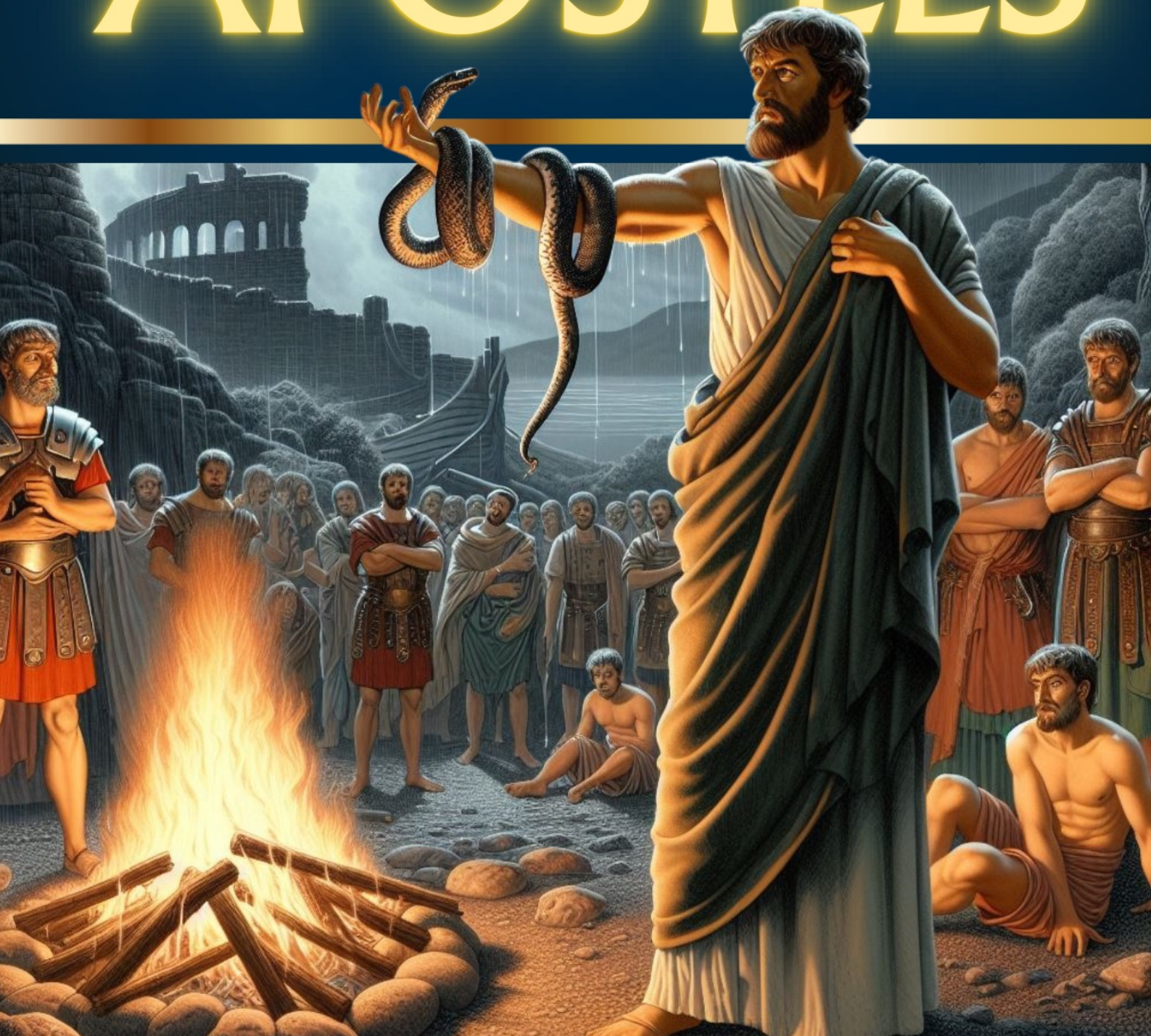


Stories of the APOSTLES



Stories of the Apostles

Bible Stories for Children | Father of Love Stories.

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BIBLE STORIES FOR CHILDREN



Stories of the
APOSTLES
FATHER OF LOVE STORIES

MARLISE SCHNEIDER

Dedicated to my precious children, Lukas and Sarah

Special thanks to Daniel Bernhardt (my husband), Carlos Hernandez,
Anna Pace and Danutasn Brown for their helpful suggestions as this
book was being written.

Marlise Schneider

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1. In the Upper Room

These [the disciples] all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. Acts 1:14



Acts 1 / AA chapter 4

Just before Jesus went back to heaven, He had said to His disciples: “Don’t leave Jerusalem yet; wait for what the Father has promised. He has promised to give you the Holy Spirit, to baptize you with the Holy Spirit. He will give you power to be witnesses for me all over the earth.”

The disciples were waiting for Jesus to fulfill this promise. They were all together in an upper room. Each day they would eat, pray and spend time together. Other believers joined them, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and the brothers of Jesus. Soon there were 120 people gathering each day to pray in the upper room. They would discuss what Jesus had told them and share what had happened during His life, and then compare that with what the Old Testament said. They realized that there were many things they had misunderstood. They asked God to give them the Holy Spirit and to forgive their sins.

When they were not in the upper room praying, they would spend time in the temple. They couldn’t help but tell others that Jesus was alive! The people saw and heard them, and were amazed to see how cheerful and hopeful they were. Just a few weeks before they

had been so scared and hopeless when Jesus was crucified. How different they looked now!

One day, as the group was praying in the upper room, Peter had an idea. “Let’s choose a man to replace Judas, because Judas isn’t with us anymore. He should be a man who knew Jesus ever since He was baptized by John.” After praying and drawing lots, they ended up choosing a man called Matthias.

Day after day, the group kept on praying and asking God to give them more wisdom and knowledge of Him and His ways, to change their hearts and to send them the Holy Spirit. They wanted to be ready for the great work of sharing what they had learned about God to the world. The more time they spent praying together, the closer they felt to each other. By the time the day of Pentecost arrived, they were “all in one accord”, which means there wasn’t a single disagreement or quarrel among them, and they all had the same beliefs. Can you imagine 120 people living together so peacefully in one room?

On the day of Pentecost, they were all sitting in the same room. Suddenly there was a sound from heaven like a strong, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house in which they were sitting. Then they saw that something which looked like split tongues of fire fell upon their heads. Now each of them was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.

Pentecost was a feast day, so Jerusalem was filled with visitors from all over the world who had come to worship at the temple. This meant that thousands of people would be able to see and hear what was happening to the disciples. News of what was happening spread, and soon a huge crowd had gathered. As the visitors watched and listened, they were amazed. Each one could hear the disciples

speaking in his or her own language! “How can this be?” they marveled, “Aren’t these men all from Galilea? How can they be speaking my language? What does this mean?” Of course, there were also people who felt uncomfortable with what was going on, and they scoffed, “Oh, these men are drunk!”

Peter stood up with the other eleven apostles, and he began to preach to the multitude that had gathered. “We’re not drunk,” he explained, “Why would we be drunk when it is only 9.00 in the morning?! What you are seeing today has been prophesied in the book of Joel.” Then Peter spoke about Jesus, “You knew Him; you knew that He was a good man, but because He didn’t do what you wanted, you crucified Him! Yet God has raised Him up from the dead. Jesus fulfilled David’s prophecies and now He is exalted by God. He has received the promise of the Holy Spirit from God, and has passed it on to us, and this is what you are seeing and hearing. Jesus is both Lord and the Messiah.”

The people’s hearts were touched as they listened. They realized how wrong they had been to kill the one whom God had given to save them. “What shall we do?” they asked Peter. They realized how sinful and hardhearted they were, and they wanted to change. Peter comforted them and said, “Repent and be baptized. God has given His promises to you and your children.”

That day, 3,000 people gladly received the message and were baptized. From that day, they worshiped, prayed and ate together. They shared all their things, sold their possessions and gave their money so it could be used for whatever was needed. There was no selfishness among them, and they truly loved one another and helped each other. They would spend time in the temple and together they

praised God. Every day more and more people joined them, because the message they were hearing was so wonderful.

The disciples had prayed earnestly for several weeks, asking God to change their hearts and to give them His Holy Spirit. And God answered their prayer, giving them what they asked, and helping them to witness to thousands of people. God wants to give us the same gift today. We can ask God to do for us what He did for the disciples. Would you like to pray and ask God for the gift of His Spirit today?

2. Healing a Beggar

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Acts 4:12



Acts 3:1-4:31 / AA chapter 6

The disciples of Jesus had received the Holy Spirit and had begun to preach with power and conviction. A few days after this happened, Peter and John went to the temple to worship. At the temple gate they saw something that made them sad: a crippled man was there, begging. He had never been able to walk in his whole life. He had come to Jerusalem a few weeks before, hoping to find Jesus the Healer, but he arrived too late: Jesus had already been crucified. Now he felt hopeless, and all he could do was sit by the gate each morning and beg.

Peter and John passed by him, and the man asked them for money. Peter knew he had something even better than money to offer him. “Look at us,” commanded Peter. Beggars don’t usually like to look at the people they’re begging from, because they feel ashamed to be asking for money. But now he had to look into Peter and John’s faces. “I don’t have silver or gold,” said Peter. This disappointed the man, but Peter continued, “But I give you what I have – in the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk.”

Peter took the man’s right hand and lifted him up. Would this man believe that Jesus could heal him even now? Yes, he believed! He stood up leaping. Joyfully, he walked with Peter and John to the

temple and praised God loudly. Soon a crowd of people gathered around him. They were amazed to see him healed! They began to ask themselves, “Isn’t Jesus dead? How can the disciples have this power?”

Peter looked at the crowd and began to speak to them. “Why do you marvel at this?” he asked the people. “We didn’t do this by our own power or holiness, but through Jesus Christ. Through faith in His name, this man was healed. You rejected Him and killed Him, but God raised Him from the dead and we have seen Him. The prophets wrote about this. If you repent and believe in Jesus, He will gladly forgive you and give you of His Spirit to help you.” Many people heard and believed in Jesus that day.

But not everyone was happy: the priests and leaders did not want people to know that Jesus was alive! What would the people think of them if they realized that Jesus really was the Messiah? They immediately arrested Peter and John and put them in jail for the night. They refused to accept the message that Peter was giving them; they refused to repent of what they had done to Jesus.

The next morning the Jewish leaders brought Peter and John in to judge them. Peter recognized this room: it was the same room where he had denied Jesus. “By what power have you done this?” they asked Peter angrily. Peter responded, “We’ve done this by the power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” He tried to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah, and that only Jesus could give them salvation. As the people listened, they noticed something special in Peter and John. Their faces were peaceful, and their words were loving. This is because Jesus had given them peace. They also saw the healed man standing there, strong and healthy.

After hearing the disciples, the rulers sent them away and talked among themselves: “Yes, the man has been healed; we can’t deny that. But we’ll order them to not preach about Jesus anymore. If they do, we’ll punish them severely.”

Then they brought the disciples back in and ordered them not to preach about Jesus any longer. But Peter and John replied, “Is it right for us to obey you more than God? You judge. But we cannot stop speaking about Jesus.”

The rulers were unhappy. They wished they could punish Peter and John, but the rest of the people were praising God for the miracle, so they couldn’t punish them. While the leaders were deciding what to do, the rest of the believers were praying that God would protect Peter and John. God heard their prayers, and finally, the Jewish leaders let Peter and John go free.

How happy the believers were! They all gathered together and praised God for His protection, and they asked God for more strength to share His message. While they were still praying, the room shook, and again they received the Holy Spirit. Do you realize that none of the believers were afraid when the room shook? This is because they were so close to Jesus that they were assured of His love. If anyone who rejected Jesus had been in that room, they would have been terrified of the shaking. Instead, they felt God was with them and they spoke about His Son more boldly.

Each of the people in this story was given the chance to accept Jesus and His healing. Many accepted Him like the lame man did, but others, such as the Jewish leaders, refused Him. This same choice is ours, too. Jesus longs to give us His Holy Spirit and His power to share the truth about God and salvation with others. Will you accept Jesus as your Savior today, and let Him lead and guide you?

3. Ananias and Sapphira

**Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive,
because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him;
for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.**

John 14:17



Acts 4:32-5:11 / AA chapter 7

The disciples spoke about Jesus whenever they could. It was impossible to be with them and not see that Jesus had changed their lives. More and more people believed in Jesus because of the disciples. Some of these new believers were rejected by their own families for believing in Jesus, and they had nowhere to go. The disciples received these people and gave them food and shelter.

The believers loved each other dearly, and they were “of one heart and one soul.” Those who were rich wanted most of all for the gospel to be shared with everyone, so they did not feel that what they had was theirs to keep; they shared with those who needed it. They sold their properties and laid the money at the apostles’ feet so it could be used for whatever was needed. One of the men who did this was Barnabas, who later became a missionary for Christ. Barnabas means “son of encouragement”, and his great faith in giving his wealth to the movement encouraged everyone.

