

Life

## APPLICATION<sup>®</sup> BIBLE STUDIES

### Part 1:

Complete text of Acts with study notes and features from the  
*Life Application Study Bible*

### Part 2:

Thirteen lessons for individual or group study

Study questions written and edited by

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New Living  
Translation

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.  
Carol Stream, Illinois

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*Life Application Bible Studies: Acts*

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ISBN-13: 978-1-4143-2562-0

ISBN-10: 1-4143-2562-2

Printed in the United States of America

14 13 12 11 10 09 08  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# CONTENTS

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vii	A Note to Readers
ix	Introduction to the New Living Translation
xv	Why the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> Is Unique
xvii	What Is Application?
xix	Features of the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i>
3	ACTS from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i>
85	How to Use This Bible Study
87	Lesson 1: <b>Spreading like Wildfire</b> Acts Introduction
91	Lesson 2: <b>Turning On the Power</b> Acts 1:1–2:47
95	Lesson 3: <b>Speak Up!</b> Acts 3:1–4:31
99	Lesson 4: <b>Famous Last Words</b> Acts 4:32–8:1a
103	Lesson 5: <b>It Takes All Kinds</b> Acts 8:1b–10:48
107	Lesson 6: <b>A Night Surprise</b> Acts 11:1–12:25
111	Lesson 7: <b>Bringing Out the Best</b> Acts 13:1–14:28
115	Lesson 8: <b>Coming Together</b> Acts 15:1–35
119	Lesson 9: <b>Land of Opportunities</b> Acts 15:36–18:23
123	Lesson 10: <b>New Worth</b> Acts 18:24–21:14
127	Lesson 11: <b>Don't Confuse Me with the Facts</b> Acts 21:15–23:22
131	Lesson 12: <b>Follow the Leader</b> Acts 23:23–26:32
135	Lesson 13: <b>He's Got the Whole World in His Hands</b> Acts 27:1–28:31

## A NOTE TO READERS

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The *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, was first published in 1996. It quickly became one of the most popular Bible translations in the English-speaking world. While the NLT's influence was rapidly growing, the Bible Translation Committee determined that an additional investment in scholarly review and text refinement could make it even better. So shortly after its initial publication, the committee began an eight-year process with the purpose of increasing the level of the NLT's precision without sacrificing its easy-to-understand quality. This second-generation text was completed in 2004 and is reflected in this edition of the New Living Translation. An additional update with minor changes was subsequently introduced in 2007.

The goal of any Bible translation is to convey the meaning and content of the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts as accurately as possible to contemporary readers. The challenge for our translators was to create a text that would communicate as clearly and powerfully to today's readers as the original texts did to readers and listeners in the ancient biblical world. The resulting translation is easy to read and understand, while also accurately communicating the meaning and content of the original biblical texts. The NLT is a general-purpose text especially good for study, devotional reading, and reading aloud in worship services.

We believe that the New Living Translation—which combines the latest biblical scholarship with a clear, dynamic writing style—will communicate God's word powerfully to all who read it. We publish it with the prayer that God will use it to speak his timeless truth to the church and the world in a fresh, new way.

*The Publishers*  
*October 2007*

# INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

## *Translation Philosophy and Methodology*

English Bible translations tend to be governed by one of two general translation theories. The first theory has been called “formal-equivalence,” “literal,” or “word-for-word” translation. According to this theory, the translator attempts to render each word of the original language into English and seeks to preserve the original syntax and sentence structure as much as possible in translation. The second theory has been called “dynamic-equivalence,” “functional-equivalence,” or “thought-for-thought” translation. The goal of this translation theory is to produce in English the closest natural equivalent of the message expressed by the original-language text, both in meaning and in style.

Both of these translation theories have their strengths. A formal-equivalence translation preserves aspects of the original text—including ancient idioms, term consistency, and original-language syntax—that are valuable for scholars and professional study. It allows a reader to trace formal elements of the original-language text through the English translation. A dynamic-equivalence translation, on the other hand, focuses on translating the message of the original-language text. It ensures that the meaning of the text is readily apparent to the contemporary reader. This allows the message to come through with immediacy, without requiring the reader to struggle with foreign idioms and awkward syntax. It also facilitates serious study of the text’s message and clarity in both devotional and public reading.

The pure application of either of these translation philosophies would create translations at opposite ends of the translation spectrum. But in reality, all translations contain a mixture of these two philosophies. A purely formal-equivalence translation would be unintelligible in English, and a purely dynamic-equivalence translation would risk being unfaithful to the original. That is why translations shaped by dynamic-equivalence theory are usually quite literal when the original text is relatively clear, and the translations shaped by formal-equivalence theory are sometimes quite dynamic when the original text is obscure.

The translators of the New Living Translation set out to render the message of the original texts of Scripture into clear, contemporary English. As they did so, they kept the concerns of both formal-equivalence and dynamic-equivalence in mind. On the one hand, they translated as simply and literally as possible when that approach yielded an accurate, clear, and natural English text. Many words and phrases were rendered literally and consistently into English, preserving essential literary and rhetorical devices, ancient metaphors, and word choices that give structure to the text and provide echoes of meaning from one passage to the next.

On the other hand, the translators rendered the message more dynamically when the literal rendering was hard to understand, was misleading, or yielded archaic or foreign wording. They clarified difficult metaphors and terms to aid in the reader’s understanding. The translators first struggled with the meaning of the words and phrases in the ancient context; then they rendered the message into clear, natural English. Their goal was to be both faithful to the ancient texts and eminently readable. The result is a translation that is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful.

## *Translation Process and Team*

To produce an accurate translation of the Bible into contemporary English, the translation team needed the skills necessary to enter into the thought patterns of the ancient authors and then to render their ideas, connotations, and effects into clear, contemporary English.

To begin this process, qualified biblical scholars were needed to interpret the meaning of the original text and to check it against our base English translation. In order to guard against personal and theological biases, the scholars needed to represent a diverse group of evangelicals who would employ the best exegetical tools. Then to work alongside the scholars, skilled English stylists were needed to shape the text into clear, contemporary English.

With these concerns in mind, the Bible Translation Committee recruited teams of scholars that represented a broad spectrum of denominations, theological perspectives, and backgrounds within the worldwide evangelical community. Each book of the Bible was assigned to three different scholars with proven expertise in the book or group of books to be reviewed. Each of these scholars made a thorough review of a base translation and submitted suggested revisions to the appropriate Senior Translator. The Senior Translator then reviewed and summarized these suggestions and proposed a first-draft revision of the base text. This draft served as the basis for several additional phases of exegetical and stylistic committee review. Then the Bible Translation Committee jointly reviewed and approved every verse of the final translation.

Throughout the translation and editing process, the Senior Translators and their scholar teams were given a chance to review the editing done by the team of stylists. This ensured that exegetical errors would not be introduced late in the process and that the entire Bible Translation Committee was happy with the final result. By choosing a team of qualified scholars and skilled stylists and by setting up a process that allowed their interaction throughout the process, the New Living Translation has been refined to preserve the essential formal elements of the original biblical texts, while also creating a clear, understandable English text.

The New Living Translation was first published in 1996. Shortly after its initial publication, the Bible Translation Committee began a process of further committee review and translation refinement. The purpose of this continued revision was to increase the level of precision without sacrificing the text's easy-to-understand quality. This second-edition text was completed in 2004, and an additional update with minor changes was subsequently introduced in 2007. This printing of the New Living Translation reflects the updated 2007 text.

#### *Written to Be Read Aloud*

It is evident in Scripture that the biblical documents were written to be read aloud, often in public worship (see Nehemiah 8; Luke 4:16-20; 1 Timothy 4:13; Revelation 1:3). It is still the case today that more people will hear the Bible read aloud in church than are likely to read it for themselves. Therefore, a new translation must communicate with clarity and power when it is read publicly. Clarity was a primary goal for the NLT translators, not only to facilitate private reading and understanding, but also to ensure that it would be excellent for public reading and make an immediate and powerful impact on any listener.

#### *The Texts behind the New Living Translation*

The Old Testament translators used the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible as represented in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977), with its extensive system of textual notes; this is an update of Rudolf Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart, 1937). The translators also further compared the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint and other Greek manuscripts, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and any other versions or manuscripts that shed light on the meaning of difficult passages.

The New Testament translators used the two standard editions of the Greek New Testament: the *Greek New Testament*, published by the United Bible Societies (UBS, fourth revised edition, 1993), and *Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by Nestle and Aland (NA, twenty-seventh edition, 1993). These two editions, which have the same text but differ in punctuation and textual notes, represent, for the most part, the best in modern textual scholarship. However, in cases where strong textual or other scholarly evidence supported the decision, the translators sometimes chose to differ from the UBS and NA Greek texts and followed variant readings found in other ancient witnesses. Significant textual variants of this sort are always noted in the textual notes of the New Living Translation.

#### *Translation Issues*

The translators have made a conscious effort to provide a text that can be easily understood by the typical reader of modern English. To this end, we sought to use only vocabulary and

language structures in common use today. We avoided using language likely to become quickly dated or that reflects only a narrow subdialect of English, with the goal of making the New Living Translation as broadly useful and timeless as possible.

But our concern for readability goes beyond the concerns of vocabulary and sentence structure. We are also concerned about historical and cultural barriers to understanding the Bible, and we have sought to translate terms shrouded in history and culture in ways that can be immediately understood. To this end:

- We have converted ancient weights and measures (for example, “ephah” [a unit of dry volume] or “cubit” [a unit of length]) to modern English (American) equivalents, since the ancient measures are not generally meaningful to today’s readers. Then in the textual footnotes we offer the literal Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek measures, along with modern metric equivalents.
- Instead of translating ancient currency values literally, we have expressed them in common terms that communicate the message. For example, in the Old Testament, “ten shekels of silver” becomes “ten pieces of silver” to convey the intended message. In the New Testament, we have often translated the “denarius” as “the normal daily wage” to facilitate understanding. Then a footnote offers: “Greek *a denarius*, the payment for a full day’s wage.” In general, we give a clear English rendering and then state the literal Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek in a textual footnote.
- Since the names of Hebrew months are unknown to most contemporary readers, and since the Hebrew lunar calendar fluctuates from year to year in relation to the solar calendar used today, we have looked for clear ways to communicate the time of year the Hebrew months (such as Abib) refer to. When an expanded or interpretive rendering is given in the text, a textual note gives the literal rendering. Where it is possible to define a specific ancient date in terms of our modern calendar, we use modern dates in the text. A textual footnote then gives the literal Hebrew date and states the rationale for our rendering. For example, Ezra 6:15 pinpoints the date when the postexilic Temple was completed in Jerusalem: “the third day of the month Adar.” This was during the sixth year of King Darius’s reign (that is, 515 B.C.). We have translated that date as March 12, with a footnote giving the Hebrew and identifying the year as 515 B.C.
- Since ancient references to the time of day differ from our modern methods of denoting time, we have used renderings that are instantly understandable to the modern reader. Accordingly, we have rendered specific times of day by using approximate equivalents in terms of our common “o’clock” system. On occasion, translations such as “at dawn the next morning” or “as the sun was setting” have been used when the biblical reference is more general.
- When the meaning of a proper name (or a wordplay inherent in a proper name) is relevant to the message of the text, its meaning is often illuminated with a textual footnote. For example, in Exodus 2:10 the text reads: “The princess named him Moses, for she explained, ‘I lifted him out of the water.’” The accompanying footnote reads: “*Moses* sounds like a Hebrew term that means ‘to lift out.’”  
 Sometimes, when the actual meaning of a name is clear, that meaning is included in parentheses within the text itself. For example, the text at Genesis 16:11 reads: “You are to name him Ishmael (*which means ‘God hears’*), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress.” Since the original hearers and readers would have instantly understood the meaning of the name “Ishmael,” we have provided modern readers with the same information so they can experience the text in a similar way.
- Many words and phrases carry a great deal of cultural meaning that was obvious to the original readers but needs explanation in our own culture. For example, the phrase “they beat their breasts” (Luke 23:48) in ancient times meant that people were very upset, often in mourning. In our translation we chose to translate this phrase dynamically for clarity: “They went home *in deep sorrow*.” Then we included a footnote with the literal Greek, which reads: “Greek *went home beating their breasts*.” In other similar cases, however, we have sometimes chosen to illuminate the existing literal expression to make it immediately understandable. For example, here we might have expanded the literal Greek phrase to read: “They went home

beating their breasts *in sorrow*.” If we had done this, we would not have included a textual footnote, since the literal Greek clearly appears in translation.

- Metaphorical language is sometimes difficult for contemporary readers to understand, so at times we have chosen to translate or illuminate the meaning of a metaphor. For example, the ancient poet writes, “Your neck is *like* the tower of David” (Song of Songs 4:4). We have rendered it “Your neck is *as beautiful as* the tower of David” to clarify the intended positive meaning of the simile. Another example comes in Ecclesiastes 12:3, which can be literally rendered: “Remember him . . . when the grinding women cease because they are few, and the women who look through the windows see dimly.” We have rendered it: “Remember him before your teeth—your few remaining servants—stop grinding; and before your eyes—the women looking through the windows—see dimly.” We clarified such metaphors only when we believed a typical reader might be confused by the literal text.
- When the content of the original language text is poetic in character, we have rendered it in English poetic form. We sought to break lines in ways that clarify and highlight the relationships between phrases of the text. Hebrew poetry often uses parallelism, a literary form where a second phrase (or in some instances a third or fourth) echoes the initial phrase in some way. In Hebrew parallelism, the subsequent parallel phrases continue, while also furthering and sharpening, the thought expressed in the initial line or phrase. Whenever possible, we sought to represent these parallel phrases in natural poetic English.
- The Greek term *hoi Ioudaioi* is literally translated “the Jews” in many English translations. In the Gospel of John, however, this term doesn’t always refer to the Jewish people generally. In some contexts, it refers more particularly to the Jewish religious leaders. We have attempted to capture the meaning in these different contexts by using terms such as “the people” (with a footnote: Greek *the Jewish people*) or “the religious leaders,” where appropriate.
- One challenge we faced was how to translate accurately the ancient biblical text that was originally written in a context where male-oriented terms were used to refer to humanity generally. We needed to respect the nature of the ancient context while also trying to make the translation clear to a modern audience that tends to read male-oriented language as applying only to males. Often the original text, though using masculine nouns and pronouns, clearly intends that the message be applied to both men and women. A typical example is found in the New Testament letters, where the believers are called “brothers” (*adelphoi*). Yet it is clear from the content of these letters that they were addressed to all the believers—male and female. Thus, we have usually translated this Greek word as “brothers and sisters” in order to represent the historical situation more accurately.

