation 3:5](#) All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine. ...

²¹ Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne. [Revelation 3:5, 21 NLT](#).

John saw the holiness, justice, and power of God, but instead of seeing Him as someone the sinner should fear, he saw the mercy, tenderness and love of God. John saw Jesus in vision as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but also as the Lamb that had been killed [[Revelation 5:5-6](#)]. He would be a Lion to those who rejected His grace, and a Lamb to those who were obedient and accepted it. The pillar of fire was scary to the Egyptians but provided light and warmth to the Israelites. The arm that is strong to punish the wicked is also strong to deliver the obedient.

God's people will always be few in number compared to the rest of the world, but their strength doesn't come from numbers. One can never be in the minority when they are on God's side because He is always a majority. When God's people have been resurrected in victory over death, and sin and sinners are no more they will be the majority in number. Disciples of Jesus may suffer like He did on this earth, but in heaven they will reign forever and ever [[Revelation 22:5](#)].

When that day comes, they will sing praises to God, [Revelation 15:3](#) And they were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. [Revelation 15:3 NLT](#). [Revelation 14:1](#) Then I saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him were 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. [Revelation 14:1 NLT](#). [Revelation 22:5](#) And there will be no night there--no need for lamps or sun--for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever. [Revelation 22:5 NLT](#). [Revelation 14:4](#) They have kept themselves as pure as virgins, following the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been purchased from among the people on the earth as a special offering to God and to the Lamb. [Revelation 14:4 NLT](#). Jesus described the scene like this, [Matthew 25:34](#) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. [Matthew 25:34 NLT](#). And in words from a parable, [Matthew 25:21](#) "The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together! ' [Matthew 25:21 NLT](#).

[Revelation 21:2](#) And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [Revelation 21:2 NLT](#).

[Revelation 21:11](#) It shone with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone--like jasper as clear as crystal. ¹² The city wall was broad and high, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. [Revelation 21:11-12 NLT](#). [Revelation 21:21](#) The twelve gates were made of pearls--each gate from a single pearl! And the main street was pure gold, as clear as glass. ²² I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. [Revelation 21:21-22 NLT](#).

[Revelation 21:3](#) I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." ⁵ And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." [Revelation 21:3-5 NLT](#).

[Revelation 22:1](#) Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. [Revelation 22:1-2 NLT](#). [Revelation 22:14](#) Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will be permitted to enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life. [Revelation 22:14 NLT](#).

[Revelation 21:3](#) I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. [Revelation 21:3 NLT](#).

Chapter 58—The Church Triumphant

Many hundreds of years have passed since the apostles died, but their stories, in words inspired by the Holy Spirit have been preserved for us. In one generation, they fulfilled the commission given to them by Jesus as He returned to heaven. Together with the Holy Spirit, they did a work that changed the whole world. When they were first called, some of them were uneducated, but they were taught by Jesus and prepared for the great work He assigned to them. Their hearts were filled with grace and truth, selfish desires were lost sight of, and the love of Christ flowed out of them.

The disciples knew Jehovah, He who is the Strength of Israel. They prayed to Him, and their honor was tied to His. Any attack on the gospel was felt deeply by them, and they were willing to give anything to fight for the cause of Christ. They expected much and they attempted much. They had been with Jesus and now they looked to Him for guidance. Their ability to preach the truth in the face of opposition was related to how close they followed God's will. Jesus was the subject of every conversation; His name is the only name by which human beings can be saved. They claimed that Jesus was Christ, their risen Savior, and people were moved by their words and became followers of Him.

The spread of the gospel was not easy work, and the apostles did not accomplish it with their own power. They experienced hardships, and persecution, but they considered the cause of more value than their own lives, in fact they rejoiced that they could suffer for Christ. Their will was surrendered to God, and their actions were decisive, and their achievements revealed the grace of heaven. The spread of the gospel was possible through the unlimited power of God flowing through them.

Jesus laid the foundation on which the church was built. The construction of the Jewish temple was used as an example of the growth of the church. [Zechariah 6:12](#) Tell him, 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Here is the man called the Branch. He will branch out from where he is and build the Temple of the LORD. ...¹⁵ People will come from distant lands to rebuild the Temple of the LORD. And when this happens, you will know that my messages have been from the LORD of Heaven's Armies. All this will happen if you carefully obey what the LORD your God says. [Zechariah 6:12, 15 NLT](#).