Another man who decided to share his money was Ananias. He and his wife Sapphira decided to sell their property and give the money to the disciples. But when they had the money in their hands,

they decided they'd rather keep some of it for themselves, and give the apostles only a part of the money. No one had asked them to give this money; it had been their own decision to promise this to God. But now they were planning to break their promise. Without telling anyone, they kept some of the money. Why did they suddenly want to keep some of the money? Didn't they trust that God would take care of their needs? Ananias went and laid the rest of it at the apostles' feet. "No one will know that we kept some of it," they assured each other.

But God did know. Could God keep on blessing them if they were purposely breaking their promise to Him, and lying to Him like this? If only they trusted God enough to admit that they did not feel comfortable giving all of it!

The Holy Spirit let Peter know what was happening, and Peter said to Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep part of the price? You've lied not to men, but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he was faced with his sin and could have repented, but he didn't. Terror took hold of him. With his choice he left God's hedge of protection, and God could no longer protect him. Satan was able to do what he wished with him, and Ananias died instantly. Some of the young men took Ananias out and buried him.

Three hours later, Sapphira came to where the disciples were. She did not know what had happened. Peter spoke to her, giving her a chance to confess her sin. He asked her, "Did you sell the land for this much money?" "Yes," she lied. Now Peter spoke to her seriously, saying, "Why did you agree together to tempt the Spirit of God? Those who have buried your husband are ready to carry you out."

She was also faced with her sin and refused to confess it, and she, too, died instantly. The young men took her out and buried her.

The believers heard the story and were fearful. It was clear that no one could deceive God. Lying is not a part of God's kingdom, because Jesus is the truth. There is no room for lies or deceit among God's people. The message of the gospel is all about giving people the truth. Will you come to Jesus, the truth, so that He can give you of His Spirit and help you be truthful?

4. Peter and John before the Sanhedrin

**Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said,
We ought to obey God rather than men.
Acts 5:29**



Acts 5:12-42 / AA chapter 8

Peter and John were in jail. Why? The Jewish leaders had arrested them because they had not stopped telling others about Jesus. The leaders were scared. They saw that the disciples were not only teaching about Jesus; they were healing in the name of Jesus. They saw that sick people were brought to Peter, and all of them were healed, even if only Peter's shadow passed over them. It seemed as if God was with the disciples and not with them.

The Jewish leaders should have been happy to see so many people being healed and blessed, but instead, they were angry. "If all of these people believe in Jesus, we will lose our power and authority," they thought. So they put Peter and John in prison to stop them from spreading the message that Jesus was the Son of God and represented what God was like.

But God would not let them stay in prison this time. During the night, the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and went to Peter and John. The angel commanded them, "Go, stand and teach the people in the temple." Peter and John gladly did this. They left

the prison, and early in the morning they went into the temple and began to preach again.

While all this was happening, the Jewish rulers thought that Peter and John were still safely locked in the prison. Imagine how they felt the next morning when a messenger came to tell them, “The doors are locked and the guards are all at their posts, but we can’t find the prisoners!” Then someone else came with more surprising news: “The men you put in prison are now preaching in the temple!”

The rulers were stunned. They decided to bring the apostles in. They were afraid to hurt them because the people loved them, but they wanted to accuse them anyway. The high priest said to Peter and John, “Didn’t we command you not to teach in this name? Yet you’re filling Jerusalem with these teachings, and people are saying that we killed Jesus!” To this, Peter could only answer, “We should obey God rather than man.” It didn’t matter if the rulers didn’t want the name of Jesus to be preached; the apostles would do it anyway, because that’s what God had called them to do.

Peter tried once more to convince the Jewish leaders to believe in Jesus and to repent of having crucified Him. But sadly, they refused to accept what he was telling them. The Jewish leaders couldn’t believe that this was the way the Messiah would act: that He would choose humble fishermen as His disciples and teach about God’s love without leading them in victory over the Romans.

The leaders were angry. “Let’s kill these men,” they decided among themselves. But then an older, wiser Pharisee named Gamaliel spoke up. “Don’t do anything to these men,” he advised, “If what they’re doing comes from men, then it will fade away, just like other teachings that were not from God. If this is from God, you won’t be able to stop it. What if you’re fighting against God?”

The leaders listened to Gamaliel and agreed to follow his advice. They decided to set the apostles free, but before that, they whipped them and ordered them to stop preaching about Jesus. Peter and John left the council feeling joyful. Jesus had suffered so much for them, and now they had been given a chance to suffer for Him, and to talk about Him to the leaders. After this, did they stop preaching about Jesus? No, they didn't. They obeyed God rather than men, so they continued going to the temple and visiting houses each day to share the news about Jesus with others.

The apostles respected their leaders and obeyed them, but they obeyed God first. It was God's will that the people learn about the Son of God so that they would know about the Father more. When the leaders ordered them to do something that was against God's will, they refused to obey them, because God was first in their lives. Their love for God was so strong that they could not imagine doing anything else. Will you ask God to help you get to know Him more today? The more you know Him, the more you will want to do His will, even if it is against what others tell you to do. Do you believe that you have something to share to others that they need? Will you obey God rather than men?

5. Stephen

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.
Acts 7:55

 Acts 6, 7 / AA chapters 9 and 10

The group of believers was getting larger. Those who had riches were still sharing with those who were in need. But after a while, the group began to have some problems. The Greek¹ believers came to the apostles and complained, “Why are the Greek widows being neglected? Why aren’t they receiving help like the Jewish widows are?”

The apostles alone could not keep up with all the work of caring for so many people. It was time to get others to help. The Holy Spirit led the apostles to choose seven men as deacons. These men would take care of the money that the church had, and to make sure that those who needed help would receive it. The apostles would then be able to use all their time to preach and to pray.

The believers chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas as deacons. They watched as the apostles prayed and laid their hands on them, to dedicate them for this work. These men were a huge help to the ministry. Because they had been chosen to be deacons, people respected them and listened to what

¹ The “Greeks” or “Greek Jews” mentioned in these stories were actually Jews who had adopted Greek customs and the Greek language. On the other hand, the “Jews” were those who had always kept their Jewish language and customs and had refused to adopt the Greek culture.

they had to say. The deacons didn't only help poor people; they also taught God's Word. Their work helped to bring more believers into the faith, including some of the priests.

One of these deacons was Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit". He was Jewish, but he spoke Greek and preached in the synagogues of the Greek Jews. He discussed the truth with rabbis and spoke with power.

The priests and rulers didn't like what Stephen was doing, so they decided to kill him. They brought him to the Sanhedrin for trial and accused him of teaching dangerous doctrines. They even brought false witnesses to tell lies about him.

After all the accusations and lies were spoken, they allowed Stephen to stand up and speak. As he stood, everyone noticed that his face shone like the face of an angel. This made the leaders tremble with fear, but they refused to repent from what they were doing.

Stephen lovingly tried to convince them to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. He showed them how the Scriptures spoke of Jesus. He spoke powerfully about how in their history their ancestors had also made mistakes and killed innocent men, so they shouldn't be surprised that they would do it again. But the high priest refused to accept Stephen's words. Instead of repenting, he ripped his robe to show how furious he was. Stephen tried once more to convince him, "Please repent. You are resisting the Holy Spirit, just like your fathers did."

When he said this, the priests seized him in anger, ready to kill him. But Stephen was not afraid to die. He looked up into heaven and saw a beautiful vision. He said, "I see the gates of heaven opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." Stephen's accusers did

not want to hear any more. They covered their ears and yelled so that no one would be able to hear what Stephen was saying. They took him outside the city and stoned him. As they did, Stephen prayed, saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” He knelt down and also prayed, “Don’t charge this sin against them!” Then he died, with forgiveness in his heart, just like Jesus did.

What the Jews had just done to Stephen was against the law of the Roman empire; by law they were not allowed to kill anyone. But they paid large sums of money to the Roman authorities, and they got away with what they did.

A young man called Saul of Tarsus had been watching everything. He even helped the false witnesses by caring for their coats while they accused Stephen. He had been an active part of this terrible act against Stephen. After Stephen died, Saul thought about what he had seen and heard. He began to believe that Stephen had been right and they had been wrong, but for a long time he could not accept that he had been wrong. The thought that he had been part of such a horrible act made him feel terribly guilty, so he tried to convince himself that Stephen had been wrong. To calm his conscience, he decided to fight against the believers even harder, and he persecuted them constantly.

The believers were heartbroken by the loss of their beloved Stephen. They missed him. But they were comforted as they remembered his words, his vision and his shining face just before he died. They knew that Jesus would be with them no matter what happened, and they could trust Him just like Stephen did. Will you trust Jesus, too, no matter what happens?

6. Philip the Traveling Missionary

**If any man serve me, let him follow me;
and where I am, there shall also my servant be:
if any man serve me, him will my Father honor.
John 12:26**



Acts 8 / AA chapter 11

The Jewish leaders, especially Saul, persecuted the church constantly. Saul went into houses, dragged the believers out and put them in prison. The Christians didn't fight back, because Jesus told them not to resist with violence. This made them seem like easy targets, but there were unbelievers who were watching. When they saw how cruelly the Christians were treated, they felt sympathy for them, and they were curious to know how the Christians could be so meek and gently, and what kind of God they had.

There was one Pharisee who protected, defended and encouraged the believers; he tried to stop the Jews from persecuting the church. Who was this Pharisee? It was Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus one night to privately speak to him. The first time Nicodemus spoke to Jesus, he had done it in hiding, afraid that anyone would find out that he was interested in meeting Jesus. But now Nicodemus was not ashamed anymore. He let others know that he believed in

Jesus, even if it meant that the Jewish leaders would make fun of him.

The persecution became so bad that several believers moved to other areas. They settled in cities far away, and wherever they went, they spoke to others about Jesus. One of these men was Philip. He moved to Samaria. When he began to preach about Jesus, the Samaritans welcomed him, because they remembered that Jesus accepted them when other Jews didn't. Here Philip was able to heal the sick and to free people from demons in the name of Jesus. Soon there were so many new believers in Samaria that Philip had to invite other apostles from Jerusalem to come and help him.

The Samaritans who accepted Jesus were filled with joy. But there was one Samaritan who watched what was going on and felt confused. This man was called Simon the Sorcerer. He was a magician, and was used to having people listen to him and respect him. But now the people were choosing to believe in Jesus, and they were asking to be baptized. Even Simon the sorcerer believed and was baptized. He watched in amazement as Philip performed miracles in the name of Jesus.

Soon Peter and John arrived from Jerusalem to help Philip in Samaria. As Simon watched, they prayed for the new Samaritan believers and laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Simon was amazed. He wanted to do what Peter and John were doing! He went to them and offered them money. He begged, "Give me this power too, so that I can lay my hands on people and they can receive the Holy Spirit!" Peter answered him seriously, "The gift of God cannot be bought with money. Your heart is not completely united with God. Repent and pray to God about this. You still have bitterness in your heart, and you're trapped in sin."

Simon thought about what Peter was saying. He realized that he was following Jesus for the wrong reasons. He had gotten baptized because he thought he would gain more power and honor by following Jesus; but he didn't truly love Jesus. When he realized this, he repented. He wanted to follow Jesus out of love. He said to Peter, "Pray to God for me. I don't want to be trapped in sin!"

Now that the message had been preached in Samaria, an angel told Philip to travel to a town called Gaza. Here Philip found an Ethiopian eunuch, a man who worked for the queen of Ethiopia. This man had come to Jerusalem to worship God during the feast, and was now returning home. Philip noticed that he was reading the book of Isaiah.

"Do you understand what you're reading?" Philip asked him kindly. The eunuch replied, "How can I understand it, unless someone explains it to me?" He was glad to let Philip sit with him in his carriage and explain the Scriptures to him. Philip showed him that the prophecies in Isaiah talked about Jesus. While they were riding, they reached a place with water. The eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What stops me from being baptized?" Philip gladly answered, "If you believe with all your heart, you may be baptized." The eunuch assured Philip, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

They stopped right there, and Philip baptized him. When they came out of the water, the Spirit took Philip away to another city, and the eunuch didn't see him anymore. But this man had found what he longed for: salvation in Jesus. He continued his journey rejoicing in what God had done for him that day. What a wonderful message he had to share with his people in Ethiopia!

Philip, Peter and John were willing to go wherever God asked them to be. They felt honored and joyful to help others to get to know

about Jesus. How might God use you today to help others? Will you ask Him to help you learn more of Him, and to show you how you can share Him with others today?

7. From Persecutor to Disciple

**Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:
old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.
1 Corinthians 5:17**



Acts 9:1-18; 22:13-16; 26:16-18 / AA chapter 12

Saul of Tarsus was a smart and talented young Pharisee. He had studied with the best rabbis and was ready to do anything to defend the Jewish beliefs, even if it meant persecuting Christians. He, like the other Pharisees, thought that the Christians were teaching people not to keep the law because the Christians didn't follow many traditions. The Christians were teaching a new way of relating to God, following their master Jesus – and to people like Saul, it seemed wrong and dangerous.