We have also been sensitive to passages where the text applies generally to human beings or to the human condition. In some instances we have used plural pronouns (they, them) in place of the masculine singular (he, him). For example, a traditional rendering of Proverbs 22:6 is: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” We have rendered it: “Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.” At times, we have also replaced third person pronouns with the second person to ensure clarity. A traditional rendering of Proverbs 26:27 is: “He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.” We have rendered it: “If you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself. If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead.”

We should emphasize, however, that all masculine nouns and pronouns used to represent God (for example, “Father”) have been maintained without exception. All decisions of this kind have been driven by the concern to reflect accurately the intended meaning of the original texts of Scripture.

### *Lexical Consistency in Terminology*

For the sake of clarity, we have translated certain original-language terms consistently, especially within synoptic passages and for commonly repeated rhetorical phrases, and within

certain word categories such as divine names and non-theological technical terminology (e.g., liturgical, legal, cultural, zoological, and botanical terms). For theological terms, we have allowed a greater semantic range of acceptable English words or phrases for a single Hebrew or Greek word. We have avoided some theological terms that are not readily understood by many modern readers. For example, we avoided using words such as “justification” and “sanctification,” which are carryovers from Latin translations. In place of these words, we have provided renderings such as “made right with God” and “made holy.”

#### *The Spelling of Proper Names*

Many individuals in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, are known by more than one name (e.g., Uzziah/Azariah). For the sake of clarity, we have tried to use a single spelling for any one individual, footnoting the literal spelling whenever we differ from it. This is especially helpful in delineating the kings of Israel and Judah. King Joash/Jehoash of Israel has been consistently called Jehoash, while King Joash/Jehoash of Judah is called Joash. A similar distinction has been used to distinguish between Joram/Jehoram of Israel and Joram/Jehoram of Judah. All such decisions were made with the goal of clarifying the text for the reader. When the ancient biblical writers clearly had a theological purpose in their choice of a variant name (e.g., Esh-baal/Ishbosheth), the different names have been maintained with an explanatory footnote.

For the names Jacob and Israel, which are used interchangeably for both the individual patriarch and the nation, we generally render it “Israel” when it refers to the nation and “Jacob” when it refers to the individual. When our rendering of the name differs from the underlying Hebrew text, we provide a textual footnote, which includes this explanation: “The names ‘Jacob’ and ‘Israel’ are often interchanged throughout the Old Testament, referring sometimes to the individual patriarch and sometimes to the nation.”

#### *The Rendering of Divine Names*

All appearances of ‘el, ‘elohim, or ‘eloah have been translated “God,” except where the context demands the translation “god(s).” We have generally rendered the tetragrammaton (YHWH) consistently as “the LORD,” utilizing a form with small capitals that is common among English translations. This will distinguish it from the name ‘adonai, which we render “Lord.” When ‘adonai and YHWH appear together, we have rendered it “Sovereign LORD.” This also distinguishes ‘adonai YHWH from cases where YHWH appears with ‘elohim, which is rendered “LORD God.” When YH (the short form of YHWH) and YHWH appear together, we have rendered it “LORD GOD.” When YHWH appears with the term *tseba’oth*, we have rendered it “LORD of Heaven’s Armies” to translate the meaning of the name. In a few cases, we have utilized the transliteration, *Yahweh*, when the personal character of the name is being invoked in contrast to another divine name or the name of some other god (for example, see Exodus 3:15; 6:2-3).

In the New Testament, the Greek word *christos* has been translated as “Messiah” when the context assumes a Jewish audience. When a Gentile audience can be assumed, *christos* has been translated as “Christ.” The Greek word *kurios* is consistently translated “Lord,” except that it is translated “LORD” wherever the New Testament text explicitly quotes from the Old Testament, and the text there has it in small capitals.

#### *Textual Footnotes*

The New Living Translation provides several kinds of textual footnotes, all designated in the text with an asterisk:

- When for the sake of clarity the NLT renders a difficult or potentially confusing phrase dynamically, we generally give the literal rendering in a textual footnote. This allows the reader to see the literal source of our dynamic rendering and how our translation relates to other more literal translations. These notes are prefaced with “Hebrew,” “Aramaic,” or “Greek,” identifying the language of the underlying source text. For example, in Acts 2:42 we translated the literal “breaking of bread” (from the Greek) as “the Lord’s Supper” to clarify that this verse refers to the ceremonial practice of the church rather than just an ordinary meal. Then we attached a footnote to “the Lord’s Supper,” which reads: “Greek *the breaking of bread*.”

- Textual footnotes are also used to show alternative renderings, prefaced with the word “Or.” These normally occur for passages where an aspect of the meaning is debated. On occasion, we also provide notes on words or phrases that represent a departure from long-standing tradition. These notes are prefaced with “Traditionally rendered.” For example, the footnote to the translation “serious skin disease” at Leviticus 13:2 says: “Traditionally rendered *leprosy*. The Hebrew word used throughout this passage is used to describe various skin diseases.”
- When our translators follow a textual variant that differs significantly from our standard Hebrew or Greek texts (listed earlier), we document that difference with a footnote. We also footnote cases when the NLT excludes a passage that is included in the Greek text known as the *Textus Receptus* (and familiar to readers through its translation in the King James Version). In such cases, we offer a translation of the excluded text in a footnote, even though it is generally recognized as a later addition to the Greek text and not part of the original Greek New Testament.
- All Old Testament passages that are quoted in the New Testament are identified by a textual footnote at the New Testament location. When the New Testament clearly quotes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and when it differs significantly in wording from the Hebrew text, we also place a textual footnote at the Old Testament location. This note includes a rendering of the Greek version, along with a cross-reference to the New Testament passage(s) where it is cited (for example, see notes on Proverbs 3:12; Psalms 8:2; 53:3).
- Some textual footnotes provide cultural and historical information on places, things, and people in the Bible that are probably obscure to modern readers. Such notes should aid the reader in understanding the message of the text. For example, in Acts 12:1, “King Herod” is named in this translation as “King Herod Agrippa” and is identified in a footnote as being “the nephew of Herod Antipas and a grandson of Herod the Great.”
- When the meaning of a proper name (or a wordplay inherent in a proper name) is relevant to the meaning of the text, it is either illuminated with a textual footnote or included within parentheses in the text itself. For example, the footnote concerning the name “Eve” at Genesis 3:20 reads: “*Eve* sounds like a Hebrew term that means ‘to give life.’” This wordplay in the Hebrew illuminates the meaning of the text, which goes on to say that Eve “would be the mother of all who live.”

AS WE SUBMIT this translation for publication, we recognize that any translation of the Scriptures is subject to limitations and imperfections. Anyone who has attempted to communicate the richness of God’s Word into another language will realize it is impossible to make a perfect translation. Recognizing these limitations, we sought God’s guidance and wisdom throughout this project. Now we pray that he will accept our efforts and use this translation for the benefit of the church and of all people.

We pray that the New Living Translation will overcome some of the barriers of history, culture, and language that have kept people from reading and understanding God’s Word. We hope that readers unfamiliar with the Bible will find the words clear and easy to understand and that readers well versed in the Scriptures will gain a fresh perspective. We pray that readers will gain insight and wisdom for living, but most of all that they will meet the God of the Bible and be forever changed by knowing him.

*The Bible Translation Committee  
October 2007*

## WHY THE LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE IS UNIQUE

Have you ever opened your Bible and asked the following:

- What does this passage really mean?
- How does it apply to my life?
- Why does some of the Bible seem irrelevant?
- What do these ancient cultures have to do with today?
- I love God; why can't I understand what he is saying to me through his word?
- What's going on in the lives of these Bible people?

Many Christians do not read the Bible regularly. Why? Because in the pressures of daily living they cannot find a connection between the timeless principles of Scripture and the ever-present problems of day-by-day living.

God urges us to apply his word (Isaiah 42:23; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:4), but too often we stop at accumulating Bible knowledge. This is why the *Life Application Study Bible* was developed—to show how to put into practice what we have learned.

Applying God's word is a vital part of one's relationship with God; it is the evidence that we are obeying him. The difficulty in applying the Bible is not with the Bible itself, but with the reader's inability to bridge the gap between the past and present, the conceptual and practical. When we don't or can't do this, spiritual dryness, shallowness, and indifference are the results.

The words of Scripture itself cry out to us, "But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves" (James 1:22). The *Life Application Study Bible* helps us to obey God's word. Developed by an interdenominational team of pastors, scholars, family counselors, and a national organization dedicated to promoting God's word and spreading the gospel, the *Life Application Study Bible* took many years to complete. All the work was reviewed by several renowned theologians under the directorship of Dr. Kenneth Kantzer.

The *Life Application Study Bible* does what a good resource Bible should: It helps you understand the context of a passage, gives important background and historical information, explains difficult words and phrases, and helps you see the interrelationship of Scripture. But it does much more. The *Life Application Study Bible* goes deeper into God's word, helping you discover the timeless truth being communicated, see the relevance for your life, and make a personal application. While some study Bibles attempt application, over 75 percent of this Bible is application oriented. The notes answer the questions "So what?" and "What does this passage mean to me, my family, my friends, my job, my neighborhood, my church, my country?"

Imagine reading a familiar passage of Scripture and gaining fresh insight, as if it were the first time you had ever read it. How much richer your life would be if you left each Bible reading with a new perspective and a small change for the better. A small change every day adds up to a changed life—and that is the very purpose of Scripture.

## WHAT IS APPLICATION?

The best way to define application is to first determine what it is *not*. Application is *not* just accumulating knowledge. Accumulating knowledge helps us discover and understand facts and concepts, but it stops there. History is filled with philosophers who knew what the Bible said but failed to apply it to their lives, keeping them from believing and changing. Many think that understanding is the end goal of Bible study, but it is really only the beginning.

Application is *not* just illustration. Illustration only tells us how someone else handled a similar situation. While we may empathize with that person, we still have little direction for our personal situation.

Application is *not* just making a passage “relevant.” Making the Bible relevant only helps us to see that the same lessons that were true in Bible times are true today; it does not show us how to apply them to the problems and pressures of our individual lives.

What, then, is application? Application begins by knowing and understanding God’s word and its timeless truths. *But you cannot stop there.* If you do, God’s word may not change your life, and it may become dull, difficult, tedious, and tiring. A good application focuses the truth of God’s word, shows the reader what to do about what is being read, and motivates the reader to respond to what God is teaching. All three are essential to application.

Application is putting into practice what we already know (see Mark 4:24 and Hebrews 5:14) and answering the question “So what?” by confronting us with the right questions and motivating us to take action (see 1 John 2:5-6 and James 2:26). Application is deeply personal—unique for each individual. It makes a relevant truth a personal truth and involves developing a strategy and action plan to live your life in harmony with the Bible. It is the biblical “how to” of life.

You may ask, “How can your application notes be relevant to my life?” Each application note has three parts: (1) an *explanation*, which ties the note directly to the Scripture passage and sets up the truth that is being taught; (2) the *bridge*, which explains the timeless truth and makes it relevant for today; (3) the *application*, which shows you how to take the timeless truth and apply it to your personal situation. No note, by itself, can apply Scripture directly to your life. It can only teach, direct, lead, guide, inspire, recommend, and urge. It can give you the resources and direction you need to apply the Bible, but only you can take these resources and put them into practice.

A good note, therefore should not only give you knowledge and understanding but point you to application. Before you buy any kind of resource study Bible, you should evaluate the notes and ask the following questions: (1) Does the note contain enough information to help me understand the point of the Scripture passage? (2) Does the note assume I know more than I do? (3) Does the note avoid denominational bias? (4) Do the notes touch most of life’s experiences? (5) Does the note help me apply God’s word?

# FEATURES OF THE LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE

## NOTES

In addition to providing the reader with many application notes, the *Life Application Study Bible* also offers several kinds of explanatory notes, which help the reader understand culture, history, context, difficult-to-understand passages, background, places, theological concepts, and the relationship of various passages in Scripture to other passages.

## BOOK INTRODUCTIONS

Each book introduction is divided into several easy-to-find parts:

*Timeline.* A guide that puts the Bible book into its historical setting. It lists the key events and the dates when they occurred.

*Vital Statistics.* A list of straight facts about the book—those pieces of information you need to know at a glance.

*Overview.* A summary of the book with general lessons and applications that can be learned from the book as a whole.

*Blueprint.* The outline of the book. It is printed in easy-to-understand language and is designed for easy memorization. To the right of each main heading is a key lesson that is taught in that particular section.

*Megathemes.* A section that gives the main themes of the Bible book, explains their significance, and then tells you why they are still important for us today.

*Map.* If included, this shows the key places found in that book and retells the story of the book from a geographical point of view.

## OUTLINE

The *Life Application Study Bible* has a new, custom-made outline that was designed specifically from an application point of view. Several unique features should be noted:

1. To avoid confusion and to aid memory work, the book outline has only three levels for headings. Main outline heads are marked with a capital letter. Subheads are marked by a number. Minor explanatory heads have no letter or number.
2. Each main outline head marked by a letter also has a brief paragraph below it summarizing the Bible text and offering a general application.
3. Parallel passages are listed where they apply.

## PERSONALITY PROFILES

Among the unique features of this Bible are the profiles of key Bible people, including their strengths and weaknesses, greatest accomplishments and mistakes, and key lessons from their lives.

**MAPS**

The *Life Application Study Bible* has a thorough and comprehensive Bible atlas built right into the book. There are two kinds of maps: a book-introduction map, telling the story of the book, and thumbnail maps in the notes, plotting most geographic movements.

**CHARTS AND DIAGRAMS**

Many charts and diagrams are included to help the reader better visualize difficult concepts or relationships. Most charts not only present the needed information but show the significance of the information as well.

**CROSS-REFERENCES**

An updated, exhaustive cross-reference system in the margins of the Bible text helps the reader find related passages quickly.

**TEXTUAL NOTES**

Directly related to the text of the New Living Translation, the textual notes provide explanations on certain wording in the translation, alternate translations, and information about readings in the ancient manuscripts.

**HIGHLIGHTED NOTES**

In each Bible study lesson, you will be asked to read specific notes as part of your preparation. These notes have each been highlighted by a bullet (•) so that you can find them easily.

*ACTS*

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## KEY PLACES IN ACTS



Modern names and boundaries are shown in gray.