The apostles wrote: [1 Peter 2:4](#) You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.⁵ And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. [1 Peter 2:4-5 NLT](#). [Ephesians 2:19](#) So now you

Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. ²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit. [Ephesians 2:19-22 NLT](#). ¹ [Corinthians 3:10](#) Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have--Jesus Christ. ¹² Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials--gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. ¹³ But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. [1 Corinthians 3:10-13 NLT](#).

The apostles built on a solid foundation, the Rock of Ages. The stones they laid came from all parts of the world, but the work did not go forward without great opposition. In some ways it was like the building of the temple walls in Nehemiah's day. [Nehemiah 4:17](#) who were building the wall. The laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon. [Nehemiah 4:17 NLT](#).

Kings, governments, and Jewish priests and rulers did their best to destroy the temple of God that was being built. The builders were threatened with prison, torture, and death, but they pressed forward, and the church grew into a beautiful building. One by one the original builders were killed. Stephen was stoned, James and Paul had their heads cut off, Peter was crucified, the other apostles were killed, and John was exiled. New workers took the place of those who died, and the church continued to grow. The first few hundred years of the founding of the church saw great opposition, and persecution, but there were always people who were willing to sacrifice all to carry on the work. [Hebrews 11:36](#) Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. ³⁷ Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. ³⁸ They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. [Hebrews 11:36-38 NLT](#).

Down through the ages there were men and women who like the apostles were willing to answer the call of God and defend the faith. The Waldenses, John Wycliffe, Huss and Jerome, Martin Luther, Zwingli, Latimer, Knox, the Huguenots, the Wesleys, and many others. These people added to the structure of the Lord's house that was built on the same foundation. Many years and many generations have passed since Jesus laid the foundation, but the building of God's

house has never stopped. Stones were laid which shone brightly like living stones piercing the darkness of error and superstition. These lights continue to shine even after the people have died, which says something about the truth that they preached.

The apostles and all the other faithful builders have done their part to build up the temple of God, but the structure is not complete yet. Paul had words of encouragement for those who continued this work. [1 Corinthians 3:14](#) If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. [1 Corinthians 3:14-15 NLT](#). As Jesus sent out His disciples, He sends the church today. [Mark 16:20](#) And the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked through them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs. [Mark 16:20 NLT](#). God will be with the workers today just as He was back then, and He will give them the same power. [Jeremiah 1:7](#) The LORD replied, "Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. ⁸ And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!" ⁹ Then the LORD reached out and touched my mouth and said, "Look, I have put my words in your mouth! [Jeremiah 1:7-9 NLT](#).

God desires to use every member of the church as a channel to share His grace to the world. There is nothing the world needs more than the knowledge of God's love for humanity. Heaven is waiting for more men and women who will represent to the world the Spirit and character of Jesus. If the church is true to God, no power on earth can stand against her. If she will put on the robe of Christ's righteousness, a bright and glorious day will dawn for her. There have been times when the work on God's house has slowed but it has never stopped. When opposition to the work is stronger, God supplies additional power to push through the obstacles.

One of the things that helped Jesus to endure the hard life, and the persecution He suffered was that He could see the future result of what He was going through. He could see the happiness of those who could be forgiven and receive eternal life because of His sacrifice. He could hear the saved ones singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Though we do not have the future vision that Jesus had, God has given His church a vision of the future, the beauty of heaven, and glory He has in store for her. So, by faith we can endure persecution and suffering, so that one day we can hear the words, [Matthew 25:34](#) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. [Matthew 25:34 NLT](#). At that time, we will throw our crowns at His feet and say: [Revelation 5:12](#) And they sang in a mighty chorus: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered--to receive power and riches and

wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." ¹³ And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang: "Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever." [Revelation 5:12-13 NLT](#).

The battle between good and evil is over and songs of victory fill heaven. "Worthy is the Lamb that was killed and lives again and was victorious over evil." [Revelation 7:9](#) After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they were shouting with a great roar, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!" [Revelation 7:9-10 NLT](#).

[Revelation 7:14](#) And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows." Then he said to me, "These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white. ¹⁵ "That is why they stand in front of God's throne and serve him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will give them shelter. ¹⁶ They will never again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun. ¹⁷ For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes." [Revelation 7:14-17 NLT](#). [Revelation 21:4](#) ... and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." [Revelation 21:4 NLT](#).