The day that Stephen was killed, he had been there, supporting the false witnesses and watching all that happened. The more Saul thought about it, the more he felt that Stephen had been right, and they had been wrong. This worried him, and he spoke to his leaders about it, but they convinced him that he hadn't done anything wrong. Saul decided to listen to them. He could not bear to think that he had done such a terrible thing, so to calm his conscience, he began to persecute the Christians in terrible ways. He believed this was “doing God service”. Jesus had warned the disciples that this would happen.

One day Saul decided to travel to Damascus. He knew there were believers there, and he wanted to persecute as many as he could. He even had a letter from the high priest saying that he was allowed to do this.

He set off on his journey with a few other men. At midday, a bright light from heaven suddenly surrounded them. Saul, blinded and confused, fell to the ground. A voice spoke to him in Hebrew, saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The voice replied, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. You are hurting yourself by rebelling against me.” Saul’s companions were afraid. They heard a voice, but could see no one. But Saul understood the voice and he knew that the Son of God was speaking to him.

He realized how wrong he had been in persecuting the Christians. He believed the voice and repented. “Lord, what will you have me do?” he asked. Jesus answered him, “Rise, go into the city, and you will be told what to do.”

When the bright light left them, Saul arose, and he noticed that he was blind. His companions had to lead him by the hand into Damascus. He found the house of Judas the disciple, and stayed there. For the first three days, he didn’t eat or drink anything. He just sat there, alone and blind. None of the believers wanted to come near him, because they were afraid of him. What if he was acting? Was he really not going to persecute them anymore?

Saul spent those days thinking and praying. He thought of what he had done to Stephen and to so many other believers, and he was horrified. He realized how deeply humans could fool themselves, thinking they were doing right when actually they were doing great evil. He begged God for mercy and forgiveness. He repeated the

Scriptures in his mind, and it became clear to him that Jesus really was the Son of God.

Meanwhile, a believer called Ananias received a vision from God. In the vision, Jesus said to him, “Go to the house of Judas and ask for Saul of Tarsus. He has received a vision telling him that you will come in and put your hands on him so that he might receive his sight.”

Ananias could hardly believe what he was hearing. He said, “Lord, I have heard so much about this man! He has done so much evil to the believers, and he has the authority to arrest anyone who believes in you!” But Jesus answered, “Go; I have chosen him to teach the Gentiles, kings and Israelites about me.”


Ananias did not question anymore. He believed Jesus and went straight to Judas’ home, found Saul and placed his hands on his head. He said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way, has sent me, that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something that looked like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again.

Ananias assured Saul, “The Lord has chosen you to be a witness for him. Now don’t wait any longer; arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins.” And Saul was baptized. He was no longer Saul the persecutor; he was now a believer in Jesus Christ. He had experienced the great forgiveness of God, and wanted to share that with the world.

After meeting Jesus, Saul changed from being a persecutor to a preacher. He allowed Jesus to change him completely. Jesus can make changes in our lives which might seem impossible, but if we accept Him, He will do this work in us. Will you let Him make the changes that need to be made in your life?

8. Paul as a New Convert

**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ:
for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;
to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.
Romans 1:16**

 *Acts 9:19-30 / AA chapter 13*

Saul had now become a Christian. He had another name, Paul, and after he accepted Jesus, people called him Paul more often than Saul. After Paul received his sight, he stayed with the Christians for a few days. Part of the time he spent with the believers, but the rest of the time he went into the synagogue and preached that Christ is the Son of God. “Jesus fulfills everything that is written in the Scriptures! He is the way for us to understand God more deeply!” Paul explained, “Won’t you believe that He is the Messiah?”

The Jews listened, surprised. “He’s joined the Christians!” they said in wonder, “Isn’t he the one that used to destroy them before?” They didn’t want to accept what Paul was preaching, but they realized they could not argue against what he was saying, either. This made them angry, and they began to hate him and to speak against his teachings. Their hatred became so great that Paul began to be in danger.

During the night, an angel came to Paul. “You need to leave Damascus for a while,” the angel instructed. Paul obeyed. He went to the desert in Arabia, and there he spent time with God. He read the

Scriptures, prayed and repented again. Here he understood that God had chosen him for a special work: he would be a minister for God among the Gentile people. After this special time in the desert, Paul bravely returned to Damascus.

As soon as the Jews found out that Paul was back, they planned to kill him. They shut the city gates so that Paul would not be able to leave. Paul's friends prayed and asked God to show them how to help Paul. Then they had the answer: Paul could escape from a window of the city wall! The window was too high up for Paul to jump down, but his friends knew what to do: they found a huge basket and a long, thick rope. Then, when it was dark outside, Paul got inside the basket, and his friends lowered him down the wall. Since it was dark, no one saw him go down the wall, and no one saw him leave the city. Once more, God had kept him safe!

Paul went to Jerusalem. He was eager to meet with the believers there and share his story with them. But what do you think happened when he went to them? They were afraid and stayed away from him! They could not believe that he had been converted. Yet there was one believer who was too kind-hearted to reject Paul. His name was Barnabas, and he decided to take a risk and hear Paul, and he believed his story. Barnabas then brought Paul to the other disciples, and convinced them that what he was saying was true.

The believers had now accepted Paul, so he felt ready to speak to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. He knew them well, because he had worked with them before. He hoped they would be sincere and honest, and that they would see that Jesus really was the Son of God. But sadly, they refused to believe, and just like the Jews in Damascus, they planned to kill Paul.

When Paul was praying at the temple, an angel came to him once more and said, “Hurry, leave Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.” Paul wished he didn’t have to leave. He still hoped that he would be able to convince the Jews about Jesus. He answered, “Lord, they know that I persecuted those who believed in you. I even took part in Stephen’s death!” But the angel insisted, “Leave. I will send you to the Gentiles.” The believers helped Paul to leave Jerusalem secretly.

Even though Paul was saddened that the leaders that he knew and loved had rejected Christ, he was not ashamed to continue being a witness for Jesus. He had come to know and love Jesus so well, that living for Him was what was most important to him. How well do you know Jesus? Are you so close to Him that you are not ashamed to follow Him, even if those around you do not? Will you ask Jesus to help you get to know Him more today?

9. Peter and the Jewish Believers

Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases.

Luke 9:1



Acts 9:31-43 / AA chapter 14

The Jews had been persecuting the church, but this did not go on forever. The persecution finally stopped, at least for some time, and the believers in Judaea, Galilea and Samaria now had the peace and freedom to share Jesus with others.

Peter enjoyed this new freedom to visit the Jewish believers in other towns around the area. First, he traveled to a town called Lydda. There he found Aeneas, a man who had been sick with palsy for eight years. Peter knew how to help him. Full of faith in Jesus, he commanded, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ makes you whole. Arise and make your bed.” Aeneas believed and stood up immediately. When the people saw Aeneas standing and walking, they believed in Jesus.

Then Peter was called to the nearby town of Joppa. “Please come! One of the women in our church has died!” the believers begged. Peter came immediately. The believers took him to an upper room where they had laid her body. Peter listened as the believers told him about this woman. Her name was Dorcas, and she had been a kind, loving woman. The widows cried and showed Peter some

coats. “She made these for us. She was always making clothes for the poor. And she would visit the sick and comfort those who were sad.”

Then Peter asked everyone to leave the room. Once he was alone, he knelt down and prayed, asking God to give life and health back to Dorcas. Then he said, “Dorcas, arise.” And she opened her eyes, saw Peter and sat up. The church at Joppa was filled with joy and gratefulness to have their beloved Dorcas with them again!

What a wonderful work God had given Peter! He worked especially among the Jewish believers, encouraging and teaching them. He was even given the power to perform the wonderful miracles in this story. How was he able to do this? By being close to Jesus and having faith in Him.

Would you like to get to know Jesus like Peter did? Would you like to be able to help others with Jesus, just like Peter did? Ask Him to help you get to know Him a little more today.

10. Peter and the Gentile Believers

**Then Peter opened his mouth, and said,
Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:
But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is
accepted with him. Acts 10:34-35**



Acts 10:1-11:18 / AA chapter 14

Peter was happy to work among the Jewish believers. He gladly visited, taught and healed them. But he was still not comfortable working among Gentiles, or people who were not Jewish. As a Jew, he had been taught that only Jewish people could receive God's blessings. He would need to learn that God loves all people, not just the Jews.

There was a Gentile man in Caesarea who loved God and wished to worship him. This man's name was Cornelius, and he was a wealthy Roman Centurion (a high-ranking soldier). He knew the Jews worshiped the true God, and he worshiped God as best as he could. He always asked God to guide him in his activities. He also helped poor people, and both Jews and Gentiles knew him as a good man. In spite of all this, he could not be a part of the Jewish synagogue, even though he supported it with money, simply because he was a Gentile. The Jews would not accept to worship with a Gentile.

One day at around 3:00 in the afternoon, Cornelius was fasting and praying. He wanted to know God better, but he wasn't sure how

to learn more about God, or where to go. Suddenly, an angel came to him. Cornelius was afraid, and asked, “What is it, Lord?” The angel answered, “God has heard your prayers. Now send men to Joppa to ask for a man called Simon Peter.” Cornelius quickly sent two of his servants and a soldier to fetch Peter.

Meanwhile, Peter was praying on the rooftop. By now it was lunchtime, and Peter was hungry, but the food wasn’t ready yet. Suddenly Peter saw a vision: heaven opened, and a huge sheet tied at the four corners came down. Inside the sheet were all kinds of unclean animals, and a voice from heaven said, “Arise, Peter, kill and eat.” What a strange vision! Peter was surprised. He looked at the animals and said, “Oh, no, Lord, I have never eaten anything unclean!” The voice answered, “What God has made clean, you should not call unclean.” This happened three times, then the sheet was taken up to heaven again.

What did this strange vision mean? The animals in the sheet were all unclean; they were animals that the Jews did not eat because the Scriptures said that unclean animals should not be eaten. And it was good to know which animals are clean and which are unclean because it protected them from eating unhealthy foods, but the problem with the Jewish people was that they also believed that certain people were clean and unclean. They believed that the Jews were clean, and the Gentiles were unclean. Because they believed this, they did not share God with other nations, because they believed God wouldn’t bless non-Jews. It was time for them to stop believing this lie. It was time for the disciples to preach to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. So far, they had only preached to the Jews. Through this vision, God was trying to teach Peter that the gospel is for all nations, not just for the Jews.

The servants of Cornelius arrived just when Peter was thinking about this vision. Then the Spirit said to Peter, “There are three men looking for you. Go with them, because I have sent them.” Peter met them, and they explained, “An angel told Cornelius to send for you, so you can teach him.”

For Peter, it was quite strange to have to go to the home of a Gentile man, because this was something Jewish people didn’t do. But he trusted in God’s leading, and asked six other believers to travel to Caesarea with him and Cornelius’ servants.

Cornelius was overjoyed to see Peter. He was so grateful to have a teacher in his home, that he knelt down and worshiped Peter. Because he knew so little about God, he didn’t know that this was wrong. Peter instantly stopped him and kindly helped him to stand up, saying, “Stand up; I am also just a man!” He explained that only Jesus and His Father were to be worshiped.

Then Peter looked and saw that all of Cornelius’ relatives and close friends had gathered there, patiently waiting to listen to him. Peter was amazed. He said, “Jews are not allowed to be with Gentiles, but God has shown me that I should not call other people unclean.” Then he kindly asked Cornelius, “What did you call me here for?” Cornelius told him his story, and he added, “We are all here present before God, to hear what God has commanded you.” Peter said to them, “Now I know that God loves all people, and He accepts believers in every nation.”

Now Peter started preaching about Christ. Cornelius and his friends and family had not heard much about Jesus before, so all of this was new to them. They listened attentively. As Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on those who were listening. The Holy Spirit was falling upon Gentiles! The Jewish believers that had come

with Peter were astonished; these Gentiles were now speaking in other languages and praising God! Peter asked joyfully, “Can anyone stop these people from being baptized? They have received the Holy Spirit just like we have.” He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Sadly, not all the Jewish believers felt as joyful as Peter. Most of them still thought that it was wrong to be in the home of Gentiles, and they were upset to hear about what Peter had done. As soon as Peter returned to them, they scolded him. But Peter told them the whole story, and he pleaded, “Please, don’t view Gentiles as unclean any longer. God gave them the same gift that He gave to us. How can I go against God?” When the believers heard this, they accepted what Peter said, and they glorified God. The Gentiles could also receive the gospel! The Jewish believers could now begin to see Gentiles as people whom God also loved. The message could now be shared with the whole world!