The apostle Paul, whose missionary journeys fill much of this book, traveled tremendous distances as he tirelessly spread the gospel across much of the Roman Empire. His combined trips, by land and sea, equal more than 13,000 air miles.

**1 Judea** Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, outside Jerusalem, and his followers returned to the city to await the infilling of the Holy Spirit, which occurred at Pentecost. Peter gave a powerful sermon that was heard by Jews from across the empire. The Jerusalem church grew, but Stephen was martyred for his faith by Jewish leaders who did not believe in Jesus (1:1—7:60).

**2 Samaria** After Stephen's death, persecution of Christians intensified, but it caused the believers to leave Jerusalem and spread the gospel to other cities in the empire. Philip took the gospel into Samaria, and even to a man from Ethiopia (8:1—40).

**3 Syria** Paul (Saul) began his story as a persecutor of Christians, only to be met by Jesus himself on the road to Damascus. He became a believer, but his new faith caused opposition, so he returned to Tarsus, his home, for safety. Barnabas sought out Paul in Tarsus and brought him to the church in Antioch of Syria, where they worked together. Meanwhile, Peter had received a vision that led him to Caesarea, where he presented the gospel to a Gentile family, who became believers (9:1—12:25).

**4 Cyprus and Galatia** Paul and Barnabas were dedicated by the church in Antioch of Syria for God's work of spreading the gospel to other cities. They set off on their first missionary journey through Cyprus and Galatia (13:1—14:28).

**5 Jerusalem** Controversy between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians over the matter of keeping the law

led to a special council, with delegates from the churches in Antioch and Jerusalem meeting in Jerusalem. Together, they resolved the conflict and the news was taken back to Antioch (15:1—35).

**6 Macedonia** Barnabas traveled to Cyprus while Paul took a second missionary journey. He revisited the churches in Galatia and headed toward Ephesus, but the Holy Spirit said no. So he turned north toward Bithynia and Pontus but again was told not to go. He then received the "Macedonian call," and followed the Spirit's direction into the cities of Macedonia (15:36—17:14).

**7 Achaia** Paul traveled from Macedonia to Athens and Corinth in Achaia, then traveled by ship to Ephesus before returning to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and finally back to Antioch (17:15—18:22).

**8 Ephesus** Paul's third missionary journey took him back through Cilicia and Galatia, this time straight to Ephesus in Asia. He visited other cities in Asia before going back to Macedonia and Achaia. He returned to Jerusalem by ship, despite his knowledge that arrest awaited him there (18:23—23:30).

**9 Caesarea** Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and taken to Antipatris, then on to Caesarea under Roman guard. Paul always took advantage of any opportunity to share the gospel, and he did so before many Gentile leaders. Because Paul appealed his case to Caesar, he began the long journey to Rome (23:31—26:32).

**10 Rome** After storms, layovers in Crete, and shipwreck on the island of Malta, Paul arrived in Sicily and finally in Italy, where he traveled by land, under guard, to his long-awaited destination: Rome, the capital of the empire (27:1—28:31).

# ACTS

*Jesus crucified; Pentecost; church begun*  
A.D. 30

*Stephen martyred; Paul's conversion*  
35

*Paul returns to Tarsus*  
38

*Barnabas goes to find Paul*  
43

*James martyred; Peter in prison*  
44

*Paul's first missionary journey*  
46–48

*Jerusalem council*  
50

*Paul's second missionary journey*  
50–52

## VITAL STATISTICS

### PURPOSE:

To give an accurate account of the birth and growth of the Christian church

### AUTHOR:

Luke (a Gentile physician)

### ORIGINAL AUDIENCE:

Theophilus

### DATE WRITTEN:

Between A.D. 63 and 70

### SETTING:

Acts is the connecting link between Christ's life and the life of the church, between the Gospels and the Letters.

### KEY VERSE:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8).

### KEY PEOPLE:

Peter, John, James, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, Cornelius, James (Jesus' brother), Timothy, Lydia, Silas, Titus, Apollos, Agabus, Ananias, Felix, Festus, Agrippa, Luke

### KEY PLACES:

Jerusalem, Samaria, Lydda, Joppa, Antioch, Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Caesarea, Malta, Rome

### SPECIAL FEATURES:

Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. Because Acts ends so abruptly, Luke may have planned to write a third book, continuing the story.



WITH a flick of a match, friction occurs and a spark leaps from match to tinder. A small flame burns the edges and grows, fueled by wood and air. Heat builds, and soon the kindling is licked by reddish orange tongues. Higher and wider it spreads, consuming the wood. The flame has become a fire.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a match was struck in Palestine. At first, just a few in that corner of the world were touched and warmed, but the fire spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea out to the world and to all people. Acts provides an eyewitness account of the flame and fire—the birth and spread of the church. Beginning in Jerusalem with a small group of disciples, the message traveled across the Roman Empire. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, this courageous band preached, taught, healed, and demonstrated love in synagogues, schools, homes, marketplaces, and courtrooms, and on streets, hills, ships, and desert roads—wherever God sent them, lives and history were changed.

Written by Luke as a sequel to his Gospel, Acts is an accurate historical record of the early church. But Acts is also a theological book, with lessons and living examples of the work of the Holy Spirit, church relationships and organization, the implications of grace, and the law of love. And Acts is an apologetic work, building a strong case for the validity of Christ's claims and promises.

The book of Acts begins with the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit and the commencement of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Spirit-inspired evangelism began in Jerusalem and eventually spread to Rome, covering most of the Roman Empire. The gospel first went to the Jews, but they, as a nation, rejected it. A remnant of Jews, of course, gladly received the Good News. But the continual rejection of the gospel by the vast majority of the Jews led to the ever-increasing proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. This was according to Jesus' plan: The gospel was to go from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). This, in fact, is the pattern that the Acts narrative follows. The glorious proclamation began in Jerusalem (chapters 1–7), went to Judea and Samaria (chapters 8 and following), and to the countries beyond Judea (11:19; 13:4 and on to the end of Acts). The second half of Acts is focused primarily on Paul's missionary journeys to many countries north of the Mediterranean Sea. He, with his companions, took the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Some of the Jews believed, and many of the Gentiles received the Good News with joy. New churches were started, and new believers began to grow in the Christian life.

As you read Acts, put yourself in the place of the disciples: Identify with them as they are filled with the Holy Spirit, and experience the thrill of seeing thousands respond to the gospel message. Sense their commitment as they give every ounce of talent and treasure to Christ. And as you read, watch the Spirit-led boldness of these first-century believers, who through suffering and in the face of death take every opportunity to tell of their crucified and risen Lord. Then decide to be a twenty-first-century version of those men and women of God.

*Paul's third missionary journey*  
53–57

*Nero becomes emperor*  
54

*Paul imprisoned in Caesarea*  
57–59

*Paul's journey to Rome*  
59

*Paul released from prison*  
62

*Paul martyred*  
67?

*Rome destroys Jerusalem*  
70

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## THE BLUEPRINT

### A. PETER'S MINISTRY

(1:1—12:25)

1. Establishment of the church
2. Expansion of the church

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter preached boldly and performed many miracles. Peter's actions demonstrate vividly the source and effects of Christian power. Because of the Holy Spirit, God's people were empowered so they could accomplish their tasks. The Holy Spirit is still available to empower believers today. We should turn to the Holy Spirit to give us the strength, courage, and insight to accomplish our work for God.

### B. PAUL'S MINISTRY

(13:1—28:31)

1. First missionary journey
2. The council at Jerusalem
3. Second missionary journey
4. Third missionary journey
5. Paul on trial

Paul's missionary adventures show us the progress of Christianity. The gospel could not be confined to one corner of the world. This was a faith that offered hope to all humanity. We, too, should venture forth and share in this heroic task to witness for Christ in all the world.

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## MEGATHEMES

### THEME

### EXPLANATION

### IMPORTANCE

*Church Beginnings*

Acts is the history of how Christianity was founded and organized and solved its problems. The community of believers began by faith in the risen Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to witness, to love, and to serve.

New churches are continually being founded. By faith in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church can be a vibrant agent for change. As we face new problems, Acts gives important remedies for solving them.

*Holy Spirit*

The church did not start or grow by its own power or enthusiasm. The disciples were empowered by God's Holy Spirit. He was the promised Advocate and Guide sent when Jesus went to heaven.

The Holy Spirit's work demonstrated that Christianity was supernatural. Thus, the church became more Holy Spirit conscious than problem conscious. By faith, any believer can claim the Holy Spirit's power to do Christ's work.

*Church Growth*

Acts presents the history of a dynamic, growing community of believers from Jerusalem to Syria, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In the first century, Christianity spread from believing Jews to non-Jews in 39 cities and 30 countries, islands, or provinces.

When the Holy Spirit works, there is movement, excitement, and growth. He gives us the motivation, energy, and ability to get the gospel to the whole world. How are you fitting into God's plan for spreading Christianity? What is your place in this movement?

*Witnessing*

Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, and thousands more witnessed to their new faith in Christ. By personal testimony, preaching, or defense before authorities, they told the story with boldness and courage to groups of all sizes.

We are God's people, chosen to be part of his plan to reach the world. In love and by faith, we can have the Holy Spirit's help as we witness or preach. Witnessing is also beneficial to us because it strengthens our faith as we confront those who challenge it.

*Opposition*

Through imprisonment, beatings, plots, and riots, Christians were persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles. But the opposition became a catalyst for the spread of Christianity. Growth during times of oppression showed that Christianity was not the work of humans, but of God.

God can work through any opposition. When persecution from hostile unbelievers comes, realize that it has come because you have been a faithful witness and you have looked for the opportunity to present the Good News about Christ. Seize the opportunities that opposition brings.

## A. PETER'S MINISTRY (1:1—12:25)

The book of Acts begins where the Gospels leave off, reporting the actions of the apostles and the work of the Holy Spirit. Beginning in Jerusalem, the church is established and grows rapidly, then faces intense persecution, which drives the believers out into the surrounding areas. Through this dispersion, Samaritans and Gentiles hear the Good News and believe.

### 1. Establishment of the church

#### *The Promise of the Holy Spirit*

**1** In my first book\* I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach<sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. <sup>3</sup>During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

<sup>4</sup>Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. <sup>5</sup>John baptized with\* water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

1:1  
Luke 1:3

1:3  
Luke 24:33-36  
John 20:19, 26;  
21:1, 14

1:4  
Luke 24:49  
John 14:16-17, 26  
Acts 2:33

1:5  
Luke 3:16

#### *The Ascension of Jesus*

<sup>6</sup>So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?"

1:1 The reference is to the Gospel of Luke. 1:5 Or in; also in 1:5b.

- **1:1** In the book of Acts, Luke continues the story he began in his Gospel, covering the 30 years after Jesus was taken up into heaven. During that short time the church was established, and the Good News of salvation was spread throughout the world, even to the capital of the Roman Empire. Those preaching the Good News, though ordinary people with human frailties and limitations, were empowered by the Holy Spirit to take it all over the world. In the book of Acts we learn about the nature of the church and how we, like these early believers, can turn our world upside down (17:6).
- **1:1ff** Verses 1-11 are the bridge between the events recorded in the Gospels and the events marking the beginning of the church. Jesus spent 40 days teaching his disciples, and they were drastically changed. Before the Resurrection, they had argued with each other and had deserted their Lord. One of them (Peter) even lied about knowing Jesus. Here, in a series of meetings with the living, resurrected Christ, the disciples had many questions answered. They became convinced of the Resurrection, learned about the Kingdom of God, and discovered their power source—the Holy Spirit. By reading the Bible, we can sit with the resurrected Christ in his school of discipleship. By believing in him, we can receive his power through the Holy Spirit to be new people. By joining with other Christians, we can take part in doing his work on earth.
- **1:1-3** Luke says that the disciples were eyewitnesses to all that had happened to Jesus Christ—his life before his crucifixion, and the 40 days after his resurrection as he taught them more about the Kingdom of God. Today people still doubt Jesus' resurrection. But Jesus appeared to the disciples on many occasions after his resurrection, proving that he was alive. Consider the change the Resurrection made in the disciples' lives. At Jesus' death, they had scattered, disillusioned, and fearing for their lives. After seeing the resurrected Christ, they became fearless and risked everything to spread the Good News about him around the world. They faced imprisonment, beatings, rejection, and martyrdom, yet they never compromised their mission. These men would not have risked—and in some cases, given—their lives for something they knew was a fraud. They knew Jesus was alive, and the early church was fired with their enthusiasm to tell others. We need to know this so we can have confidence in their testimony. Twenty centuries later we can still be confident that our faith is based on fact.
- 1:3** Jesus explained that his coming inaugurated the Kingdom of God. When he returned to heaven, God's Kingdom would remain in the hearts of all believers through the presence of the Holy Spirit. But the Kingdom of God will not be fully realized until Jesus Christ returns to judge all people and remove all evil from the world. Until that time believers are to work to spread God's Kingdom across

the world. The book of Acts records how this work was begun. What the early church started, we must continue.

- **1:4, 5** *The Trinity* is a description of the unique relationship of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If Jesus had stayed on earth, his physical presence would have limited the spread of the Good News because physically he could be in only one place at a time. After Christ was taken up into heaven, he would be spiritually present everywhere through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was sent so that God would be with and within his followers after Christ returned to heaven. The Spirit would comfort them, guide them to know his truth, remind them of Jesus' words, give them the right words to say, and fill them with power (see John 14–16).
- **1:5** At Pentecost (2:1-4) the Holy Spirit was made available to all who believed in Jesus. We receive the Holy Spirit (are baptized with him) when we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior. The baptism of the Holy Spirit must be understood in the light of his total work in Christians.
  - (1) The Spirit marks the beginning of the Christian experience. We cannot be Christians without his Spirit (Romans 8:9); we cannot be joined to Christ without his Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17); we cannot be adopted as his children without his Spirit (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6, 7); we cannot be in the body of Christ except by baptism in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).
  - (2) The Spirit is the power of our new lives. He begins a life-long process of change making us more like Christ (Galatians 3:3; Philippians 1:6). When we receive Christ by faith, we begin an immediate personal relationship with God. The Holy Spirit works in us to help us become like Christ.
  - (3) The Spirit unites the Christian community in Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22). The Holy Spirit can be experienced by all, and he works through all (1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:4).
- **1:6** During the years of Jesus' ministry on earth, the disciples continually wondered about his Kingdom. When would it come? What would be their role? In the traditional view, the Messiah would be an earthly conqueror who would free Israel from Rome. But the Kingdom Jesus spoke about was, first of all, a *spiritual* Kingdom established in the hearts and lives of believers (Luke 17:21). God's presence and power dwell in believers in the person of the Holy Spirit.
- 1:6, 7** Like other Jews, the disciples chafed under their Roman rulers. They wanted Jesus to free Israel from Roman power and then become their king. Jesus replied that God the Father sets the timetable for all events—worldwide, national, and personal. If you want changes in your life that God hasn't yet made, don't become impatient. Instead, trust God's timetable.