How wonderful that the gospel is for everyone, and not only for certain people! God invites everyone to come to Him. It is up to us to accept His invitation. Will you accept His invitation today?

11. Delivered from Prison

**The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him,
And delivereth them.
Psalm 34:7**



Acts 12:1-23 / AA chapter 15

There was a new King Herod on the throne now (not the same King Herod that killed John the Baptist). This king worshiped with the Jews, and he began to persecute the Christians again because he wanted to make the Jewish leaders happy. He destroyed the homes of Christians, and put many of them in prison. Then he did something that brought much sadness to the believers: he had James killed with a sword. James was the first apostle who died for believing in Jesus.

The Jewish leaders were glad that one of the apostles had died. But they did not like that the king had killed him secretly. “He should have killed James in front of a crowd of people, so that others will be afraid of believing in Jesus,” they said. King Herod heard them and decided to do things better. He put Peter in prison and decided to wait. He wanted to kill Peter, but in a way that would make the Jewish leaders happy.

The Christians were filled with grief. James had just died. Would they lose Peter as well? The believers began to fast and to pray non-stop for Peter. Only God could save Peter; he was guarded in prison by sixteen soldiers, and chained to two other soldiers. With these chains, he couldn’t even move without the soldiers knowing.

Herod planned to kill Peter after the Passover. But the night before, a shining angel came to the prison. The angel found Peter sleeping peacefully – so peacefully, in fact, that the light of the angel didn’t wake him up! The angel had to touch Peter to wake him. “Get up quickly,” he commanded. Peter silently obeyed. As he got up, the chains fell from his wrists. “Now put on your clothes and sandals, and follow me,” said the angel. Peter followed the angel, amazed. The gates opened and closed for them on their own. The guards didn’t even move as they went by. After passing by three gates, Peter reached the street. The glowing angel kept on walking, and silently Peter followed behind. Finally, the angel disappeared, and Peter realized he was free. This was not a dream! God had sent His angel to deliver Peter from prison!

Meanwhile, the believers were all gathered in the house of Mary the mother of John Mark. They were praying for Peter. He went to this home and knocked on the door. Rhoda the servant girl answered the door. When she heard Peter’s voice, she was excited. She ran back to tell the others, “It’s Peter!” “No, it can’t be,” they argued back at her, “Maybe it’s his angel.” They did not believe her. Peter was still waiting outside, and he knocked again. Rhoda realized that in her excitement, she had forgotten to let Peter in! They opened the door for him and joyfully exclaimed, “It really is Peter!” Amazed, they listened to the incredible story of how God had delivered him. How grateful the believers were for the way God had answered their prayers!

Meanwhile, Herod didn’t know what had happened. He was planning to kill Peter in front of a large group of people. The crowd was already beginning to gather, so Herod sent soldiers to bring Peter. When the guards realized that Peter had escaped, they were terrified.

Herod was furious at them for letting Peter escape, and he had them killed. He knew it wasn't their fault, but he didn't want to admit that God had delivered Peter, so he preferred to blame the soldiers and kill them instead.

Not long after this, King Herod had a big party in Caesarea. During this party, the people began to praise and worship him. King Herod knew that only God should be worshiped, but he enjoyed this kind of attention from the people, so he did not stop them. Satan was ready to take King Herod's life now. God tried one last time to help him repent; He sent an angel to convict him that what he was doing was wrong. But his heart was not changed. He kept allowing the people to worship him, and by doing this, he clearly rejected God.

God respected King Herod's decision and finally withdrew His protection from him. All of a sudden, the king turned pale and began to sweat. He got a pain in his belly that got worse and worse over the next few days. He knew he had done wrong against God, and that he was about to die, but he did not repent. The Bible says that "he was eaten by worms" – this is how people spoke when they meant that someone died a horrible death through a judgment of God. God wasn't causing Herod's pain: he actually sent an angel to try to show Herod what was wrong, to save him! But sadly, Herod refused God's forgiveness. He only felt terror as he thought of all his sins, and he ended up getting really, really sick. He could have repented, but he didn't let God help him, and he died a horrible death.

The people had much to think about now. Peter had been delivered from death, and the king who had wanted to kill him was now dead. This thought brought many people to believe in what the apostles were teaching, and to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

God sent His angel to both Peter and King Herod. Peter was delivered, but King Herod held on to his sins and died. God would have wanted to deliver the king, too, but He had to respect his choice. God sends His angels to help us, too. Will you thank God for His angels, and for offering His help and protection to us today? Will you accept that you are wrong when God shows you, and believe that He forgives you?

12. The First Gentile Church

We love him, because he first loved us.

1 John 4:19



Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3 / AA chapter 16

The disciples left Jerusalem because of persecution. They went as far as Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch, and shared the gospel there. What they usually did was to find the Hebrew and Greek Jews in every city and preach to them first, before trying to reach the Gentiles.

Antioch was a large Gentile city. A few disciples traveled there and taught the people of Jesus. The people listened to the message, and soon there was a group of Greek Gentiles in Antioch who had accepted Jesus. A new church was started – the first Gentile church! This group would need a minister to teach and guide these new believers. Who could do this work? “Let’s send Barnabas to minister to these new believers,” the leaders in Jerusalem decided. Barnabas gladly accepted this task. As he worked with these people, the group became larger, and soon he realized that he would need someone to help him. He traveled to Tarsus to fetch Paul for this work.

The new believers in Antioch loved the message of the gospel. It made them more loving and compassionate, gave them peace about the future, and taught them to live in harmony in their communities. They couldn’t stop thinking about all that Jesus had done for them,

and they couldn't stop talking about it, either. The people around them noticed this. They began to mock the believers, saying, "We'll call you Christians, because you speak about Christ so much!" This is how the believers began to be called "Christians", not only in Antioch, but in other cities as well. The believers didn't mind being called Christians. They felt honored that people noticed that they spoke of Christ more than anything else.

Paul had known for a long time that God had called him to work among the Gentiles. He and Barnabas had already been working among the first Gentile Christians. It was clear that this was the work that God had for them to do. But they had not been ordained to the gospel ministry yet. An ordination is a special ceremony in which the elders place their hands on the new ministers' heads and pray for them, to dedicate them to God's work.

One day, as a group of men from the church of Antioch were fasting and praying together, the Holy Spirit instructed them to ordain Paul and Barnabas. They laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas in front of all the members, and dedicated them to God as ministers to the Gentiles, and together they fasted and prayed. It was important for the believers to see this ordination, because it helped them understand that God had called Paul and Barnabas to do this work. This ordination also helped the Jewish believers to understand that the gospel was for all nations, not just for the Jews. From this day on, the people referred to Paul and Barnabas as apostles.

While Paul and Barnabas were still in Antioch, prophet Agabus arrived from Jerusalem. He warned the Christians that there would soon be a famine throughout the world. The believers listened and decided, "Let's collect money and send it with Paul and Barnabas to the Christians in Judea. We want them to know that we love them

and care about them.” The believers in Antioch were not rich, but they gladly gave what they could. This offering of love would help the Jewish believers in Jerusalem to accept the new Gentile believers.

The first Gentile church had been started, and the love of Christ was felt deeply among these new believers. How did they have this love? It came from Christ. They knew Christ and experienced His love for them, so they couldn’t help but to love Him back, and to love others as well. What freedom there was in knowing that God loved them like He loved His Son Jesus! How thankful they were to Jesus that He had showed them the loving tenderness of their Father in Heaven!

How well do you know Jesus? Do you want to know Him like the first Christians knew Him and have the joy and peace they had? Ask Him to help you know Him more in this way.

13. The Island of Cyprus

Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see.

Isaiah 42:18



Acts 13:4-12 / AA chapter 17

Paul and Barnabas had just been ordained as ministers of the gospel for the Gentiles. Now they planned to take a missionary journey together, to visit several cities and share the Gospel. They decided to bring a young man called John Mark with them. He was from Jerusalem, and his mother Mary had often invited the apostles to stay in her home when they visited. Through these visits in his home, John Mark became interested in ministry and asked if he could join the apostles in their work.

The three men arrived at the island of Cyprus. They searched for the Jewish synagogues and spoke of Jesus there. They also spent time with the Christians in Cyprus. Some of these Christians had moved to this island to escape persecution from the Jews in Jerusalem. Paul, Barnabas and John Mark visited several cities in Cyprus. In one of the cities, they met a troublesome man called Elymas. He was a Jewish sorcerer, and he was friends with one of the highest authorities of Cyprus, the deputy Sergius Paulus. Elymas the sorcerer tried to convince Sergius Paulus to ignore Paul's preaching, but Sergius Paulus was a wise man. Instead of ignoring Paul, he asked Paul and Barnabas to come to him and speak to him about God's Word.

Paul arrived and began to speak to Sergius Paulus, but all the while he spoke, Elymas the sorcerer got in his way and did all he

could to discourage the deputy from listening to the message. Finally, Paul looked straight at Elymas. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul spoke with authority, and said to the sorcerer: “You are a child of the devil, an enemy of righteousness. Won’t you stop doing this?” Elymas was being told what his problem was, and he was being given a chance to repent and come to God. But he was stubborn and refused to accept what Paul was saying. Paul continued speaking, “Now the hand of the Lord will be upon you. You will be blind, and for some time you won’t see the sun.”

Immediately, Elymas the sorcerer went blind. He was so blind, in fact, that he had to ask someone to lead him by the hand so he could leave Paul’s presence. His eyes were blind, but this was meant to show him that his spiritual eyes were blind. He was refusing to see the light of God’s truth. Through his physical blindness, he was being given a chance to realize that he was spiritually blind, and that he needed to repent.

We don’t know whether Elymas finally repented or not, but we do know that all those who saw this knew that Paul’s message came from God. Sergius the deputy believed and was astonished at the beautiful message that Paul and Barnabas shared with him.

Sergius Paulus the deputy was willing to receive the light of the gospel; his spiritual eyes could see. But Elymas the sorcerer refused the light; his spiritual eyes were blind. We are given the choice, too, to accept Jesus, who is the light of the world, and who gives us all truth. Can we accept that we don’t know everything and need to be willing to listen to Jesus? Will you try walking in His ways?

14. Faith and Difficulties

Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. Isaiah 26:4



Acts 13:13-52 / AA chapter 17

Paul, Barnabas and John Mark were on a missionary journey. They had spent some time in Cyprus, and now they sailed to Perga, a city in what is now Turkey. This part of the journey was difficult and dangerous, and young John Mark became overwhelmed and discouraged. He grew tired of the hard travelling, the cold and the hunger. Instead of asking God to give him strength, he decided to return to Jerusalem and not travel with Paul and Barnabas anymore. Paul and Barnabas trusted God through their difficulties, but John Mark would need some more time to grow in his faith.

Paul was displeased that John Mark had left them. Paul felt he wasn't reliable, and for a long time he refused to bring him along on other trips. But Barnabas was more understanding, and he did his best to encourage John Mark to continue working for God. Because of Barnabas' kindness and encouragement, John Mark ended up becoming a valuable worker for Christ. Paul noticed that John Mark had changed, and eventually started working with him again. In his letters to the churches, he wrote about how valuable John Mark was for the ministry.

After John Mark left, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Antioch in Pisidia². On the Sabbath day, they attended the synagogue. The leaders of the synagogue read a portion of the Scriptures. Then, as they usually did when they had visitors, they looked at Paul and Barnabas and asked them, “Do you have anything to say to us?” Yes, Paul did have something to say! He stood up and preached enthusiastically about Jesus and how His life fulfilled the Scriptures. The people listened and their hearts were touched.

After they left the synagogue, both Jews and Gentiles spoke with the disciples. “Continue in the grace of God,” said some of the Jews. The Gentiles came to Paul and Barnabas and pleaded, “Please preach these words to us next Sabbath.”

The next Sabbath, almost the whole city arrived to listen to Paul preaching the Word of God. When the Jews from the synagogue saw this, they were jealous. They no longer supported Paul’s message, and tried to stop others from believing. Paul and Barnabas faced the Jews and spoke to them firmly, saying, “The Jews were the first people to receive God’s Word, but they have rejected it. Now the Lord has commanded us to teach it to the Gentiles.” The Gentiles were overjoyed to hear that God’s Word was for them, too. They accepted Paul’s teaching and began to praise God. They were so excited about this wonderful message that they began to share it with others. From then on, Paul and Barnabas focused mostly on teaching the Gentiles.

Sadly, the Jews began to persecute Paul and Barnabas, and sent them away from the area. As Paul and Barnabas left Antioch of Pisidia, they shook the dust off their feet. Jesus had taught His disciples that if a town refused to receive them, they should quietly

² This is a different Antioch, not the Antioch in Syria where the apostles had been before.

leave and not even take dust from that town on their feet, as a way to respect the choice of the people of that town. But even though Paul and Barnabas had to leave, they felt great joy knowing that there were now people in this city who believed and were sharing the gospel of Jesus with others.

Paul and Barnabas loved Jesus so dearly that they could not stop telling others about Him. No matter what difficulties they had, they were not discouraged from continuing the work. They trusted God completely. John Mark needed some more time to develop this trust in God, and he became discouraged at first, but later he became a valuable minister for God, too. How well do you know God? Do you know Him well enough to trust Him even when there are difficulties? Ask Him to help you know Him more today, and experience His love, so that you can love Him and trust Him fully.

15. Preaching in Heathen Cities

**He [a good man] shall not be afraid of evil tidings:
his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord
Psalm 112:7**



Acts 14:1-26 / AA chapter 18

Paul and Barnabas continued their missionary journey, and reached the city of Iconium. Where do you think they went to first when they reached the city? They came to the synagogue, like they always did. There they preached that Jesus was the long-awaited teacher sent by God to set things right. The people listened eagerly, and a large group of both Jews and Greeks believed what they preached.

Sadly, several of the Jews did not accept the message, and they did their best to make the Gentiles think badly of Paul and Barnabas. In spite of the problems that the Jews were causing, Paul and Barnabas continued preaching. God also gave them the power to perform miracles among the people. Soon there were two groups of people in the city: those who believed the message that Paul and Barnabas were teaching, and those who did not.

Finally, the non-believing Jews and Gentiles went to the city authorities and lied, saying, “The city is in danger of rebellion because of these men!” They hoped that the city authorities would stone Paul and Barnabas, but to their disappointment, the city leaders

listened to the apostles and decided that they were speaking clearly and sensibly, and they did not condemn them.

Now the Jews tried even harder to get Paul and Barnabas into trouble. They stirred up a mob of angry men, and they blamed the apostles for it. Finally, some friends advised the disciples, “You need to leave this city. It’s not safe for you here.” Paul and Barnabas followed their advice and left Iconium secretly. But they left knowing that now there were several believers who would keep on speaking to the people of Iconium about how to be right with God through Jesus.

The next town that Paul and Barnabas visited was Lystra. This was such a heathen town that it did not even have a synagogue. Instead, there was a large temple for worshiping Jupiter. Paul and Barnabas began to speak to the people, telling them about the God who made Jupiter and the things in the sky. Then they spoke of the Son of God and His life. As Paul was telling them about Jesus the Healer, he saw a crippled man who was looking at him attentively. Paul could see that this man had faith to be healed, and right there, he commanded him to stand up. The man obeyed, and to everyone’s amazement, he stood on his feet. The people exclaimed, “The gods have come down to us in the form of men!” They began calling Barnabas “Jupiter”, and they called Paul “Mercury”.

Paul and Barnabas went away to rest. They didn’t know that the heathen priest had begun to prepare a feast to honor them because the people were so excited. They were going to have food, music and even animal sacrifices. When everything was ready, an excited crowd of people came to fetch Paul and Barnabas. “Oh, no!” said Paul when he realized that they wanted to worship them. The two apostles ran among the people, trying to explain that they were just messengers of

God. Paul got everyone's attention and said clearly, "We are men just like you. Please turn to God, not to us!"

The people were annoyed and disappointed. They had been looking forward to the feast, and were not happy that Paul and Barnabas had cancelled it. A short time later, some non-believing Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and spoke against Paul and Barnabas. Because of what had happened, the people were ready to hate the apostles. They grabbed Paul and stoned him until they were sure he was dead. Then they took him out of the city and left him there. How quickly men can turn on those they had previously idolized!

The believers in Lystra were heartbroken. They loved Paul, and they gathered around him and cried because they were sure he was dead. But suddenly, right before their eyes, Paul stood up and began to praise God – Jesus had restored him! The believers were overjoyed. One of the young men who rejoiced was Timothy, a new Christian who later ended up working with Paul in the ministry, and who received two letters from Paul. Do you know what these letters are? They are first and second Timothy, two books in the Bible.

The day after Paul was restored, he and Barnabas went to the city of Derbe. They didn't stay there long, but it was just long enough for several people to listen to their message and believe in Jesus. Then they went back to the three cities where they had been persecuted – Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, and continued their work there and made sure it was established strongly in the word of God. They also knew that the Christians in these cities were being mistreated by the non-believers, and they wanted to encourage them. Paul and Barnabas organized churches in these cities and cared for them by visiting them, teaching them, and writing them letters.

Paul and Barnabas continued their missionary journey through different cities, until they reached Antioch of Syria, their last stop. They had just completed their first missionary journey together, a journey filled with dangers but also with God's grace and help. And they left behind several new churches with believers who were overjoyed to know that God loved them.

Paul and Barnabas did not give up, even when their lives were in danger. They simply went where God wanted them to go, and they fearlessly preached about Jesus. They trusted that God was with them and would do what was best for them, and they were able to bless so many people this way. We can ask Jesus for this same faith, so that we can trust God even through difficult times, and be a blessing to others. Will you ask Jesus to give you His faith today, so that you can learn to trust God more fully?

16. Jews and Gentiles

In that day I will restore the fallen house of David. I will repair its damaged walls. From the ruins I will rebuild it and restore its former glory. And Israel will possess what is left of Edom and all the nations I have called to be mine. The Lord has spoken, and he will do these things.
Amos 9:11-12 (NLT)

 *Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 2:11-14 / AA chapter 19*

Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey was completed, and they were back in Antioch of Syria. They found that the church in Antioch had grown since they had last been there. But with this growth, there was a new problem: the Jewish believers wanted the new Gentile believers to follow some of the Jewish customs. Paul and Barnabas thought this was not necessary, but the Jewish believers kept on insisting. Finally, Paul and Barnabas travelled to Jerusalem to discuss these things with the other apostles.

The group began their journey. On their way to Jerusalem, they visited other churches and encouraged them. Once they reached Jerusalem, they discussed two important questions with the apostles and elders. The first question was: should the Gentile believers be circumcised? The other question was: Is it all right for believers to eat meats offered to idols? These were problems that the Gentile believers faced every day, but the Jewish believers didn't. The group spoke and argued for a long time about these things.

Peter reminded them, "God sent the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, and they were not circumcised. If they believed, God made no

difference between them and us.” Paul and Barnabas spoke of all the wonders that God had done among the Gentile believers. James³ was leading the meeting. After listening to what was said, he decided, “God wants to give the Gentiles the same blessings that He gave to the Jews, without the Jewish ceremonies. The prophets wrote that God would call people from all over the world to come to Him. We should not trouble the Gentiles by asking them to be circumcised.” It was settled. They would ask the Gentiles to only give up their heathen customs, to keep the commandments and lead holy lives. This meant that they would not eat meat offered to idols, and they would be faithful to their husband or wife. They were also asked to follow the health advice of the Scriptures.

After this important meeting, Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas traveled back to Antioch of Syria to tell the believers what had been decided. There were Jewish believers who were unhappy with what had been decided, but the Gentiles were encouraged and strengthened to know that they did not need to do all the ceremonies that were not necessary for salvation.

While Paul and Barnabas were still in Antioch, Peter came to them. Peter had grown up believing that it was wrong to be friends with Gentiles or to share a meal with them, but now he was spending time with Gentiles, eating with them and being friends with them. It seemed as though he had accepted them and felt comfortable with them. But some time later, some other Jews from Jerusalem came, and suddenly Peter’s attitude changed. He stayed only around the Jews and stopped eating with the Gentiles. As if that wasn’t enough, Barnabas and a few others began to follow his bad example, too.

³ This James was probably the brother of Jesus. He is also the one who wrote the book of James in the Bible.


They wanted to please the Jews that had just arrived, but what they did hurt the Gentiles and put a distance between them. When Paul found out what was happening, he scolded Peter in front of the others and showed him his mistake. It was important to show that God loved all men equally, no matter what nation or race they were from.

Peter knew that Paul was right, and he repented. There was no reason to treat the Gentiles differently than the Jews; God had given them all the same blessings. They had all accepted Jesus and were being changed by His Spirit. The group of believers included people from all nations, not just Jews, who loved Jesus and wanted to live for Him. We are invited to be a part of this group, too. Will you ask Jesus to help you be a part of His temple of believers today?

17. Timothy, the Youngest Minister

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

1 Timothy 4:12

 *Acts 15:36-41; 16:1-6 / AA chapter 21*

It was time for Paul to make another missionary journey. “Let’s travel and visit the churches,” he suggested to Barnabas. Barnabas agreed, and he had an idea: “Let’s take John Mark with us again!”

Paul did not want John Mark to come with them. He had already abandoned them before. How could they be sure that he wouldn’t do it again if things got difficult? But Barnabas insisted, “John Mark has grown, and his faith is stronger. He won’t make the same mistake again.” Paul and Barnabas kept discussing this, but they would not agree. Paul was not willing to risk travelling with John Mark again. Finally, they decided they would each make a different trip: Barnabas planned to go with John Mark, and Paul decided to travel with Silas.

Paul and Silas traveled to Lystra, the town where people had stoned Paul and left him for dead. The Christian group in Lystra was overjoyed to see him again! Among this group was a young man called Timothy, whose mother and grandmother had taught him the Scriptures since he was a child. His father was a Greek, but his mother, Eunice, was Jewish. Both his mother and his grandmother,

Lois, had become Christians. Timothy was taught to be humble, faithful and responsible, and he had a pure character. Paul noticed these qualities in Timothy and gave him an invitation: “Come and join us in our travels and ministry!” He loved him like a son, and taught him how to work as a minister, and how to understand the Scriptures.

Paul asked Timothy to become circumcised. “God doesn’t require this of you,” Paul explained, “But because we will be visiting Jewish synagogues, this might help them to accept you.” Once this was done, Paul, Silas and Timothy were ready for their missionary journey. Together they visited several churches where they taught and encouraged the believers. Their visits helped the churches to grow and to become stronger in their faith.

Throughout the trip, Timothy watched and learned. He was young, but he was faithful and responsible and eager to learn from the older apostles like Paul. Paul loved Timothy like a son and taught him as much as he could. Later on, when they were no longer traveling together, Paul wrote to Timothy. In one of his letters, Paul said to him, “Don’t let people look down on you just because you’re young. Instead, be an example in the way you speak and behave, and be an example in faith.” We are never too young to leave an impression on people. If the Spirit of Christ is in us, people will notice our purity and politeness, just like they did when they met Timothy. Every child and young person can learn from Jesus, as Jesus was a child once, too. Through His Spirit, He can help us to be humble, polite and faithful just like He was as a child and youth. Will you ask for His Spirit today, that He will help you have a character like His?

18. Prisoners in Philippi

**And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,
And thou shalt be saved, and thy house.
Acts 16:31**



Acts 16:7-40 / AA chapter 21

Paul and his companions had been traveling all over Asia Minor, visiting and strengthening the churches. Now it was time to go where they had never been before: they would cross the sea to Europe. They arrived at the coast of Troas to board a ship, and while Paul was there, he received a vision. In his vision, a man from Macedonia was saying, “Come to the province of Macedonia to help us!” After this vision, Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke sailed to Macedonia and visited several cities there.

One of these cities was Philippi. One Sabbath afternoon the apostles went outside the city, by the riverside, and they found a group of women who were praying. One of these women was called Lydia, and she had a business selling purple cloth. When Paul began to preach, she gladly listened, and she was baptized together with her whole household. She also begged the apostles to stay in her home as long as they needed to.

Lydia wasn't the only woman who followed them; another woman began to be around them. She was a fortune-teller, and her masters made a lot of money from her work. This woman followed them around for many days, and she kept saying out loud, “These men are servants of the Most High God, and they will show us the

way to salvation!” It might sound nice for someone to say these things, but the way she was speaking and acting was actually disturbing Paul’s work. When people heard her, they didn’t want to be around Paul. They wondered, “Why is a medium saying these things? Is the same spirit working in both her and Paul?”

Paul was disturbed by what this woman was doing. He knew she had an evil spirit inside her, so he commanded the evil spirit, “Leave this woman!” Immediately, the woman stopped speaking. She was finally free from the evil spirit! She was so grateful that she began to follow Christ, and she didn’t do any more fortune-telling.

Now her masters were upset. They needed her to do her fortune-telling so that they could get money. How could they make money now that she had stopped doing this job? They were so angry that they brought Paul and Silas before the city authorities. “These men are causing trouble!” they accused. They also brought in a multitude of men who told lies about the apostles. There was such a riot that the city authorities gave the order to whip the apostles and put them in prison, without even hearing their side of the story.

Paul and Silas were hungry, cold, in pain and uncomfortable. But instead of complaining, they encouraged each other in that damp, dark prison. They sang praises and expressed how joyful they were to suffer for Jesus after all that Jesus had done for them. As they spoke and sang, the rest of the prisoners listened with astonishment. Even the guards marveled at what they were hearing! Prisoners don’t sing in prison, do they?