1:7  
Matt 24:36  
1 Thes 5:1-2

1:8  
Luke 24:48  
John 15:27  
Acts 2:1-4

1:9  
Mark 16:19

1:11  
Rev 1:7

<sup>7</sup>He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

<sup>9</sup>After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. <sup>10</sup>As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. <sup>11</sup>“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

#### *Matthias Replaces Judas*

<sup>12</sup>Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile.\* <sup>13</sup>When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying.

Here are the names of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Zealot), and Judas (son of James). <sup>14</sup>They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>During this time, when about 120 believers\* were together in one place, Peter stood up and addressed them. <sup>16</sup>“Brothers,” he said, “the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. <sup>17</sup>Judas was one of us and shared in the ministry with us.”

<sup>18</sup>(Judas had bought a field with the money he received for his treachery. Falling headfirst there, his body split open, spilling out all his intestines. <sup>19</sup>The news of his death spread to all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name *Akeldama*, which means “Field of Blood.”)

1:12 Greek a Sabbath day's journey. 1:15 Greek brothers.

1:12  
Luke 24:50, 52

1:13  
Matt 10:2-4  
Mark 3:16-19  
Luke 6:14-16

1:14  
Acts 2:42

1:16  
Ps 41:9

1:17  
John 6:70-71  
Acts 1:24-25

1:18  
Matt 27:3-8

- **1:8** The “power” believers receive from the Holy Spirit includes courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority. The disciples would need all these gifts to fulfill their mission. If you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.
- **1:8** Jesus had instructed his disciples to witness to people of all nations about him (Matthew 28:19, 20). But they were told to wait first for the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). God has important work for you to do for him, but you must do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. We often like to get on with the job, even if it means running ahead of God. But waiting is sometimes part of God's plan. Are you waiting and listening for God's complete instructions, or are you running ahead of his plans? We need God's timing and power to be truly effective.
- 1:8** This verse describes a series of ever-widening circles. The Good News was to spread, geographically, from Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth. It would begin with the devout Jews in Jerusalem and Samaria, spread to the mixed race in Samaria, and, finally, be offered to Gentiles all over the world. God's Good News has not reached its final destination if someone in your family, your workplace, your school, or your community hasn't heard the Good News about Jesus Christ. Make sure that you are contributing in some way to the ever-widening circle of God's loving message.
- 1:9-11** After 40 days with his disciples (1:3), Jesus returned to heaven. It was important for the disciples to see Jesus taken up into heaven; they knew without a doubt that he was God and that his home was in heaven. The two white-robed men were angels who proclaimed to the disciples that one day Jesus would return in the same way he had gone—bodily and visibly. History is not haphazard or cyclical; it is moving toward a specific point—the return of Jesus to judge and rule over the earth. We should be ready for his sudden return (1 Thessalonians 5:2), not by standing around “staring into heaven,” but by working hard to share the Good News so that others will be able to share in God's great blessings.
- **1:12, 13** After Christ was taken up into heaven, the disciples

immediately returned to Jerusalem and had a prayer meeting. Jesus had said they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days, so they waited and prayed. When you face a difficult task, an important decision, or a baffling dilemma, don't rush into the work and just hope it comes out the way it should. Instead, make your first step prayer for the Holy Spirit's power and guidance.

**1:13** A “Zealot” could mean anyone zealous for the Jewish law. The Zealots may have been a radical political party working for the violent overthrow of Roman rule in Israel.

**1:14** At this time, Jesus' brothers were with the disciples. During Jesus' lifetime, they had not believed he was the Messiah (John 7:5), but his resurrection must have convinced them. Jesus' special appearance to James, one of his brothers, may have been an especially significant event in their conversion (see 1 Corinthians 15:7).

**1:15-26** This was the first church business meeting. The small group of 11 had already grown to more than 120. The main order of business was to appoint a new disciple, or apostle, as the 11 were now called. While the apostles waited, they were doing what they could—praying, seeking God's guidance, and getting organized. Waiting for God to work does not mean sitting around doing nothing. We must do what we can, while we can, as long as we don't run ahead of God.

**1:16, 17** How could someone who had been with Jesus daily betray him? Judas had received the same calling and teaching as everyone else. But he had chosen to reject Christ. Judas hardened his heart and joined in the plot with Jesus' enemies to put him to death. Judas remained unrepentant to the end, and he finally committed suicide. Although Jesus predicted this would happen, it was Judas's choice. Those privileged to be *close* to the truth are not necessarily *committed* to the truth. See Judas's Profile in Mark 14, p. 1655 for more information on his life.

**1:18** Matthew says that Judas hanged himself (Matthew 27:5); Acts says that he fell. The traditional explanation is that when Judas hanged himself, the rope or branch broke, Judas fell, and his body burst open.

<sup>20</sup>Peter continued, “This was written in the book of Psalms, where it says, ‘Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.’ It also says, ‘Let someone else take his position.’”

<sup>21</sup>“So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—<sup>22</sup>from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.”

<sup>23</sup>So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>Then they all prayed, “O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen <sup>25</sup>as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs.” <sup>26</sup>Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven.

### The Holy Spirit Comes

**2** On the day of Pentecost\* all the believers were meeting together in one place. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. <sup>4</sup>And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages,\* as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

<sup>5</sup>At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

<sup>7</sup>They were completely amazed. “How can this be?” they exclaimed. “These people are all from Galilee, <sup>8</sup>and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! <sup>9</sup>Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome <sup>11</sup>(both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!” <sup>12</sup>They stood there amazed and perplexed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.

<sup>13</sup>But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, “They’re just drunk, that’s all!”

**1:20** Pss 69:25; 109:8. **2:1** The Festival of Pentecost came 50 days after Passover (when Jesus was crucified).  
**2:4** Or in other tongues.

**1:20**  
†Pss 69:25; 109:8  
**1:21-22**  
Mark 1:9-11

**1:24**  
Acts 6:6  
**1:26**  
Prov 16:33

**2:1**  
Lev 23:15-21  
Deut 16:9-11  
Acts 1:14; 20:16

**2:2**  
Acts 4:31

**2:4**  
Mark 16:17  
Acts 4:31;  
10:44-46; 19:6  
1 Cor 12:10; 13:1

**2:7**  
Acts 1:11

**2:9**  
Acts 16:6; 19:10  
1 Pet 1:1

**2:10**  
Matt 27:32  
Acts 13:13; 16:6

**2:13**  
1 Cor 14:23  
Eph 5:18

**1:21, 22** Many consistently followed Jesus throughout his ministry on earth. The 12 disciples were his inner circle, but others shared the disciples’ deep love for and commitment to Jesus.

**1:21-25** The apostles had to choose a replacement for Judas Iscariot. They outlined specific criteria for making the choice. After finalists were chosen, the apostles prayed, asking God to guide the selection process. This gives us a good example of how to proceed when we are making important decisions. Set up criteria consistent with the Bible, examine the alternatives, and pray for wisdom and guidance to reach a wise decision.

**1:26** The disciples became *apostles*. *Disciple* means “follower or learner,” and *apostle* means “messenger or missionary.” These men now had the special assignment of spreading the Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

**2:1** Held 50 days after Passover, Pentecost was also called the Festival of First Harvest. It was one of three major annual festivals (Deuteronomy 16:16), a festival of thanksgiving for the harvested crops. Jesus was crucified at Passover time, and he ascended 40 days after his resurrection. The Holy Spirit came 50 days after the Resurrection, 10 days after the Ascension. Jews of many nations had gathered in Jerusalem for this festival. Thus, Peter’s speech (2:14ff) was given to an international audience, and it resulted in a worldwide harvest of new believers—the first converts to Christianity.

• **2:3, 4** This was a fulfillment of John the Baptist’s words about the Holy Spirit’s baptizing with fire (Luke 3:16) and of the prophet Joel’s words about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28, 29).

Why tongues of fire? Tongues symbolize speech and the communication of the Good News. Fire symbolizes God’s purifying presence, which burns away the undesirable elements of our lives and sets our hearts aflame to ignite the lives of others. On Mount Sinai, God confirmed the validity of the Old Testament law with fire

from heaven (Exodus 19:16-18). At Pentecost, God confirmed the validity of the Holy Spirit’s ministry by sending fire. At Mount Sinai, fire came down on one place; at Pentecost, fire came down on many believers, symbolizing that God’s presence is available to all who believe in him.

• **2:3, 4** God made his presence known to this group of believers in a spectacular way—roaring wind (2:2), fire, and his Holy Spirit. Would you like God to reveal himself to you in such recognizable ways? He may do so, but be wary of forcing your expectations on God. In 1 Kings 19:10-13, Elijah also needed a message from God. First came a great wind, then an earthquake, and finally a fire. But God’s message came in a “gentle whisper.” God may use dramatic methods to work in your life—or he may speak in gentle whispers. Wait patiently and always listen.

• **2:4-11** These people literally spoke in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability—a miraculous attention-getter for the international crowd gathered in town for the festival. All the nationalities represented recognized their own languages being spoken. More than miraculous speaking drew people’s attention, however; they saw the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The apostles continued to minister in the Holy Spirit’s power wherever they went.

**2:7, 8** Christianity is not limited to any race or group of people. Christ offers salvation to all people without regard to nationality. Visitors in Jerusalem were surprised to hear the apostles and other believers speaking in languages other than their own, but they need not have been. God works all kinds of miracles to spread the Good News, using many languages as he calls all kinds of people to become his followers. No matter what your race, color, nationality, or language, God speaks to you. Are you listening?

**2:9-11** Why are all these places mentioned? This is a list of many lands from which Jews had come to the festivals in Jerusalem. These Jews were not originally from Palestine because their

## A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BOOK OF ACTS

Beginning with a brief summary of Jesus' last days on earth with his disciples, his ascension, and the selection of a replacement for Judas Iscariot, Luke moves quickly to his subject—the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church. Pentecost, highlighted by the filling of the Holy Spirit (2:1-13) and Peter's powerful sermon (2:14-42), was the beginning. Then the Jerusalem church grew daily through the bold witness of Peter and John and the love of the believers (2:43-4:37). The infant church was not without problems, however, with external opposition (resulting in imprisonment, beatings, and death) and internal deceit and complaining. Greek-speaking Jewish believers were appointed to help with the administration of the church to free the apostles to preach. Stephen and Philip were among the first deacons, and Stephen became the church's first martyr (5:1-8:3).

Instead of stopping Christianity, opposition and persecution served as catalysts for its spread because the believers took the message with them wherever they fled (8:4). Soon there were converts throughout **Samaria** and even in **Ethiopia** (8:5-40).

At this point, Luke introduces us to a bright young Jew, zealous for the law and intent on ridding Judaism of the Jesus heresy. But on the way to **Damascus** to capture believers, Saul was converted when he was confronted in person by the risen Christ (9:1-9). Through the ministry of Ananias and the sponsorship of Barnabas, Saul (Paul) was welcomed into the fellowship and then sent to **Tarsus** for safety (9:10-30).

Meanwhile, the church continued to thrive throughout **Judea**, **Galilee**, and **Samaria**. Luke recounts Peter's preaching and how Peter healed Aeneas in **Lydda** and Dorcas in **Joppa** (9:31-43). While in **Joppa**, Peter learned through a vision that he could take the gospel to the "unclean" Gentiles. Peter understood, and he faithfully shared the truth with Cornelius, whose entire household became believers (chapter 10). This was startling news to the **Jerusalem** church; but when Peter told his story, they praised God for his plan for *all* people to hear the Good News (11:1-18). This pushed the church into even wider circles as the message was preached to Greeks in **Antioch**, where Barnabas went to encourage the believers. Then he went on to **Tarsus** to find Saul (11:20-26).

To please the Jewish leaders, Herod joined in the persecution of the **Jerusalem** church, killing James (John's brother) and imprisoning Peter. But God freed Peter, and Peter walked from prison to a prayer meeting on his behalf at John Mark's house (chapter 12).

Here Luke shifts the focus to Paul's ministry. Commissioned by the **Antioch** church for a missionary tour (13:1-3), Paul and Barnabas took the gospel to **Cyprus** and south **Galatia** with great success (13:4-14:28). But the Jewish-Gentile controversy still smoldered, and with so many Gentiles responding to Christ, the controversy threatened to divide the church. So a council met in **Jerusalem** to rule on the relationship of Gentile Christians to the Old Testament laws. After hearing both sides, James (Jesus' brother and the leader of the Jerusalem church) resolved the issue and sent messengers to the churches with the decision (15:1-31).

After the council, Paul and Silas preached in **Antioch**. Then they left for **Syria** and **Cilicia** as Barnabas and Mark sailed for **Cyprus** (15:35-41). On this second missionary journey, Paul and Silas traveled throughout **Macedonia** and **Achaia**, establishing churches in **Philippi**, **Thessalonica**, **Berea**, **Corinth**, and **Ephesus** before returning to **Antioch** (16:1-18:22). Luke also tells of the ministry of Apollos (18:24-28).

On Paul's third missionary trip, he traveled through **Galatia**, **Phrygia**, **Macedonia**, and **Achaia**, encouraging and teaching the believers (19:1-21:9). During this time, he felt compelled to go to **Jerusalem**; and although he was warned by Agabus and others of impending imprisonment (21:10-12), he continued his journey in that direction.

While in **Jerusalem**, Paul was accosted in the Temple by an angry mob and taken into protective custody by the Roman commander (21:17-22:29). Now we see Paul as a prisoner and on trial before the Jewish high council (23:1-9), Governor Felix (23:23-24:27), and Festus and Agrippa (25:1-26:32). In each case, Paul gave a strong and clear witness for his Lord.

Because Paul appealed to Caesar, however, he was sent to **Rome** for the final hearing of his case. But on the way, the ship was destroyed in a storm, and the sailors and prisoners had to swim ashore. Even in this circumstance Paul shared his faith (27:1-28:10). Eventually the journey continued and Paul arrived in Rome, where he was held under house arrest while awaiting trial (28:11-31).