The city authorities went home thinking that punishing Paul and Silas had been the right thing. But on their way home, they heard a bit more about the apostles, and they saw the woman that had been freed from the demon. How different she looked now – she was so

quiet and peaceful! They realized they had made a big mistake. “Why did we punish two innocent men?” they asked, filled with regret. “Let’s release them first thing in the morning.”

But God would not let Paul and Silas wait until morning. During the night, angels came to the prison. The earth shook, the doors were opened and the chains fell from the apostles’ hands and feet. Light filled the prison.

The jailer had fallen asleep, but he woke up with the quake. “Oh no! The prisoners have escaped, and I will be blamed for it!” he thought with despair. He grabbed a sword and was about to kill himself with it, but before he could do anything, Paul spoke loudly and cheerfully, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

The jailer couldn’t believe what was happening. He had treated Paul and Silas with cruelty, but here they were, speaking to him lovingly and respectfully when they could have just run away. He hurried to their cell and knelt before them, trembling, and crying out, “Please forgive me!” He quickly brought them out of their cell and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you and your household will be saved.”

The jailer accepted what Paul said to him, and he took the apostles into his home. He washed their wounds and gave them food to eat. He and his whole household listened as Paul taught them about Jesus. That very night the jailer, his whole family and all his servants were baptized. Even the prisoners in their cells were now open to the message of Jesus.

The whole town of Philippi had felt the earthquake, and the people were frightened. In the morning, the city authorities heard what had happened at the prison, and they were alarmed. “We’ll just release them quietly,” they decided. But Paul did not want to leave

the prison quietly. He said, “It should not be like this. They beat us publicly even though we were not condemned, so they should release us publicly.” What the authorities had done to Paul and Silas was against Roman law. It was only proper for the authorities to come to Paul and Silas and speak to them personally. The town leaders were afraid, because if the Roman emperor heard about this, they could get into big trouble. They quickly came to Paul and Silas and apologized, and they asked them to leave the city.


The apostles respected the wishes of the town authorities. They went to Lydia’s house, comforted the believers and said goodbye to them, and then they left. People in other cities heard of what had happened to Paul and Silas, and they became interested in hearing the gospel. They valued the message because they saw that the apostles were willing to suffer so much for it. And the apostles won the respect of the political leaders, because they were respectful and didn’t try to pick fights with those who disagreed with them.

The apostles believed in Jesus, and they gladly accepted whatever happened to them. Their love for Jesus was so strong that they felt that whatever they suffered for Him was not nearly as much as He had suffered for them. This love for Jesus helped them reach the heart of the jailer and so many others in Philippi and in the surrounding cities. Do we love Jesus this much? Do we know Him enough to understand how much He loves us and suffered for us? Let’s ask Jesus to show us more of His love for us, that we might learn to love Him more.

19. The Thessalonians and the Bereans

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Acts 17:11

 Acts 17:1-15 / AA 22, 23

Paul and Silas continued their missionary trip. They arrived at Thessalonica, and as usual, they searched for the synagogue and began to preach there. The people listened as Paul spoke of how Christ fulfilled the Scriptures; how His life made clear all the things that had seemed mysterious in the prophecies. He also told them how he had come to believe in Jesus. “Why are you full of bruises?” the people asked him, and Paul explained what had happened to them in Philippi. He kept on teaching the people for three Sabbaths.

The people listened attentively, and several of them believed. There was a multitude of Greek Jews, as well as a large number of women, who accepted the message and who met with the apostles to hear them. But as usual, there was a group of Jews that did not believe, and they were envious of the success that Paul and Silas were having.

These unbelieving Jews gathered a group of rough men, and started a mob in the city. Paul and Silas were staying in the home of a

man called Jason. The rude, angry mob came to Jason's home looking for the apostles, but they could not find them. When the mob realized they would not find Paul, they grabbed Jason and a few other believers and took them to the city authorities.

"The men who are staying in Jason's house are doing things against the laws of Caesar. They say there is another king called Jesus!" the Jews accused angrily. The people of the city and the rulers were troubled when they heard this, but they couldn't find Paul and Silas. They could only keep Jason and the other men in jail for a short while, but then they had to let them go. Meanwhile, the believers had kept Paul and Silas hidden away, and to keep them safe, they sent them away to the city of Berea that very night.

What did Paul and Silas do as soon as they arrived at Berea? They went into the Jewish synagogue to preach about Jesus! Paul soon found out that the Bereans were different than the Thessalonians. They listened carefully to what Paul told them, and before they accepted or rejected what he was telling them, they searched the Scriptures carefully to check whether what he was saying was true or not. The Bible says that the Bereans were "more noble". They were open-minded as they heard Paul, and each day they compared what he said with what was written in the Scriptures. Many of them were sure that Paul was preaching the truth, and they believed.

It didn't take long for the Jews in Thessalonica, the other city, to find out that the Bereans were happily listening to Paul. These unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica decided to travel to Berea immediately to stop Paul. They arrived and began to stir up the people against the apostles, just like they had done at Thessalonica.

To keep the apostles safe, the believers quickly sent Paul by ship to Athens, but Timothy and Silas still remained at Berea for some time.

The Thessalonians and the Bereans were so different! The Bereans had an open heart and mind, and were willing to listen to what Paul had to say. But before they decided what to do with Paul's teachings, they carefully searched the Scriptures for themselves. They prayed about what they heard and discussed it among themselves, reading the evidence carefully, as they were not stubbornly attached to their old ideas. They allowed the Scriptures to show them whether what Paul was saying was true or not. The Jews of Thessalonica, on the other hand, listened to their own ideas rather than what the Scriptures said, and they missed out on accepting the most wonderful message the world has ever known.

We have the same choice. Will we, like the Bereans, study the Bible to be sure of what God wants to tell us? Are we willing to compare what a preacher is saying with what the Scriptures say? If our beliefs are backed up by careful Bible study, we will be sure of what we believe. We will have the beautiful message of Jesus in our lives. Do you want it, too? Ask God to help you learn more of His Word today.

20. Preaching of the Unknown God

**For in him we live, and move, and have our being;
as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.
Acts 17:28**



Acts 17:16-34 / AA 23

Paul traveled alone to Athens. This was a large, important city, full of beautiful art and lovely buildings. But most of these buildings were temples for idols; this city did not have much knowledge of the God of the Jews. As Paul walked and looked around, he felt sad. How could he tell all these people about Jesus, and that He was the way to know the Creator?

The first thing Paul did was to go to the Jewish synagogue. There he began to speak to the Jews about Jesus. Before long, the leaders of Athens heard that Paul was preaching things that were strange to them, and they began to talk with him. Before long, a crowd had gathered to listen. Some of the people there simply wanted to make fun of Paul, because they thought he was speaking nonsense. But soon they realized that he knew what he was talking about, so they listened respectfully.

Now the people invited Paul to speak to them on Mars Hill, a very sacred spot in Athens. “There will be no noise and distraction there,” they assured Paul. The people gathered, ready to listen attentively, and even the wise men of Athens had come to hear Paul’s

speech. Paul began, “You are very religious. On our way here, I found an altar that was built ‘to the unknown god’. Today I will speak to you about this God. Since you already have an altar for Him, you already worship Him even though you don’t know Him.” Paul pointed to the different idols in Athens. “These idols have no life,” he said, “They can’t move unless humans move them. But the Unknown God is different; He doesn’t need human hands to move Him around. He created everything and gave life to all. He is not kept in a temple made by human hands.” Paul continued, “God loves us, and we are His children. He gave us life and keeps us alive.” Then he spoke about God’s Son, Jesus.


The people listened attentively, until Paul said, “There will be a resurrection.” For many of these people, it was just too hard to believe that God could resurrect people, and they mocked Paul. Others said, “We’d like to hear more of this later.” But when would “later” come? They were refusing what God wanted to tell them now. Still others said that the story of the cross was foolishness. Why would the Son of God die on the cross? They didn’t like the idea of having to repent and change; they were too proud for that. They felt much more comfortable with their own religion, a religion that did not ask them to deny themselves. Many of them believed that what Paul was saying was true, but it was too uncomfortable for them to accept the message, and they rejected it. Paul respected their decision and left the crowd. But there were a few people who believed, and they followed Paul, wanting to hear more. Among these new believers there was an important citizen from Athens called Dionysius, and a woman named Damaris.

The people of Athens were given the chance to get to know “the Unknown God”, for whom they’d had an altar for so many years.

They had to choose between idols that have no life and depend on human hands, or a God who gives life and on whom we can depend. How sad that so few of them chose the God of life! What do you choose today? Do you choose things that don't last and don't have life, or do you choose the God who gives you life each day?

21. The Corinthians and the Cross

**But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.
1 Corinthians 1:23-24**

 Acts 18:1-18 / AA 24

Paul arrived at the busy city of Corinth, a city where people came to do business and to take vacations. Here he met Aquilla and Priscilla, a wonderful Jewish couple who accepted the gospel and invited him to stay in their home. As Paul looked around the city, he saw idol worship all around him. The people of Corinth worshiped Venus. How could Paul speak to these people to reach their hearts? What would he speak about? He decided that he would speak differently here than how he had spoken in Athens. With the people of Athens, he had used clear reasoning and gave philosophical reasons for what he was saying, but they had still refused to accept the gospel. This time, Paul decided he would speak only of Christ and His crucifixion. Instead of arguing and trying to convince people, he would simply speak of what Jesus had done, His great sacrifice, and His power to change lives and make them better.

As usual, he went to the synagogues first. He spoke enthusiastically of how Jesus had changed his life, and what the

Scriptures said of Jesus. Sadly, the Jews refused to accept the gospel. They listened attentively and they could see that what Paul was saying was true, but they did not feel comfortable with the idea of having to repent and change. So instead of accepting Paul's message, they began to feel such strong anger against him that they would have killed him if God hadn't protected him. Once Paul realized that the Jews in Corinth would not change, he ripped his clothing, a symbol of mourning, and with great sadness said, "I have done my best to help you, but you have rejected the message. Now I will go to the Gentiles."

After this, Paul went to the home of Justus, a man who worshiped God, and he began to preach to the Gentiles, telling them of how God had created the world through His Son Jesus, and it was this Son who had come to earth to be their Savior. Silas and Timothy soon arrived to help him. Most of the Greeks who heard their message thought that it sounded like foolishness, but there were many who believed and were baptized. One of these men was Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, along with his whole household.

When the Jews saw that people were following Paul's message, they began to tell lies about him, to stop people from listening to him. Paul became discouraged. He realized it would be difficult at this time to start a church in Corinth. "I should leave this city," Paul thought. But God sent him a vision with an encouraging message: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, for I am with you and no one will hurt you. I have many people in this city." This vision gave Paul the courage to continue preaching, and soon there was a large group of people who had accepted Jesus as their Savior, and a church was started.

The Jews were angry that so many people had accepted Jesus. To stop Paul, they stirred up a mob against him and took him to their

city leader, Gallio. “Paul is a trouble-maker!” they accused. Gallio was a wise man. He quickly understood what was really happening, and he refused to punish Paul. Gallio announced, “This has nothing to do with wrongdoing. I will not judge things that have to do with your religion. You may all leave now.” When the mob heard that Paul would not be punished, they grew angry. They had been hoping for some excitement, but now they had to go home. They were so upset that they began to beat Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the Jewish synagogue. If Paul wasn’t going to be whipped, then they would beat the Jewish leaders for misleading them. The Jews ended up receiving what they had planned to do to Paul, and the city authorities did nothing to stop it.

Paul stayed in Corinth a bit longer to encourage the new believers and protect them from the Jews. During his stay in Corinth, he wrote two letters to the church in Thessalonica to encourage the Christians there. These letters are in the Bible, and they’re called First and Second Thessalonians.

Corinth was a city so full of idols that it had seemed impossible for anyone there to accept Jesus. But when Paul shared the story of the cross, there were people whose hearts were touched. They clearly understood the message of God’s love for us in the story of Jesus. Sometimes it may seem that it is impossible for the people around us to accept Jesus, but God tells us that the harvest is ripe and that we must go and tell them. Will we believe God? Do we believe that the people will understand, accept and be blessed by the message? Let us go out in faith trusting that God will be with us like He was with Paul.

22. A Preacher Called Apollos

For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

2 Corinthians 10:12



Acts 18:18-28 / AA 26

Paul was on his way from Corinth to Jerusalem. He was eager to arrive at Jerusalem in time for one of the yearly feasts. Since it was a long journey, he planned to stop and visit cities and churches along the way.

He first stopped at the city of Ephesus. As usual, he went into the synagogue and began to preach. The Jews were interested in what he had to say, and they begged him, “Please stay with us a little longer.” But Paul had to continue his journey to Jerusalem. “I will return,” he promised them. But the new group of believers wasn’t left alone: Aquilla and Priscilla had come to Ephesus with Paul, and when Paul continued his journey, they stayed to carry on the work in this city.