Luke ends Acts abruptly with the encouraging word that Paul had freedom in his captivity as he talked to visitors and guards, "boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him" (28:31).

ancestors had been dispersed to other parts of the world through captivities and persecutions. Very likely, some of the Jews who responded to Peter's message returned to their homelands with God's Good News of salvation. Thus, God prepared the way for the spread of the Good News. As you read Acts, you will see how the way was often prepared for Paul and other messengers by people who had become believers at Pentecost. The church at Rome, for example, was probably begun by such Jewish believers.

**2:12** When the gathered crowd recognized that something supernatural was taking place, they naturally wanted an explanation. At this point, Peter stepped forward and explained the truth about

God. This should be the pattern in our lives as well. Hopefully we are living in such a way that people will see Christ in us. If we *do* shine and sparkle (Matthew 5:14; Philippians 2:15) and if we are "salty" (Matthew 5:13), we will get the attention of others. They will surely want to know what is so attractive and different about us. Then we can explain our "Christian hope" (1 Peter 3:15). What is different about your life? What supernatural evidence would cause someone to stop you and say, "What can this mean?"

*Peter Preaches to the Crowd*

<sup>14</sup>Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, “Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this.

<sup>15</sup>These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o’clock in the morning is much too early for that. <sup>16</sup>No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> ‘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.

<sup>18</sup> In those days I will pour out my Spirit  
even on my servants—men and women alike—  
and they will prophesy.

<sup>19</sup> And I will cause wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below—  
blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

<sup>20</sup> The sun will become dark,  
and the moon will turn blood red  
before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives.

<sup>21</sup> But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD  
will be saved.\*

<sup>22</sup> “People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene\* by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. <sup>23</sup>But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. <sup>24</sup>But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. <sup>25</sup>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.

<sup>26</sup> No wonder my heart is glad,  
and my tongue shouts his praises!  
My body rests in hope.

**2:17-21** Joel 2:28-32. **2:22** Or *Jesus of Nazareth*.

**2:17-21**  
†Joel 2:28-32

**2:18**  
Num 11:29  
1 Cor 12:10

**2:20**  
Matt 24:29

**2:21**  
Rom 10:13

**2:22**  
John 3:2

**2:23**  
1 Pet 1:20

**2:24**  
Acts 3:15

**2:25-28**  
†Ps 16:8-11  
Acts 13:30-35

• **2:14** Peter had been an unstable leader during Jesus’ ministry, letting his bravado be his downfall, even denying that he knew Jesus (John 18:15-18, 25-27). But Christ had forgiven and restored him (John 21). This was a new Peter, humble but bold. His confidence came from the Holy Spirit, who made him a powerful and dynamic speaker. Have you ever felt as if you’ve made such bad mistakes that God could never forgive and use you? No matter what sins you have committed, God promises to forgive you and make you useful for his Kingdom. Allow him to forgive you and use you effectively to serve him.

**2:14ff** Peter tells the people that they should listen to the testimony of the believers because the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus had been entirely fulfilled in him (2:14-21), because Jesus is the Messiah (2:25-36), and because the risen Christ could change their lives (2:37-40).

**2:16-21** Not everything mentioned in Joel 2:28, 29 was happening that particular morning. The “last days” include all the days between Christ’s first and second comings and is another way of saying “from now on.” “That great and glorious day of the LORD” (2:20) denotes the whole Christian age. Even Moses yearned for the Lord to put his Spirit upon everyone (Numbers 11:29). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was released throughout the entire world—to men, women, slaves, Jews, Gentiles. Now *everyone* can receive the Spirit. This was a revolutionary thought for first-century Jews.

**2:23** Everything that happened to Jesus was under God’s control. His plans were never disrupted by the Roman government or the

Jewish officials. This was especially comforting to those facing oppression during the time of the early Christian church.

**2:24** Peter spoke forthrightly about the Resurrection. As Peter preached, the events of Christ’s death and resurrection were still hot news, less than two months old. Christ’s execution had been carried out in public before many witnesses. His empty tomb was available for inspection just a short distance away. If Christ had not truly died, Peter’s message would have been laughed at or ignored. If Christ had not been resurrected, authorities could have produced his body and put an end to this new faith. But Peter and the apostles had witnessed the risen Christ. Changed men, they announced the news with great passion and conviction.

Our faith and our credibility also rest on the truth of the empty tomb. Why? For a number of important reasons. According to the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection of Christ means that he is the Son of God and that his word can be trusted. It means that his sacrifice for sin was acceptable to God, so we can be completely forgiven. It means that our Savior is alive and active, able to help us in times of need. It also means that one day we, too, will conquer death. The Christian faith rests on the basic fact of the empty tomb. Don’t neglect this essential part of the gospel when you share your faith with others.

**2:25-32** Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-11—a psalm written by David. He explained that David was not writing about himself because David died and was buried (2:29). Instead, he was writing as a prophet (2:30) who spoke of the Messiah who would be

- 27 For you will not leave my soul among the dead\*  
or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.  
28 You have shown me the way of life,  
and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.\*

2:29  
1 Kgs 2:10  
Acts 13:36  
2:30  
2 Sam 7:12-14  
†Pss 89:4; 132:11

2:31  
†Ps 16:10

2:33  
John 14:26  
Acts 1:4, 8  
Eph 4:8  
Phil 2:9

2:34-35  
†Ps 110:1

29“Dear brothers, think about this! You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn’t referring to himself, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. 30But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David’s own descendants would sit on his throne. 31David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah’s resurrection. He was saying that God would not leave him among the dead or allow his body to rot in the grave.

32“God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. 33Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. 34For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said,

‘The LORD said to my Lord,  
“Sit in the place of honor at my right hand

35 until I humble your enemies,  
making them a footstool under your feet.’”\*

2:36  
Acts 5:30-31

2:37  
Acts 16:30

2:38  
Mark 16:16  
Acts 3:19; 8:12;  
22:16

2:39  
Isa 44:3; 57:19  
Eph 2:13

2:40  
Deut 32:5  
Phil 2:15

36“So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!”

37Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

38Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles\*—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” 40Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!”

41Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

### *The Believers Form a Community*

2:42  
Acts 20:7

42All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper\*), and to prayer.

43A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in

2:44-45  
Acts 4:32-37

2:27 Greek *in Hades*; also in 2:31. 2:25-28 Ps 16:8-11 (Greek version). 2:34-35 Ps 110:1. 2:39 Or *and to people far in the future*; Greek reads *and to those far away*. 2:42 Greek *the breaking of bread*; also in 2:46.

resurrected. The emphasis here is that Jesus’ body was *not* left to rot in the grave but was, in fact, resurrected and glorified.

2:37 After Peter’s powerful, Spirit-filled message, the people were deeply moved and asked, “What should we do?” This is the basic question we must ask. It is not enough to be sorry for our sins. We must repent, ask God to forgive us, and then live like forgiven people. Has God spoken to you through his Word or through the words of another believer? Like Peter’s audience, ask God what you should do, and then obey.

2:38, 39 If you want to follow Christ, you must “repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” To repent means to turn from sin, to change the direction of your life from selfishness and rebellion against God’s laws. At the same time, you must *turn to* Christ, depending on him for forgiveness, mercy, guidance, and purpose. We cannot save ourselves—only God can save us. Baptism identifies us with Christ and with the community of believers. It is a condition of discipleship and a sign of faith.

2:40-43 About 3,000 people became new believers when Peter preached the Good News about Christ. These new Christians

were united with the other believers, taught by the apostles, and included in the prayer meetings and fellowship. New believers in Christ need to be in groups, where they can learn God’s Word, pray, and mature in the faith. If you have just begun a relationship with Christ, seek out other believers for fellowship, prayer, and teaching. This is the way to grow.

2:44 Recognizing the other believers as brothers and sisters in the family of God, the Christians in Jerusalem shared all they had so that all could benefit from God’s gifts. It is tempting—especially if we have material wealth—to cut ourselves off from one another, concerning ourselves with only our interests and enjoying only our own little piece of the world. But as part of God’s spiritual family, it is our responsibility to help one another in every way possible. God’s family works best when its members work together.

need. <sup>46</sup>They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity\*—<sup>47</sup>all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

**2:47**  
Acts 4:4; 6:7  
Rom 14:18

### Peter Heals a Crippled Beggar

**3** Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. <sup>2</sup>As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. <sup>3</sup>When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money.

**3:1**  
Acts 10:3, 9, 30

**3:2**  
Acts 14:8

<sup>4</sup>Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!" <sup>5</sup>The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting some money. <sup>6</sup>But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene,\* get up and\* walk!"

**3:4**  
Acts 13:9; 14:9

**3:6**  
Acts 4:10

<sup>7</sup>Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. <sup>8</sup>He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.

**3:8**  
John 5:14

**3:9**  
Acts 4:16, 21

<sup>9</sup>All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. <sup>10</sup>When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely astounded! <sup>11</sup>They all rushed out in amazement to Solomon's Colonnade, where the man was holding tightly to Peter and John.

**3:10**  
John 9:8

**3:11**  
John 10:23  
Acts 5:12

### Peter Preaches in the Temple

<sup>12</sup>Peter saw his opportunity and addressed the crowd. "People of Israel," he said, "what is so surprising about this? And why stare at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? <sup>13</sup>For it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of all our ancestors—who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's decision to release him. <sup>14</sup>You rejected this holy, righteous one and instead demanded the release of a murderer. <sup>15</sup>You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. And we are witnesses of this fact!

**3:13**  
Exod 3:6, 15  
Matt 22:32  
Acts 5:30; 7:32

**3:15**  
Acts 2:24; 5:30

**2:46** Or and sincere hearts. **3:6a** Or Jesus Christ of Nazareth. **3:6b** Some manuscripts do not include get up and.

**2:46** A common misconception about the first Christians (who were Jews) was that they rejected the Jewish religion. But these believers saw Jesus' message and resurrection as the fulfillment of everything they knew and believed from the Old Testament. The Jewish believers at first did not separate themselves from the rest of the Jewish community. They still went to the Temple and synagogues for worship and instruction in the Scriptures. But their belief in Jesus created great friction with Jews who didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Thus, believing Jews were forced to meet in private homes for Communion, prayer, and teaching about Christ. By the end of the first century, many of these Jewish believers were excommunicated from their synagogues.

**2:47** A healthy Christian community attracts people to Christ. The Jerusalem church's zeal for worship and brotherly love was contagious. A healthy, loving church will grow in numbers. What are you doing to make your church the kind of place that will attract others to Christ?

**3:1** The Jews observed three times of prayer—morning (9:00 AM), afternoon (3:00 PM), and evening (sunset). At these times devout Jews and Gentiles who believed in God often would go to the Temple to pray. Peter and John were going to the Temple for the afternoon prayer service.

**3:2** The Beautiful Gate was an entrance to the Temple, not to the city. It was one of the favored entrances, and many people passed through it on their way to worship. Giving money to beggars was considered praiseworthy in the Jewish religion. So the beggar wisely placed himself where he would be seen by the most people who were on their way to worship at the Temple.

• **3:5, 6** The lame man asked for money, but Peter gave him something much better—the use of his legs. We often ask God to solve a small problem, but he wants to give us a whole new life and help

for all our problems. He may say, "I've got something even better for you." You may ask God for what you want, but don't be surprised when he gives you what you really need.

• **3:6** "In the name of Jesus Christ" means "by the authority of Jesus Christ." The apostles were doing this healing through the Holy Spirit's power, not their own.

**3:7-10** In his excitement, the formerly lame man began to jump and walk around. He also praised God! Then others were awed by God's power. Don't forget to thank people who help you, but also remember to praise God for his care and protection.

**3:11** Solomon's Colonnade was part of the Temple complex built by King Herod the Great in an attempt to strengthen his relationship with the Jews. A colonnade is an entrance or porch supported by columns. Jesus taught and performed miracles in the Temple many times. When the apostles went to the Temple, they were undoubtedly in close proximity to the same religious leaders who had conspired to put Jesus to death.

• **3:11ff** Peter had an audience, and he capitalized on the opportunity to share Jesus Christ. He clearly presented his message by telling (1) who Jesus was, (2) how the Jews had rejected him, (3) why their rejection was fatal, and (4) what they needed to do to change the situation. Peter told the crowd that they still had a choice; God still offered them the opportunity to believe and receive Jesus as their Messiah and as their Lord. Displays of God's mercy and grace, such as the healing of this lame man, often create teachable moments. Pray to have courage like Peter to see these opportunities and to use them to speak up for Christ.

• **3:13-15** Pilate had decided to release Jesus, but the people had clamored to have Barabbas, a murderer, released instead (see Luke 23:13-25). When Peter said, "You killed," he meant it literally. Jesus' trial and death had occurred right there in Jeru-

3:17

Luke 23:34  
Acts 13:27  
1 Tim 1:13

3:18

Pss 22; 41:9;  
69:4, 21  
Isa 50:6; 53:4-11  
Zech 12:10; 13:7  
Luke 24:27, 44, 46

3:19

Acts 2:38; 26:20

3:21

Luke 1:70

3:22

<sup>i</sup>Deut 18:15, 18  
John 1:20-21;  
7:40-41, 52

3:23

Lev 23:29  
Deut 18:19

3:25

<sup>i</sup>Gen 22:18; 26:4  
Rom 9:4-8

3:26

Acts 13:46  
Rom 1:16

4:1

Luke 22:4

16“Through faith in the name of Jesus, this man was healed—and you know how crippled he was before. Faith in Jesus’ name has healed him before your very eyes.

17“Friends,\* I realize that what you and your leaders did to Jesus was done in ignorance. 18But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that he must suffer these things. 19Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. 20Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. 21For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22Moses said, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.’\* 23Then Moses said, ‘Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God’s people.’\*

24“Starting with Samuel, every prophet spoke about what is happening today. 25You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham, ‘Through your descendants\* all the families on earth will be blessed.’ 26When God raised up his servant, Jesus, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways.”

#### *Peter and John before the Council*

**4** While Peter and John were speaking to the people, they were confronted by the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees. 2These leaders were very disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people that through Jesus there is a

3:17 Greek *Brothers*. 3:22 Deut 18:15. 3:23 Deut 18:19; Lev 23:29. 3:25 Greek *your seed*; see Gen 12:3; 22:18.

salem only weeks earlier. It wasn’t an event of the distant past—most of these people had heard about it, and some may very well have taken part in condemning Jesus.

**3:15** The religious leaders thought they had put an end to Jesus when they crucified him. But their confidence was shaken when Peter told them that Jesus was alive again and that this time they could not harm him. Peter’s message emphasized that (1) the people and their religious leaders had killed Jesus (3:17), (2) God had brought him back to life, and (3) the apostles had been witnesses of this fact. After pointing out the sin and injustice of these leaders, Peter showed the significance of the Resurrection, God’s triumph and power over death.

**3:16** Jesus, not the apostles, received the glory for the healing of the lame man. In those days a man’s name represented his character; it stood for his authority and power. By using Jesus’ name, Peter showed who gave him the authority and power to heal. The apostles did not emphasize what *they* could do but what God could do through them. Jesus’ name is not to be used as magic—it must be used in faith. When we pray in Jesus’ name, we must remember that it is Christ himself, not merely the sound of his name, who gives our prayers their power.

**3:18** Some of these prophecies are in Psalm 22, Isaiah 50:6, and Isaiah 53. Peter was explaining the kind of Messiah God had sent to earth. The Jews had expected a great ruler, not a suffering servant.

**3:19** John the Baptist had prepared the way for Jesus by preaching that people should turn from their sins. The apostles’ message of salvation also included the call to repent—acknowledging personal sin and turning from it. Many people want the benefits of being identified with Christ without admitting their own disobedience and repenting. The key to forgiveness is confessing your sin and turning from it (see 2:38).

**3:19, 20** When we repent, God promises not only to cleanse us of our sins but to bring spiritual refreshment. Turning away from sin may at first seem painful because it is hard to break old habits and give up certain sins. But God will give you a better way. As Hosea promised, “Oh, that we might know the LORD! Let us press on to know him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring” (Hosea 6:3). Do you feel a need to be refreshed?

**3:21** The time when God will bring the “final restoration of all things” refers to the Second Coming, the Last Judgment, and the removal of sin from the world.

**3:21, 22** Most Jews thought that Joshua was this Prophet predicted by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). Peter was saying that the Prophet was Jesus Christ. Peter wanted to show that their long-awaited Messiah had come! He and all the apostles were calling the Jewish nation to realize what they had done to their Messiah, to repent, and to believe. From this point on in Acts, we see many Jews rejecting the Good News. So the message went also to the Gentiles, many of whom were open to receive Jesus.

**3:24** The prophet Samuel had lived during the transition between the judges and the kings of Israel, and he had been seen as the first in a succession of prophets. Samuel anointed David king, founding David’s royal line, from which the Messiah eventually came. All the prophets pointed to a future Messiah. For more on Samuel, see his Profile in 1 Samuel 7, p. 419.

**3:25** God had promised Abraham that he would bless the world through Abraham’s descendants, the Jewish race (Genesis 12:3), from which the Messiah would come. God intended the Jewish nation to be a separate and holy nation that would teach the world about God, introduce the Messiah, and then carry on his work in the world. After the days of Solomon, the nation gave up its mission to tell the world about God. Here, too, in apostolic times as well as in the time Jesus spent on earth, the Jews rejected their Messiah.

**4:1** These priests had special influence and were often close relatives of the high priest. The captain of the Temple guard was the leader of the guards who were stationed around the Temple to ensure order. The Sadducees were members of a small but powerful Jewish religious sect that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They were the religious leaders who stood to gain financially by cooperating with the Romans. Most of those who planned and carried out Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion were from these three groups.

• **4:2, 3** Peter and John spoke to the people during the afternoon prayer time. The Sadducees moved in quickly to investigate. Because they did not believe in the Resurrection, they were understandably disturbed with what the apostles were saying. Peter and John were refuting one of their fundamental beliefs and thus threatening their authority as religious teachers. Even though the nation was under Roman rule, the Sadducees had almost unlimited power over the Temple grounds. Thus, they were able to arrest Peter and John for no other reason than teaching something that contradicted their beliefs.

resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup>They arrested them and, since it was already evening, put them in jail until morning. <sup>4</sup>But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so the number of believers now totaled about 5,000 men, not counting women and children.\*

<sup>5</sup>The next day the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law met in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest. <sup>7</sup>They brought in the two disciples and demanded, “By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?”

<sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of our people, <sup>9</sup>are we being questioned today because we’ve done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? <sup>10</sup>Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene,\* the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. <sup>11</sup>For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says,

‘The stone that you builders rejected  
has now become the cornerstone.’\*

<sup>12</sup>There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”

<sup>13</sup>The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup>But since they could see the man who had been healed standing right there among them, there was nothing the council could say. <sup>15</sup>So they ordered Peter and John out of the council chamber\* and conferred among themselves.

<sup>16</sup>“What should we do with these men?” they asked each other. “We can’t deny that they have performed a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it. <sup>17</sup>But to keep them from spreading their propaganda any further, we must warn them not to speak to anyone in Jesus’ name again.” <sup>18</sup>So they called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

4:4 Greek 5,000 adult males. 4:10 Or Jesus Christ of Nazareth. 4:11 Ps 118:22. 4:15 Greek the Sanhedrin.

4:3  
Acts 5:18

4:4  
Acts 4:21

4:6  
Matt 26:3  
Luke 3:2

4:7  
Matt 21:23

4:10  
Acts 2:24; 3:6

4:11  
iPs 118:22  
Isa 28:16  
Matt 21:42  
1 Pet 2:4, 7

4:12  
Matt 1:21  
Acts 10:43  
1 Tim 2:5

4:13  
Matt 11:25

4:15  
Acts 5:34-35

4:16  
John 11:47  
Acts 3:6-10

4:17-19  
Acts 5:28-29

• **4:3** Seldom will sharing the Good News send us to jail as it did Peter and John. Still, we run risks in trying to win others to Christ. We might be willing to face a night in jail if it would bring 5,000 people to Christ, but shouldn’t we also be willing to suffer for the sake of even one? What do you risk in witnessing—rejection, persecution? Whatever the risks, realize that nothing done for God is ever wasted.

**4:5, 6** The rulers, elders, and teachers of religious law made up the Jewish high council—the same council that had condemned Jesus to death (Luke 22:66). It had 70 members plus the current high priest, who presided over the group. The Sadducees held a majority in this ruling group. These were the wealthy, intellectual, and powerful men of Jerusalem. Jesus’ followers stood before the same high council that Jesus had.

**4:6** Annas had been deposed as high priest by the Romans, who then had appointed Caiaphas, Annas’s son-in-law, in his place. Because the Jews considered the office of high priest a lifetime position, however, they still called Annas by that title and gave him respect and authority within the high council. Annas and Caiaphas had played significant roles in Jesus’ trial (John 18:24, 28). They were not pleased that the man they thought they had sacrificed for the good of the nation (John 11:49-51) had followers who were just as persistent and promised to be just as troublesome as he had been.

• **4:7** The high council asked Peter and John by what power they had healed the man (3:6, 7) and by what authority they preached (3:12-26). The actions and words of Peter and John threatened these religious leaders, who, for the most part, were more interested in their reputations and positions than in God. Through the help of the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11), Peter spoke boldly before the council, actually putting the council on trial by showing them that the one they had crucified had risen again. Instead of being

defensive, the apostles went on the offensive, boldly speaking out for God and presenting the Good News to these leaders.

**4:11** The cornerstone unites two walls at the corner of a building and holds the building together. Peter said that the Jews rejected Christ, but now Christ had become the cornerstone of the church (Psalm 118:22; Mark 12:10; 1 Peter 2:7). Without him there would be no church because it wouldn’t be able to stand.

**4:12** Many people react negatively to the fact that there is no other name than that of Jesus to call on for salvation. Yet this is not something the church decided; it is the specific teaching of Jesus himself (John 14:6). If God designated Jesus to be the Savior of the world, no one else can be his equal. Christians are to be open-minded on many issues but not on how we are saved from sin. No other religious teacher could die for our sins; no other religious teacher came to earth as God’s only Son; no other religious teacher rose from the dead. Our focus should be on Jesus, whom God provided as the way to have an eternal relationship with himself. There is no other name or way!

• **4:13** Knowing that Peter and John were untrained, the council was amazed at what being with Jesus had done for them. A changed life convinces people of Christ’s power. One of your greatest testimonies is the difference others see in your life and attitudes since you have believed in Christ.

**4:13-18** Although the evidence was overwhelming and irrefutable (changed lives and a healed man), the religious leaders refused to believe in Christ and continued to try to suppress the truth. Don’t be surprised if some people reject you and your positive witness for Christ. When minds are closed, even the clearest presentation of the facts can’t open them. But don’t give up either. Pray for those people and continue to spread the Good News.

4:20  
1 Jn 1:1, 3

<sup>19</sup>But Peter and John replied, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him?  
<sup>20</sup>We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.”

<sup>21</sup>The council then threatened them further, but they finally let them go because they didn’t know how to punish them without starting a riot. For everyone was praising God <sup>22</sup>for this miraculous sign—the healing of a man who had been lame for more than forty years.

### *The Believers Pray for Courage*

<sup>23</sup>As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. <sup>24</sup>When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: “O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—<sup>25</sup>you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying,

‘Why were the nations so angry?  
Why did they waste their time with futile plans?

<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth prepared for battle;  
the rulers gathered together  
against the LORD  
and against his Messiah.’\*

4:24  
†Exod 20:11  
†Ps 146:6  
4:25-26  
†Ps 2:1-2

<sup>27</sup>“In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. <sup>28</sup>But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will. <sup>29</sup>And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. <sup>30</sup>Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

<sup>31</sup>After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

### *The Believers Share Their Possessions*

<sup>32</sup>All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup>The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s great blessing was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them <sup>35</sup>and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.

4:25-26 Or his anointed one; or his Christ. Ps 2:1-2.

4:27  
Isa 61:1  
Acts 3:13  
4:28  
Acts 2:23  
4:29  
Eph 6:19  
4:30  
Acts 5:12  
4:31  
Acts 2:4; 16:26

4:32  
Acts 2:44  
4:33-35  
Acts 2:45-47

- **4:20** We may sometimes be afraid to share our faith in Christ because people may feel uncomfortable or reject us. But Peter and John’s zeal for the Lord was so strong that they could not keep quiet, even when threatened. If your courage to witness for God has weakened, pray that your boldness may increase. Remember Jesus’ promise, “Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).
- 4:24-30** Notice how the believers prayed. First, they praised God; then they told God their specific problem and asked for his help. They did not ask God to remove the problem but to help them deal with it. We can follow this model when we pray. We may ask God to remove our problems, and he may choose to do so. But we must recognize that often he will leave a problem but give us the strength and courage to deal with it.
- 4:27** Herod Antipas had been appointed by the Romans to rule over the territory of Galilee. For more information on Herod, see his Profile in Mark 6, p. 1629. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor over Judea. He bowed to pressure from the crowd and sentenced Jesus to death. For more information on Pilate, see his Profile in Mark 15, p. 1661.
- 4:28** God is the sovereign Lord of all events, who rules history to fulfill his purposes. What his will determines, his power carries out. No leader, army, government, or council can stand in God’s way.
- **4:29-31** Boldness is not reckless impulsiveness. Boldness requires courage to press on through our fears and do what we know is right. How can we be more bold? Like the disciples,

we need to pray with others. To gain boldness, you can (1) pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to give you courage, (2) look for opportunities in your family and neighborhood to talk about Christ, (3) realize that rejection, social discomfort, and embarrassment are not necessarily persecution, and (4) start where you are by being bolder in small ways.

**4:32** Differences of opinion are inevitable among human personalities and can actually be helpful if handled well. But spiritual unity is essential—loyalty, commitment, and love for God and his Word. Without spiritual unity, the church could not survive. Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians to urge the church in Corinth toward greater unity.

**4:32** None of these Christians felt that what they had was their own, so they were able to give and share, eliminating poverty among them. They would not let a brother or sister suffer when others had plenty. How do you feel about your possessions? We should adopt the attitude that everything we have comes from God, and we are only sharing what is already his.

**4:32-35** The early church was able to share possessions and property as a result of the unity brought by the Holy Spirit working in and through the believers’ lives. This way of living is different from communism because (1) the sharing was voluntary; (2) it didn’t involve *all* private property but only as much as was needed; (3) it was not a membership requirement in order to be a part of the church. The spiritual unity and generosity of these early believers attracted others to them. This organizational structure is not a biblical command, but it offers vital principles for us to follow.

<sup>36</sup>For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means “Son of Encouragement”). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus. <sup>37</sup>He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles.

**4:36**  
Acts 9:27; 11:19-30; 12:25; 13:2

### Ananias and Sapphira

**5** But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. <sup>2</sup>He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife’s consent, he kept the rest.

**5:2**  
Acts 4:34-35, 37

<sup>3</sup>Then Peter said, “Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. <sup>4</sup>The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren’t lying to us but to God!”

**5:3**  
Deut 23:21  
John 13:2

<sup>5</sup>As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. <sup>6</sup>Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

**5:5**  
Acts 2:43

<sup>7</sup>About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup>Peter asked her, “Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?”

“Yes,” she replied, “that was the price.”

<sup>9</sup>And Peter said, “How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too.”

**5:9**  
1 Cor 10:9

<sup>10</sup>Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup>Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened.

### The Apostles Heal Many

<sup>12</sup>The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon’s Colonnade. <sup>13</sup>But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them. <sup>14</sup>Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. <sup>15</sup>As a result of the apostles’ work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. <sup>16</sup>Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil\* spirits, and they were all healed.

**5:12**  
Mark 16:15-20  
John 10:23  
Acts 3:10  
Heb 2:4  
**5:13**  
Acts 2:47

**5:16** Greek *unclean*.

**4:36** Barnabas (Joseph) was a respected leader of the church. He was a Levite by birth, a member of the Jewish tribe that carried out Temple duties. But his family had moved to Cyprus, so Barnabas didn’t serve in the Temple. He traveled with Paul on Paul’s first missionary journey (13:1ff). For more information on Barnabas, see his Profile in chapter 13, p. 1849.

**5:1ff** In Acts 5:1–8:3 we see both internal and external problems facing the early church. Inside, the church had dishonesty (5:1–11), greed (5:3), and administrative headaches (6:1–7). Outside, the church was being pressured by persecution. While church leaders were careful and sensitive in dealing with the internal problems, they could not do much to prevent the external pressures. Through it all, the leaders kept their focus on what was most important—spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**5:3** Even after the Holy Spirit had come, the believers were not immune to Satan’s temptations. Although Satan was defeated by Christ at the cross, he was still actively trying to make the believers stumble—as he does today (Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8). Satan’s overthrow is inevitable, but it will not occur until the last days, when Christ returns to judge the world (Revelation 20:10).