After Paul left, a special visitor arrived at Ephesus. His name was Apollos, and he was a Jew from Alexandria. He came to Ephesus and began to preach in the synagogue. As he preached, Aquilla and Priscilla listened attentively. They heard Apollos preach about the message of John the Baptist, and about his baptism. He showed from

scripture that the Israelites needed to reexamine themselves and repent of their worldliness. Everything Apollos taught was true, but he was missing the most important thing: he still hadn't heard about Jesus! Knowing Jesus would add to Apollos' preaching a healing and uplifting spirit, and give him the ability to more clearly share the will of God.

Later, Aquilla and Priscilla met with Apollos and told him about the life of Jesus. Apollos was excited when he heard that the life of Jesus fulfilled what the Scriptures said. He accepted Jesus and began to teach the gospel enthusiastically.

Now Apollos wanted to travel to other places to teach about Jesus. He travelled to the province of Achaia, carrying a letter from the church of Ephesus to the Christians in Achaia. In this letter, the believers in Ephesus said to the other Christians, "Please receive Apollos as a teacher!"

After this, Apollos continued travelling and preaching powerfully. He reached the city of Corinth, and something amazing happened there: several Jews listened to his preaching and accepted Jesus as their Savior. They hadn't accepted Jesus when Paul had preached to them, but now more time had passed, and they'd had time to think things over, so the preaching of Apollos helped them to make their final decision. People don't always accept Jesus right away; sometimes they need more time to think about what they've heard.

When the believers saw that Apollos had convinced people that Paul had not been able to, some of them began to say, "Apollos is better than Paul!" Was this true? No, of course not! There was no reason to be comparing both ministers; God was using Paul and Apollos in different ways, and neither was better than the other. They each had a different work to do.

But the comparison continued. “No, Peter is even better than Paul or Apollos,” argued some. Why did they feel the need to compare? The work belonged to God, not to Paul or Apollos or Peter. Each of God’s workers is valuable, and each task is necessary. No one is better than others; each has his own work and his own time.

Paul was staying in Ephesus when he heard what the Christians were saying. He felt sad when he heard this, and wrote a letter, 1 Corinthians, to the believers at Corinth. He wanted the believers to stop comparing others and to value the work that God has given each person to do. He wrote, “We all belong to Christ, and Christ is not divided. We were baptized in the name of Christ, and not in the name of Paul. And Christ is the one who died for us, not Paul.” Then he wrote: “The body is one, but it has many parts. It is the same with Christ; we are all part of one body, the body of Christ. And what would happen if the foot said, ‘I don’t belong to the body because I’m not a hand’? And what if the whole body were an eye, then how would we hear? And can the eye say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’?” Paul continued writing, “God has given each of us different gifts to use. Some are prophets, some are teachers, and others have the gift of healing. Not everyone does the same thing.” Then Paul reminded them that loving each other is most important. When we compare each other, there is no room for love.

When Apollos heard what some of the believers were saying about him, he was grieved. He and Paul were in perfect harmony; they were not competing against each other. Apollos didn’t encourage people who said that he was better than Paul. Instead, he decided to leave Corinth immediately. Paul encouraged Apollos and said to him, “Go back to Corinth!” But Apollos decided to wait before returning to

a city where he was being placed above the other disciples. He didn't want to become proud.

God had called Paul, Apollos, Peter and the other ministers to work for Him. Each one helped to share the gospel in a different way. God was leading each one, so there was no need for them to compare each other. God has given each of us different gifts and talents to use for Him. As long as we reflect God's love among us, His gifts and talents will be a blessing to the whole group of believers, to the whole body. Let's ask God to give us His love, so that we will stop comparing ourselves and others, and will instead use our talents out of true love.

23. No More Magic

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
James 4:7



Acts 19:1-20 / AA 27

Paul returned to Ephesus after a few months. There he met twelve people who, just like Apollos, had learnt from John the Baptist. They were eagerly sharing with others what they had learnt from John. What they were teaching was true, but they still hadn't heard about Jesus, who was the key to solving all the problems John the Baptist had pointed out. They were missing the most important part of the message!

These men listened to Paul preaching, and they were surprised when he spoke of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They said to Paul, "We received John's baptism, but we've never heard of the baptism of the Holy Spirit." Paul explained to them, "John gave the baptism of repentance, and he pointed to the One who would come after him – and that is Jesus Christ." The men were interested. "We want to be baptized in the name of Jesus, and we want to learn more," they said. Paul baptized them and then laid his hands on them, and they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and they were able to prophesy and speak in other languages.

For three months, Paul continued preaching in the synagogue. But after that, it was clear that the Jews would not accept Jesus. Paul realized he couldn't preach in the synagogue anymore, so he and the

believers began to meet in a school called the school of Tyrannus. There they met for two years.

Ephesus was a city filled with magicians. These magicians worshiped the goddess Diana and wrote books about her magic. They worshiped in a splendid temple in her honor. People were used to watching the magicians at work.

Soon the people noticed that there was something that Paul could do that their magicians could not do: he could heal people and free them from evil spirits. When the people saw this, they began to bring their sick to him. And when the sick could not be brought to Paul, they would take a handkerchief to Paul, then back to the sick person, and this person would be freed from his illness or from evil spirits. Paul never did this in his own power; he did everything in the name of Jesus Christ, and soon people realized that Jesus was stronger than their goddess Diana.


One of the Jewish priests, Sceva, had seven sons who were magicians. How could a Jewish priest have children who were magicians? This was clearly evil, and against God's advice in the Scriptures. When Sceva's seven sons saw what Paul could do in the name of Jesus, they decided to try it, too. They called in a demon-possessed man and commanded, "We order you to leave this man by Jesus whom Paul preaches about!" But did the evil spirit leave the man? No, he didn't. Instead, he said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" And immediately, the demon-possessed man attacked the seven magicians, and they ran out of the house, naked and wounded. The people were amazed that this had happened. "Practicing magic really is dangerous," they said, "And Jesus is much stronger than the gods we know. He should be worshiped and recognized as the true way to God."

Some of the believers came and admitted to Paul, “We’re still practicing magic. We knew it was wrong but we didn’t really realize how bad it was.” They brought their books on magic, built a large fire, and burnt them in front of a large crowd of people. These books had been very expensive, and they could have made 50,000 pieces of silver by selling them, but they felt they should not harm others by passing these books on. In this big bonfire, the believers gave up that which was holding them back from being fully united with Jesus. After this, Christianity became stronger in the area.

In our life there will come times when God will show us that we are holding onto something that isn’t good for us, and with enough time it can damage our faith. We might need to let go of wrong ideas, or maybe even money or possessions, but in exchange we receive something more valuable: progress in our Christian walk, the fruits and gifts of the Spirit of Jesus, and assurance that we are in God’s will which is good for us and those around us. Worldly things fade away, but doing the works of Jesus is treasure that lasts forever. Is there anything that is holding you back from fully giving yourself to Jesus? Ask Him to help you give it up. What He offers you in return is much more precious, valuable and permanent.

24. Trouble with the Idol Makers

**Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord,
And whose hope the Lord is.
Jeremiah 17:7**

 Acts 19:21-41; 20:1 / AA 28

Once a year, the Ephesians celebrated a festival for their goddess Diana. People from all over the province would come to this celebration. The worshipers of Diana began to mock the Christians for not worshipping her anymore. They noticed that several people had stopped going to Diana's meetings and were worshipping Jehovah with Paul instead.

There were also people who did not become Christians, but they stopped worshipping Diana after having heard Paul's preaching. To them the stories of the Creator God and His Son were much more interesting than the stories of Greek gods. But they just didn't want to live like Christians.

The influence on the spiritual life of the city was obvious. The men who sold idols and shrines noticed this change the most: they realized they were not selling as much as they had sold in the past. This meant less money, and that was not something they would just accept.

Demetrius was a craftsman who built silver shrines. He decided to do something about his loss of profit. He called the other workmen

together and spoke to them, “Because of Paul’s teachings, our craft is in danger, and people are not respecting the temple of Diana as much.” As the craftsmen spoke, they grew angrier. They convinced many people that Paul was a bad person and that Paul was destroying the culture and religion of the city. Soon the city was filled with unrest.

The angry men went looking for Paul, but they couldn’t find him, because the believers had hidden him. “We can’t find Paul!” the men said angrily. So instead, they seized two of Paul’s friends, Gaius and Aristarchus, and rushed them to the theatre to judge and condemn them. When Paul heard about his friends, he insisted, “I must go to the theatre!” But his friends didn’t allow it. The mob was not really interested in Gaius and Aristarchus, so they didn’t harm them, but if they had found Paul, they would have tried to kill him.

While Gaius and Aristarchus were in the theatre, there was so much confusion that some of the people from the crowd didn’t even understand why they were there. The Jews found out what was happening, and they said, “This is our chance to show the people that we don’t agree with Paul’s teachings, either. Let’s send one of our Jewish craftsmen to speak to them against Paul.” They chose a coppersmith called Alexander to speak for all the Jews. But when Alexander arrived at the theatre, the people pushed him aside. “You’re a Jew! We don’t want you here. You worship a different God. We say that Diana of the Ephesians is great!”

At last, the people grew tired, and finally everyone was silent. Now one of the leaders of the city spoke, “Everyone knows that the city of Ephesus worships Diana. There is no confusion about that. Now, don’t decide anything too quickly. You’ve brought two innocent men here. They’ve done nothing against Diana. So if Demetrius and

the craftsmen have a problem with anyone, let them come to the authorities and do things according to the law. We could get in trouble for the riot that happened today.” After he spoke, he sent everyone home.

Paul had been staying at Ephesus for more than three years, but after what happened, he knew he couldn’t stay there any longer. He quickly called the believers, embraced them, and left for Macedonia together with his two friends, Tychicus and Trophimus. They were grateful that God had protected him and his friends, and they trusted that He would continue to do what was best for them.

God always wants to do what is best for us. He would have helped the craftsmen if they had only asked Him. Do you think God could have helped the idol craftsmen to find a new business? Of course He could have. By trying to solve the problem themselves, they ended up causing trouble and confusion. And how different was Paul’s story - He allowed God to protect him and solve his problem, and God did. We have the same choice today. Will we fight for ourselves and try to solve our own problems, or will we calmly trust God to show us what to do?

25. Paul's Letters to the Churches

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Romans 15:4



1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians / AA 30, 31, 35, 36

Paul wrote several letters to different churches during his travels. He couldn't always be right there with the believers, but through his letters, he was still able to teach and encourage them.

While he was staying at Ephesus, he wrote a letter to the Corinthian believers and sent it to them through his friend Titus. This letter, 1 Corinthians, encouraged them to look to Jesus, and not to men. The believers were arguing among themselves whether it was better to listen to Paul or to Apollos. Why did they feel they needed to choose one of them, since both men were doing God's work?

But Paul had other reasons to write to this church. Members from the house of Chloe, a Christian from Corinth, came to Paul and told him, "The Corinthian brethren are arguing and don't agree with each other!" So in his letter, Paul reminded them that each member is a part of one body. "If one part of the body hurts, the whole body is uncomfortable; if one of our church members hurts, we hurt, too," wrote Paul. He reminded them how important love is. True love, the

love that comes from God, is kind, unselfish and patient. This was how each member of the body should be treating each other. Paul wrote even more, trying to correct some wrong beliefs and practices in the church of Corinth.

After writing this letter, Paul continued his journey. During his travel, he wondered how the Corinthian believers would feel when they read his letter. Would they accept what he was telling them, or would they be offended that he was pointing out their mistakes? Paul waited anxiously for news from them. He didn't want them to be annoyed, but he was their minister, and it was his job to tell them these things.

Finally, Titus returned from Corinth, and he had news for Paul. Had the members of Corinth accepted what Paul had to say to them? Yes, they had! Titus told Paul joyfully, "They have accepted your letter, and they've made changes! They've repented of their mistakes, and their lives show it."

Paul was overjoyed. He sat down and wrote them another letter, 2 Corinthians, telling them how happy he was that they had repented and changed. He praised God for doing this in them, and he reminded them to keep looking to Jesus, because He makes us loving and unselfish.

Paul finally travelled back to Corinth. He had blessed fellowship with the members, and he saw that they were strong in the faith. At Corinth he made plans and sent letters to go to other churches. He was planning to travel to Rome soon, so he wrote a letter to the Roman believers to tell them. In this letter, which is the book of Romans, Paul explained more than anywhere else how it is that we are saved through faith. It would be his most important letter to the

Gentiles explaining the gospel, which makes sense because Rome was the capital of the Gentile world!

Another church that Paul wrote to was the church of Galatia. Paul was worried because he received news that the Galatians were accepting false teachings. These teachers emphasized that what made them righteous was their actions, but Paul told them that what made them righteous was their relationship to God through Jesus! “Come back to the truth!” he urged them. “Remember that it was the hearing of faith, not your own skill and talent, that made the great change in your life!” Did the Galatians accept what Paul was telling them? Yes, they did! They came back to the truth, giving glory back to Jesus rather than to men. Their lives showed it, and this helped many other people to get to know Jesus.