**5:3ff** The sin Ananias and Sapphira committed was not stinginess or holding back part of the money—it was their choice whether or not to sell the land and how much to give. Their sin was lying to God and God’s people, saying they gave the whole amount but holding back some for themselves and trying to make themselves appear more generous than they really were. This act was judged harshly because dishonesty, greed, and covetousness are destructive in a church, preventing the Holy Spirit from work-

ing effectively. All lying is bad, but when we lie to try to deceive God and his people about our relationship with him, we destroy our testimony for Christ.

**5:11** Some read the account of Ananias and Sapphira being struck down and accuse God of being harsh. “I thought God was supposed to be loving and forgiving. I thought all that wrath stuff was for Old Testament times.” With an emphasis on grace and mercy, it’s easy to overlook the equally important truth of God’s holiness. We must remember that God has not changed (Malachi 3:6). He still hates sin as much as he ever did. God’s judgment of Ananias and Sapphira produced shock and fear among the believers, making them realize how seriously God regards sin in the church.

**5:14** What makes Christianity attractive? It is easy to be drawn to churches because of programs, good speakers, size, beautiful facilities, or fellowship. People were attracted to the early church, however, by expressions of God’s power at work; the generosity, sincerity, honesty, and unity of the members; and the character of the leaders. Have our standards slipped? God wants to add believers to his *church*, not just newer and better programs or larger and fancier facilities.

**5:15, 16** People who passed within Peter’s shadow were healed, not by Peter’s shadow, but by God’s power working through Peter. What did these miraculous healings do for the early church? (1) They attracted new believers; (2) they confirmed the truth of the apostles’ teaching; and (3) they demonstrated that the power of the Messiah, who had been crucified and risen, was now with his followers.

### The Apostles Meet Opposition

5:17  
Acts 4:1, 2

5:19  
Acts 12:7-10

5:20  
John 6:63, 68

5:21  
Acts 4:5-6

<sup>17</sup>The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. <sup>18</sup>They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. <sup>19</sup>But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, <sup>20</sup>“Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!”

<sup>21</sup>So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching.

When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council\*—the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought from the jail for trial. <sup>22</sup>But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported, <sup>23</sup>“The jail was securely locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!”

<sup>24</sup>When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were perplexed, wondering where it would all end. <sup>25</sup>Then someone arrived with startling news: “The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple, teaching the people!”

<sup>26</sup>The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would stone them. <sup>27</sup>Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. <sup>28</sup>“Didn’t we tell you never again to teach in this man’s name?” he demanded. “Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!”

<sup>29</sup>But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than any human authority. <sup>30</sup>The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross.\* <sup>31</sup>Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. <sup>32</sup>We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him.”

<sup>33</sup>When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them. <sup>34</sup>But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a

5:21 Greek *Sanhedrin*; also in 5:27, 41. 5:30 Greek *on a tree*.

5:24  
Acts 4:1

5:26  
Matt 14:5; 21:26

5:28  
Matt 23:35; 27:25  
Acts 2:23; 4:18;  
7:52

5:29  
Acts 4:19

5:30  
Acts 10:39

5:31  
Acts 2:33  
Heb 2:10

5:32  
Luke 24:28  
John 15:26-27

5:33  
Acts 7:54

5:34  
Acts 22:3

• **5:17, 18** The apostles experienced power to do miracles, great boldness in preaching, and God’s presence in their lives; yet they were not free from hatred and persecution. They were arrested, put in jail, beaten, and slandered by community leaders. Faith in God does not make troubles disappear; it makes troubles appear less frightening because it puts them in the right perspective.

Don’t expect everyone to react favorably when you share something as dynamic as your faith in Christ. Some will be jealous, afraid, or threatened. Expect some negative reactions, and remember that you must be more concerned about serving God than about the reactions of people (see 5:29).

**5:19** The angel of the Lord gave the apostles a command that, when followed, would lead to a brutal flogging (5:40). If that strikes you as odd, it is probably because of the prevailing idea among many believers that obedience inevitably leads to blessing (defined as “a problem-free, blissful existence”). Serious students of the Bible know, however, that obeying God often results in pain and suffering. They also recognize that being persecuted for Christ is a deeper kind of blessing. What biblical commands, if obeyed, might result in discomfort for you today? Will you commit to live them out anyway?

• **5:21** Suppose someone threatened to kill you if you didn’t stop talking about God. You might be tempted to keep quiet. But after being threatened by powerful leaders, arrested, jailed, and miraculously released, the apostles went back to preaching. This was nothing less than God’s power working through them (4:13)! When we are convinced of the truth of Christ’s resurrection and have experienced the presence and power of his Holy Spirit, we will also have the confidence to speak out for Christ.

• **5:21** The Temple at daybreak was a busy place. Many people stopped at the Temple to pray and worship at sunrise. The apostles were already there, ready to tell them the Good News of new life in

Jesus Christ. Also at daybreak, the 70 men of the high council (also called the Sanhedrin) were gathering, preparing to question the apostles. This was going to be no small trial. The religious leaders would do anything to stop these apostles from challenging their authority, threatening their secure position, and exposing their hypocritical motives to the people.

• **5:29** The apostles knew their priorities. While we should try to live at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18), conflict with the world and its authorities is sometimes inevitable for a Christian (John 15:18). There will be situations where you cannot obey both God and people. Then you must obey God and trust his Word. Let Jesus’ words in Luke 6:22 encourage you: “What blessings await you when people hate you and exclude you and mock you and curse you as evil because you follow the Son of Man.”

**5:34** The Pharisees were the other major party in the Jewish high council with the Sadducees (5:17). The Pharisees were the strict keepers of the law—not only God’s law but hundreds of other rules they had added to God’s law. They were careful about outward purity, but many had hearts full of impure motives. Jesus confronted the Pharisees often during his ministry on earth. Oddly enough, a Pharisee named Gamaliel became an unexpected ally for the apostles, although he probably did not support their teachings. He was a distinguished member of the high council and a teacher. While Gamaliel may have saved the apostles’ lives, his real intentions probably were to prevent a division in the council and to avoid arousing the Romans. The apostles were popular among the people, and killing them might start a riot. Gamaliel’s advice to the council gave the apostles some breathing room to continue their work. The council decided to wait, hoping that this would all fade away harmlessly. They couldn’t have been more wrong. Ironically, Paul, later one of the greatest apostles, had been one of Gamaliel’s students (22:3).

while. <sup>35</sup>Then he said to his colleagues, “Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! <sup>36</sup>Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. <sup>37</sup>After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.

<sup>38</sup>“So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. <sup>39</sup>But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!”

<sup>40</sup>The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.

<sup>41</sup>The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.\* <sup>42</sup>And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: “Jesus is the Messiah.”

5:36  
Acts 21:38

5:37  
Luke 2:1-2; 13:1-2

5:39  
Prov 21:30  
Isa 46:10

5:40  
Matt 10:17  
Mark 13:9

5:41  
Matt 5:10-12  
John 15:21  
1 Pet 4:13

5:42  
Acts 2:46

### Seven Men Chosen to Serve

**6** But as the believers\* rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

<sup>2</sup>So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. <sup>3</sup>And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. <sup>4</sup>Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.”

<sup>5</sup>Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an

6:1  
Acts 2:45; 4:35  
1 Tim 5:3

6:3  
1 Tim 3:7-8

6:4  
Acts 1:14

6:5  
Acts 21:8

5:41 Greek for the name. 6:1 Greek disciples; also in 6:2, 7.

**5:39** Gamaliel presented some sound advice about reacting to religious movements. Unless adherents in these groups endorse obviously dangerous doctrines or practices, it is often wiser to be tolerant rather than repressive. Sometimes only time will tell if they are presenting merely human ideas or if God is trying to say something through them. The next time a group promotes differing religious ideas, consider Gamaliel’s advice, just in case you “find yourselves fighting against God.”

**5:40-42** Peter and John had been warned repeatedly not to preach, but they continued in spite of the threats. We, too, should live as Christ has asked us to, sharing our faith no matter what the cost. We may not be beaten or thrown in jail, but we may be ridiculed, ostracized, or slandered. To what extent are you willing to suffer for the sake of sharing the Good News with others?

- **5:41** Have you ever thought of persecution as a blessing, as something worth rejoicing about? This beating suffered by Peter and John was the first time any of the apostles had been physically abused for their faith. These men knew how Jesus had suffered, and they praised God that he had allowed them to be persecuted like their Lord. If you are mocked or persecuted for your faith, it isn’t because you’re doing something wrong but because God has counted you “worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.”

**5:42** Home Bible studies are not new. As the believers needed to grow in their new faith, home Bible studies met their needs, as well as serving as a means to introduce new people to the Christian faith. During later times of persecution, meeting in homes became the primary method of passing on Bible knowledge. Christians throughout the world still use this approach when under persecution and as a way to build up believers.

**6:1** When we read the descriptions of the early church—the miracles, the sharing and generosity, the fellowship—we may wish we could have been a part of this “perfect” church. In reality, the early church had problems just as we do today. No church has ever been or will ever be perfect until Christ and his followers are united at his second coming. All churches have problems. If

your church’s shortcomings distress you, ask yourself: Would a perfect church allow me to be a member? Then do what you can to make your church better. A church does not have to be perfect to advance the cause of Christ.

**6:1ff** Another internal problem developed in the early church between the Hebrew-speaking Christians (probably local Jews who had been converted) and the Greek-speaking Christians (probably Jews from other lands who had been converted at Pentecost). The Greek-speaking Christians complained that their widows were being unfairly treated. This favoritism was probably not intentional but was more likely caused by the language barrier. To correct the situation, the apostles put seven respected Greek-speaking men in charge of the food distribution program. This solved the problem and allowed the apostles to keep their focus on teaching and preaching the Good News about Jesus.

**6:2** “The Twelve” are the 11 original disciples plus Matthias, who had been chosen to replace Judas Iscariot (1:26).

**6:2-4** As the early church increased in size, so did its needs. One great need was to organize the distribution of food to the poor. The apostles needed to focus on preaching, so they chose others to administer the food program. Each person has a vital part to play in the life of the church (see 1 Corinthians 12). If you are in a position of leadership and find yourself overwhelmed by responsibilities, determine *your* God-given abilities and priorities and then find others to help. If you are not in leadership, you have gifts that can be used by God in various areas of the church’s ministry. Offer these gifts in service to him.

**6:3** This administrative task was not taken lightly. Notice the requirements for the men who were to handle the food program: They were to be well respected and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. People who carry heavy responsibilities and work closely with others should have these qualities. We must look for spiritually mature and wise men and women to lead our churches.

**6:4** The apostles’ priorities were correct. The ministry of the Word should never be neglected because of administrative burdens. Pastors should not try, or be expected to try, to do everything. Instead, the work of the church should be spread out among its members.

6:6  
Num 8:10  
Acts 1:24; 13:3  
1 Tim 4:14

6:7  
Acts 12:24; 19:20;  
21:20

6:9  
Matt 27:32

6:10  
Luke 21:15

6:11  
Matt 26:59-61

6:13  
Acts 7:48; 21:28

6:14  
John 2:19-21  
Acts 21:21

7:2  
Gen 11:31–12:1;  
15:7  
Acts 22:1

7:3  
<sup>1</sup>Gen 12:1

7:4  
Gen 12:5  
Heb 11:8

7:5  
Gen 12:7; 13:15;  
15:2, 18; 17:8; 24:7

7:6  
<sup>1</sup>Gen 15:13-14

7:7  
Exod 3:12

earlier convert to the Jewish faith). <sup>6</sup>These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.

<sup>7</sup>So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

### *Stephen Is Arrested*

<sup>8</sup>Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup>But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. <sup>10</sup>None of them could stand against the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke.

<sup>11</sup>So they persuaded some men to lie about Stephen, saying, "We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God." <sup>12</sup>This roused the people, the elders, and the teachers of religious law. So they arrested Stephen and brought him before the high council.\*

<sup>13</sup>The lying witnesses said, "This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses. <sup>14</sup>We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth\* will destroy the Temple and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

<sup>15</sup>At this point everyone in the high council stared at Stephen, because his face became as bright as an angel's.

### *Stephen Addresses the Council*

**7** Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these accusations true?"

<sup>2</sup>This was Stephen's reply: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia before he settled in Haran.\* <sup>3</sup>God told him, 'Leave your native land and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.'\*

<sup>4</sup>So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran until his father died. Then God brought him here to the land where you now live.

<sup>5</sup>"But God gave him no inheritance here, not even one square foot of land. God did promise, however, that eventually the whole land would belong to Abraham and his descendants—even though he had no children yet. <sup>6</sup>God also told him that his descendants would live in a foreign land, where they would be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. <sup>7</sup>But I will punish the nation that enslaves them,' God said, 'and in the end they will come out and worship me here in this place.'\*

**6:12** Greek *Sanhedrin*; also in 6:15. **6:14** Or *Jesus the Nazarene*. **7:2** *Mesopotamia* was the region now called Iraq. *Haran* was a city in what is now called Syria. **7:3** Gen 12:1. **7:5-7** Gen 12:7; 15:13-14; Exod 3:12.

**6:6** Spiritual leadership is serious business and must not be taken lightly by the church or its leaders. In the early church, the chosen men were commissioned (by prayer and laying on of hands) by the apostles. Laying hands on someone, an ancient Jewish practice, was a way to set a person apart for special service (see Numbers 27:23; Deuteronomy 34:9).

**6:7** Jesus had told the apostles that they were to witness first in Jerusalem (1:8). In a short time, their message had infiltrated the entire city and all levels of society. Even some Jewish priests were being converted, an obvious violation of the wishes of the high council that would endanger their position.

**6:7** The word of God spread like ripples on a pond where, from a single center, each wave touches the next, spreading wider and farther. The Good News still spreads this way today. You don't have to change the world single-handedly; it is enough just to be part of the wave, touching those around you, who in turn will touch others until all have felt the movement. Don't ever feel that your part is insignificant or unimportant.

**6:9** This was a group of Jewish slaves who had been freed by Rome and had formed their own synagogue in Jerusalem.

**6:11** These men lied about Stephen, causing him to be arrested and brought before the Jewish high council. The Sadducees, the dominant party in the council, accepted and studied only the writings of Moses (Genesis—Deuteronomy). In their view, to speak blasphemy against Moses was a crime. But from Stephen's speech (chapter 7), we learn that this accusation was false. Stephen based his review of Israel's history on Moses' writings.

• **6:14** When Stephen was brought before the council of religious leaders, the accusation against him was the same that the religious leaders had used against Jesus (Matthew 26:59-61). The group falsely accused Stephen of wanting to change Moses' customs, because they knew that the Sadducees, who controlled the council, believed *only* in Moses' laws.

**7:1** This high priest was probably Caiaphas, the same man who had earlier questioned and condemned Jesus (John 18:24).

• **7:2ff** Stephen launched into a long speech about Israel's relationship with God. From Old Testament history he showed that the Jews had constantly rejected God's message and his prophets and that this council had rejected the Messiah, God's Son. He made three main points: (1) Israel's history is the history of God's acts in the world; (2) people worshiped God long before there was a Temple, because God does not live in a Temple; and (3) Jesus' death was just one more example of Israel's rebellion against and rejection of God.

• **7:2ff** Stephen didn't really defend himself. Instead, he took the offensive, seizing the opportunity to summarize his teaching about Jesus. Stephen was accusing these religious leaders of failing to obey God's laws—the laws they prided themselves in following so meticulously. This was the same accusation that Jesus had leveled against them. When we witness for Christ, we don't need to be on the defensive. Instead, we can simply share our faith.

<sup>8</sup>“God also gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision at that time. So when Abraham became the father of Isaac, he circumcised him on the eighth day. And the practice was continued when Isaac became the father of Jacob, and when Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs of the Israelite nation.

<sup>9</sup>“These patriarchs were jealous of their brother Joseph, and they sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with him <sup>10</sup>and rescued him from all his troubles. And God gave him favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God also gave Joseph unusual wisdom, so that Pharaoh appointed him governor over all of Egypt and put him in charge of the palace.

<sup>11</sup>“But a famine came upon Egypt and Canaan. There was great misery, and our ancestors ran out of food. <sup>12</sup>Jacob heard that there was still grain in Egypt, so he sent his sons—our ancestors—to buy some. <sup>13</sup>The second time they went, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers,\* and they were introduced to Pharaoh. <sup>14</sup>Then Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and all his relatives to come to Egypt, seventy-five persons in all. <sup>15</sup>So Jacob went to Egypt. He died there, as did our ancestors. <sup>16</sup>Their bodies were taken to Shechem and buried in the tomb Abraham had bought for a certain price from Hamor’s sons in Shechem.

<sup>17</sup>“As the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. <sup>18</sup>But then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. <sup>19</sup>This king exploited our people and oppressed them, forcing parents to abandon their newborn babies so they would die.

<sup>20</sup>“At that time Moses was born—a beautiful child in God’s eyes. His parents cared for him at home for three months. <sup>21</sup>When they had to abandon him, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and raised him as her own son. <sup>22</sup>Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in both speech and action.

<sup>23</sup>“One day when Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his relatives, the people of Israel. <sup>24</sup>He saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite. So Moses came to the man’s defense and avenged him, killing the Egyptian. <sup>25</sup>Moses assumed his fellow Israelites would realize that God had sent him to rescue them, but they didn’t.

<sup>26</sup>“The next day he visited them again and saw two men of Israel fighting. He tried to be a peacemaker. ‘Men,’ he said, ‘you are brothers. Why are you fighting each other?’

<sup>27</sup>“But the man in the wrong pushed Moses aside. ‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us?’ he asked. <sup>28</sup>‘Are you going to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?’ <sup>29</sup>When Moses heard that, he fled the country and lived as a foreigner in the land of Midian. There his two sons were born.

<sup>30</sup>“Forty years later, in the desert near Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to Moses in the flame of a burning bush. <sup>31</sup>When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight. As he went to take a closer look, the voice of the LORD called out to him, <sup>32</sup>‘I am the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses shook with terror and did not dare to look.

<sup>33</sup>“Then the LORD said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. <sup>34</sup>I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groans and have come down to rescue them. Now go, for I am sending you back to Egypt.’\*<sup>k</sup>

7:13 Other manuscripts read *Joseph was recognized by his brothers.* 7:31-34 Exod 3:5-10.

7:8  
Gen 17:10-14;  
21:2-4; 25:26;  
35:23-26

7:9  
Gen 37:28; 39:2  
Ps 105:17

7:10  
Gen 41:37-43  
Ps 105:21

7:11  
Gen 41:54

7:12  
Gen 42:1-2

7:13  
Gen 45:1-4

7:14  
Gen 45:9-10;  
46:26-27  
Deut 10:22

7:15  
Gen 46:5-7; 49:33  
Exod 1:6

7:16  
Gen 23:16-20

7:17-18  
Exod 1:7-8  
Ps 105:24

7:19  
Exod 1:10-11, 22

7:20  
Exod 2:2  
Heb 11:23

7:21  
Exod 2:3-10

7:22  
1 Kgs 4:30  
Isa 19:11

7:23-24  
Exod 2:11-12

7:26-28  
Exod 2:13-14

7:29  
Exod 2:15

7:30-31  
Exod 3:1-4

7:32-34  
Exod 3:4-10

• 7:8 Circumcision was a sign of the promise or covenant God made with Abraham and the entire nation of Israel (Genesis 17:9-13). Because Stephen summarized Israel’s history, he told how this covenant fared during that time. Stephen pointed out that God always had kept his side of the promise, but Israel had failed again and again to uphold its end. Although the Jews in Stephen’s day still circumcised their baby boys, they failed to obey God. The people’s hearts were far from God. Their lack of faith and lack of obedience showed that they had failed to keep their part of the covenant.

7:8 The Jewish rite of circumcision, like Israel’s regular sacrifices and annual feasts, was intended to be a very meaningful event. As with all religious rituals, circumcision was designed to serve as an outer symbol of an inner reality. Those who participated

thoughtfully would be reminded of profound spiritual truths. But we know from our own experiences of repeating the church creeds, saying the Lord’s Prayer, or celebrating ordinances like baptism and the Lord’s Supper, that it is difficult to avoid merely going through the motions. We are often guilty of participating passively and mindlessly in religious exercises. Make it your goal to give God your full attention (body, soul, and spirit) the next time you pray, take Communion, or take part in a church ceremony.

7:17 Stephen’s review of Jewish history gives a clear testimony of God’s faithfulness and sovereignty. Despite the continued failures of his chosen people and the swirling world events, God was working out his plan. When faced by a confusing array of circumstances, remember that (1) God is in control—nothing surprises him; (2) this world is not all there is—it will pass away, but God is eternal; (3) God is just, and he will make things right—punishing the wicked and rewarding the faithful; (4) God wants to use you (like Joseph, Moses, and Stephen) to make a difference in the world.

7:35  
<sup>1</sup>Exod 2:14

7:36  
 Exod 7:3; 12:41

7:37  
<sup>1</sup>Deut 18:15  
 Acts 3:22

7:38  
 Exod 19:1-6  
 Deut 32:45-47

<sup>35</sup>“So God sent back the same man his people had previously rejected when they demanded, ‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us?’ Through the angel who appeared to him in the burning bush, God sent Moses to be their ruler and savior. <sup>36</sup>And by means of many wonders and miraculous signs, he led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and through the wilderness for forty years.

<sup>37</sup>“Moses himself told the people of Israel, ‘God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people.’\* <sup>38</sup>Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God’s people in the wilderness, when the angel spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And there Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us.\*

7:37 Deut 18:15. 7:38 Some manuscripts read *to you*.



# STEPHEN

Around the world, the gospel has most often taken root in places prepared by the blood of martyrs. But before people can *give* their lives for the gospel, they must first *live* their lives for the gospel. One way God trains his servants is to place them in insignificant positions. Their desire to serve Christ is translated into the reality of serving others.

Long before violent persecution broke out against Christians, there was already social ostracism. Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah were usually cut off from their families. As a result, the believers depended on each other for support. The sharing of homes, food, and resources was both a practical and necessary mark of the early church. Eventually, the number of believers made it necessary to organize the sharing. People were being overlooked. There were complaints. Those chosen to help manage were chosen for their integrity, wisdom, and sensitivity to God.

Stephen was an effective administrator and messenger before becoming a martyr. He was named one of the managers of food distribution in the early church. And besides being a good administrator, Stephen was also a powerful speaker. When confronted in the Temple by various antagonistic groups, Stephen’s logic in responding was convincing. This is clear from the defense he made before the Jewish high council. He presented a summary of the Jews’ own history and made powerful applications that stung his listeners. During his defense Stephen must have known he was speaking his own death sentence. Members of the council could not stand to have their evil motives exposed. They stoned him to death while he prayed for their forgiveness. His final words show how much like Jesus he had become in just a short time. His death had a lasting impact on young Saul (Paul) of Tarsus, who would move from being a violent persecutor of Christians to being one of the greatest champions of the gospel the church has known.

Stephen’s life is a continual challenge to all Christians. Because he was the first to die for the faith, his sacrifice raises questions: How many risks do we take in being Jesus’ followers? Would we be willing to die for him? Are we really willing to live for him?

### Strengths and accomplishments

- One of seven leaders chosen to supervise food distribution to the needy in the early church
- Known for his spiritual qualities of faith, wisdom, grace, and power; also known for the Spirit’s presence in his life
- Outstanding leader, teacher, and debater
- First to give his life for the gospel

### Lessons from his life

- Striving for excellence in small assignments prepares one for greater responsibilities
- Real understanding of God always leads to practical and compassionate actions toward people

### Vital statistics

- Occupation: Organizer of food distribution
- Contemporaries: Paul, Caiaphas, Gamaliel, the apostles

### Key verses

“As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ He fell to his knees, shouting, ‘Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!’ And with that, he died” (Acts 7:59-60).

Stephen’s story is told in Acts 6:3–8:2. He is also mentioned in Acts 11:19; 22:20.

7:37 The Jews originally thought this “Prophet” was Joshua. But Moses was prophesying about the coming Messiah (Deuteronomy 18:15). Peter also quoted this verse in referring to the Messiah (3:22).

7:38 Stephen used the word *ekklesia* (translated “assembly”) to describe the congregation or people of God in the wilderness. This word means “called-out ones” and was used by the first-century Christians to describe their own community or “assembly.” Stephen’s point was that the giving of the law through

Moses to the Jews was the sign of the covenant. By *obedience*, then, they would continue to be God’s covenant people. But because they disobeyed (7:39), they broke the covenant and forfeited their right to be the chosen people.

7:38 From Galatians 3:19 and Hebrews 2:2, it appears that God had given the law to Moses through angels. Exodus 31:18 says God wrote the Ten Commandments himself (“written by the finger of God”). Apparently God used angelic messengers as mediators to deliver his law to Moses.

## **STUDY QUESTIONS**

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*Thirteen lessons for individual or group study*

## HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY

It's always exciting to get more than you expect. And that's what you'll find in this Bible study guide—much more than you expect. Our goal was to write thoughtful, practical, dependable, and application-oriented studies of God's word.

This study guide contains the complete text of the selected Bible book. The commentary is accurate, complete, and loaded with unique charts, maps, and profiles of Bible people.

With the Bible text, extensive notes and helps, and questions to guide discussion, *Life Application Bible Studies* have everything you need in one place.

The lessons in this Bible study guide will work for large classes as well as small-group studies. To get everyone involved in your discussions, encourage participants to answer the questions before each meeting.

Each lesson is divided into five easy-to-lead sections. The section called "Reflect" introduces you and the members of your group to a specific area of life touched by the lesson. "Read" shows which chapters to read and which notes and other features to use. Additional questions help you understand the passage. "Realize" brings into focus the biblical principle to be learned with questions, a special insight, or both. "Respond" helps you make connections with your own situation and personal needs. The questions are designed to help you find areas in your life where you can apply the biblical truths. "Resolve" helps you map out action plans for that day.

Begin and end each lesson with prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance, direction, and wisdom.

Recommended time allotments for each section of a lesson are as follows:

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<b>Segment</b>	<b>60 minutes</b>	<b>90 minutes</b>
<i>Reflect on your life</i>	<i>5 minutes</i>	<i>10 minutes</i>
<i>Read the passage</i>	<i>10 minutes</i>	<i>15 minutes</i>
<i>Realize the principle</i>	<i>15 minutes</i>	<i>20 minutes</i>
<i>Respond to the message</i>	<i>20 minutes</i>	<i>30 minutes</i>
<i>Resolve to take action</i>	<i>10 minutes</i>	<i>15 minutes</i>

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All five sections work together to help a person learn the lessons, live out the principles, and obey the commands taught in the Bible.

Also, at the end of each lesson, there is a section entitled "MORE for studying other themes in this section." These questions will help you lead the group in studying other parts of each section not covered in depth by the main lesson.

*"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it" (James 1:22-25).*

# LESSON 1

## SPREADING LIKE WILDFIRE

### ACTS INTRODUCTION

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**1** Give an example of something in your lifetime (trend, political movement, fad) that began very small but then grew rapidly and took the world by storm.

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**2** What factors caused it to have such a great influence?

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Read the introduction to Acts, the chart “A Journey through the Book of Acts,” and the following notes:

1:1     1:1ff

**3** What did the disciples do when Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified (Matthew 26:47-56, 69-75)?

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**4** In Acts we see the disciples as courageous witnesses for Christ. What changed them?

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**5** At first the church was limited to Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. By the end of Acts, the gospel had spread to most of the known world. What factors caused the church to grow so rapidly?

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Jesus promised his followers they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel around the world. Acts tells their story, documenting the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. How were these early believers able to make such a dramatic impact on their world? Fresh from the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, they spoke with holy boldness, taking every opportunity to tell of Christ on the street and in synagogues, homes, prisons, and courtrooms. These men and women were convinced of the truth because they had seen their risen Lord and were filled with the Holy Spirit. God's plan continues today, and he gives us opportunities to spread the word. The Resurrection is real, and the Holy Spirit's power is available. What's stopping us?



**6** How had God prepared the world for the rapid spread of the gospel?

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**7** How has God prepared our world for the spread of the gospel?

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**8** In what parts of the world are churches growing most rapidly? Why do you think this is so?

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**9** Where is your Jerusalem? Samaria? Ephesus? Rome?

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**10** How is your church working to take the gospel to those areas?

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**11** How does your church support missions and evangelism?

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**12** What barriers might be hindering your church's growth?

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**13** What is your place in God's plan? How can you work for the advancement of his Kingdom? (Here are some possibilities: pray, give financial support, help missionaries, reach neighbors, teach Sunday school, greet guests at church, volunteer for a church leadership position, etc.)

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**A** What were some of the key turning points for the early church? What would it take to turn your church around?

**B** What social barriers did the gospel break down? What barriers in your church need to be removed?

**C** What did Peter and Paul have in common? How were they different? How did God use each one uniquely to spread the gospel? How might God use your unique abilities to tell others of Christ?

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