Paul worked for God in many different ways. When he could, he preached directly to the people. But when he couldn't be with them, he wrote letters to teach and encourage them. The believers who received these letters were blessed and strengthened. And the good news is that we are able to read these letters even today! What Paul wrote to the Christian churches is still useful to us. We can be encouraged by these letters, and we have so much to learn from them! Would you like to start reading one of Paul's letters? Let's thank God for them, and ask Him to help us understand what He has for us in these letters.

26. Paul the Tent-Maker

Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:14



AA 32,33

A minister has a hard job. In Paul's day, and even today, the apostles and ministers had to travel, visit people, preach, heal the sick, encourage the church members, and write letters to them. All of this took much time, so they had less time to work and earn money to support themselves and their families. The Christians realized this, and as much as they could, they helped the ministers by giving them offerings so they could continue working as ministers without worrying about how to support themselves.

The apostles and ministers were grateful for this help from the believers, but there were times when they still had to work to support themselves. Paul sometimes received help from the Christians, and other times he had to work. Jewish children were always taught a skill so that they could support themselves, and Paul had been taught how to make tents. Whenever it was necessary, he would use his skill as a tent-maker to support himself. He didn't want the believers to feel that he was taking advantage of them, or that he was trying to get their money.

When Paul was in Thessalonica, he worked as a tent-maker. He noticed that several of the Thessalonian members thought that working with your hands was humiliating, and they tried to avoid it.

This kind of thinking is wrong, because work is valuable and good, so Paul worked with his hands to be an example to them.

Corinth was another city in which Paul worked. Together with his friends Aquila and Priscilla, they ran a business making tents. He didn't want anyone to think that he was trying to make himself rich by receiving money from the believers. But even as a tent-maker, Paul continued preaching and ministering.

The three friends continued making tents when they moved to Ephesus. Not everyone approved of what he was doing; there were people who said that he shouldn't be doing this kind of work while being a minister. But Paul used his time wisely, even when he was making tents. He used every opportunity to witness for Christ.

Paul didn't work only to support himself; he also supported his fellow ministers. For a time, he made tents to earn money for himself, Luke and Timothy. He shared his resources with them so freely that he even went hungry at times, just so that they could have what they needed.

Paul taught the believers that it was good for them to support their ministers with money so that they could work only in the ministry. The church members took him seriously when he asked them to do this, because they knew he had often worked with his hands to support himself. They could see that he wasn't taking advantage of them, and he wasn't being lazy either.

As part of his work, Paul prepared other men to become ministers. He found young men in the churches he visited, and he would train them and take them with him in his journeys. He even wrote letters to young ministers like Titus and Timothy to encourage them in their work. And as he taught them, he pointed out that sometimes they would be fully supported by the church members, but

other times they would have to work to support themselves; not all of them would do full-time ministry.

Paul trusted that God would meet his needs, and he taught others to do the same. Sometimes his needs were met through generous gifts from church members. Other times God provided him with the opportunity and the strength to work as a tent-maker. As long as we look to Jesus and ask Him to guide us, we can trust that He will give us everything we need. Will you listen to His voice today, and trust Him?

27. Paul's Last Journey to Jerusalem

**But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.
2 Thessalonians 3:3**



Acts 20:4 - 21:16 / AA 37

Paul decided to travel to Jerusalem again. He had several reasons to go: he knew that in Jerusalem he would meet people from all over the world. If these people heard about Jesus and believed, they would be able to share the news of Jesus in their own cities and towns. Paul also wanted to speak to the Jewish leaders again. They hadn't accepted Jesus before, but Paul hoped that if he spoke to them one more time, they might see the truth.

Paul began his long trip. He traveled with his friends Luke, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus. Paul and his friends carried a special gift with them: it was money that the Gentile believers had lovingly gathered to send to their Jewish believers.

On their way to Jerusalem, they stopped at Philippi to celebrate the Passover with the Gentile Converts. The Apostles taught the church, both Jews and Gentiles, to observe the festivals that God had given in the Torah. These celebrations each lasted at least a week, and it gave the believers the chance to bond together in the Spirit of

God. So Paul and the others enjoyed a few peaceful, happy days as they kept the Passover with the church of Philippi.

After this, Paul and his friends traveled to Troas. They spent seven days with the believers here. On the last day, they met at a large upper chamber on a third floor. They ate together, and then listened to Paul preaching for hours. At around midnight, something terrible happened. A young man called Eutychus was sitting in one of the open windows, and he fell asleep and slipped off the window. It was a big fall, and he died instantly.

The believers gathered around Eutychus and cried. But Paul knew what to do. He came to the young man, embraced him, and prayed for God to give him life, and Eutychus lived again. “Don’t be troubled,” Paul comforted the people, “His life is in him!” The whole group was jubilant! They gathered in the upper chamber once more, held a Communion service there, and Paul preached to them until sunrise.

After this wonderful night, Paul continued his trip. He reached a city called Miletus, where he met with several believers and spent some time with them. Somehow Paul knew that he would never see these people again, so he wanted to say good-bye to them. “You will face dangers,” he said to them, “But please stay close to Christ; He will strengthen you!” After he finished speaking to them, they knelt down and prayed together. They cried, hugged and kissed him, then walked with him to his ship.

The ship took Paul to the city of Tyre. He spent seven days with the believers there. The Holy Spirit warned these people that Paul would face dangers in Jerusalem, and they begged him, “Please don’t go to Jerusalem!” But Paul was determined to go anyway. When it was time for him to board his ship, the whole group, with their

families, walked with him to the ship, and before he boarded, the whole group knelt on the shore and prayed.

Paul continued his journey until Caesarea, where he stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the seven deacons. This man had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. Paul spent several peaceful, happy days in this home. While he was there, prophet Agabus came to visit him. He took Paul's belt and tied his own hands and feet with it, and announced, "The Holy Spirit says that the Jews of Jerusalem shall tie up the owner of this belt like this, and will hand him over to the Gentiles."

Paul wasn't the only one who heard this prophecy; several other friends were with him. "Please don't go to Jerusalem, Paul!" they begged him. But Paul was determined to go. "I'm willing to suffer and die for Jesus; I will go to Jerusalem," he said. Paul's friends could see that it hurt him that they were trying to stop him, so they stopped insisting. "May the will of the Lord be done," they said to him.

God's love had been shown throughout Paul's trip to Jerusalem. The believers from the different churches loved and appreciated Paul, and Eutychus had been brought back to life. Paul was so filled with love for Jesus that he was willing to go to Jerusalem even though he knew he would suffer. He trusted that God would give him the strength to go through any troubles that might come.

Paul really believed that he could work with the Jews. We know that it was God's will for him to keep working with the Gentiles, but was it God's will for him to go to Jerusalem? God had warned him that his mission there would fail, yet Paul ignored those warnings. This would later bring him great difficulties.

Yet God was patient with Paul; He knew that Paul loved his countrymen so dearly that he was willing to suffer, if only to give

them one more chance to accept Jesus. God could still use all of this for good, even though it was not His original plan. He gave Paul the freedom to decide what to do.

Do you trust God like Paul did? Do you believe He is with you no matter what happens? This kind of trust can only come by knowing and believing that God loves you and cares for you. Let's ask God to help us get to know His love better today, so that we may learn to trust Him completely.

28. Paul a Prisoner

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Psalm 23:4



Acts 21:17 - 23:35 / AA 38

Paul finally travelled to Jerusalem with some of his friends. He felt sad during this trip, because he thought of all the people that hated him because they did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. How he longed to help them realize who Jesus was! He would try his best, but he knew that several of the Jewish leaders had heard lies about him and thought he was doing Satan's work. It would be hard for them to listen to him.

As soon as he arrived in Jerusalem, he enjoyed a happy reunion with the Christian Jews, and he gave them the offerings that the Gentile churches had collected for them. The Jews were amazed – it was a lot of money! They could see that the Gentile believers had sacrificed their own needs in order to send them this money. This showed that the Christians from the Gentile churches loved the Jewish believers.

Sadly, there were many Jews who, even after receiving this money, did not see the love of the Gentiles. They were not grateful for their sacrifice and generous gift. They had their own ideas about how the Gentiles should have been taught, and many of them thought that Paul and the other ministers had not done things the right way. “What about all our Jewish customs?” they asked, “Why haven't you

taught the Gentiles to follow these customs and ceremonies?” Paul tried to explain that these Jewish ceremonies were not necessary, but the Jews did not agree.

There was something else that was bothering the Jewish believers: they could see that more Gentiles than Jews were accepting the gospel, and they didn’t like this. They still had some wrong ideas about non-Jewish people. But Paul was at peace, sure that God had guided him in his work among the Gentiles. He hoped that the Jewish Christians would soon understand that Jews and Gentiles are both precious to God, and there is no difference between them. He spoke of what God had been doing for the Gentiles in his ministry, and little by little, the Jews began to see that they had wrong ideas about the Gentiles. But instead of confessing, they gave Paul some advice that was not helpful: “Why don’t you go to the temple and perform a purification ceremony with the Jews, so that people can see that you keep the law? The Gentiles don’t need to do these things, but if you do them, the Jews will stop believing lies about you.”

It would have been best for Paul to bravely say, “No, it is no longer necessary to do these things.” But Paul was really eager to be closer to the Jewish believers, so he thought it wouldn’t hurt to perform this ceremony. But this was not God’s will, and would lead to trouble for Paul.

The next day, Paul went to the temple with four men to participate in the purification ceremony. When he arrived, several people recognized him. These people lived in faraway cities all around the world, and they would come each year to keep the feasts in Jerusalem. They hated Paul, because he had preached about Jesus in their own cities, and they had rejected his message. As soon as they saw Paul, they ran to him angrily and began to accuse him of

things he had never done. “He’s come to profane the temple!” they lied. A mob soon gathered. They took Paul out of the temple, and the doors were shut.

Claudius Lysias, the chief captain, heard that there was trouble happening in Jerusalem, and he quickly arrived with his soldiers and centurions. The people were beating Paul angrily, but as soon as they saw captain Lysias and his soldiers, they stopped. Lysias tied up Paul with two chains, and asked him, “Who are you, and what have you done?” To his question, people began yelling different answers, and Lysias was confused and could not understand what was happening. “We will take you into the castle,” Lysias decided, looking at Paul. The mob was being so violent that the soldiers had to carry Paul upstairs to protect him.

Throughout all this, Paul remained calm. He trusted that God was with him. Politely, he asked Lysias in Greek, “May I speak to you?” Lysias was surprised. “You speak Greek? Aren’t you that Egyptian man that caused an uproar?” There was an Egyptian that had led 4,000 murderers in the wilderness, and Lysias thought that Paul was that man.

Paul calmly answered, “I am a Jew from Tarsus. May I speak to the people?” Lysias agreed. Paul stood up on the stairs and raised his hand to silence the people. Speaking in Hebrew, he told them his conversion story and how he had ended up working for the Gentiles. The people had been listening attentively until he mentioned the Gentiles. “Away with him! He shouldn’t live!” they cried out. They didn’t like him saying that God also loved the Gentiles. Lysias commanded, “Bring him into the castle and whip him, and find out why he’s being accused.” One of the centurions brought Paul into the castle, and as they were tying him up, Paul asked him, “Does the law

allow you to do this to a Roman citizen who has not been condemned?”

The centurion quickly went to Lysias and warned him, “Be careful what you do; this man is a Roman.” This worried Lysias. He came to Paul and asked him, “Are you a Roman citizen?” Paul answered that he was. Lysias looked at him seriously, and said, “I had to pay a large sum of money to become a Roman citizen.” And Paul answered, “But I was born a Roman citizen.” Lysias was afraid now, because they had bound up Paul for no reason. He did not let them whip Paul.

The next morning, Paul was brought before the Jewish leaders. They knew Paul, as they had worked with him before his conversion. Paul felt peaceful, and said to them, “My conscience is clear before God.” This made them, especially High Priest Ananias, really angry. Ananias was not at peace, and he didn’t want Paul to be at peace, either. In the room there were Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, so they wanted to kill Paul for preaching about these things. But the Pharisees did believe in the resurrection, so they couldn’t accuse Paul of being wrong for preaching this. Both Pharisees and Sadducees argued and could not agree with each other about what Paul had done wrong. Finally, Lysias took Paul back to the castle to protect him.

Later, Paul thought about all that had happened, and he feared that he had not followed God’s will. Could visiting Jerusalem have been a mistake? He had wanted so badly to meet with the Jewish believers! But now the Roman officers had seen Jewish people hating each other. What would they think about God after seeing such hate among people who worshiped God? Paul wept and prayed. The next evening, Jesus came to him in vision. “Cheer up, Paul. Just as you

have testified for me here, you will testify in Rome.” Jesus encouraged Paul, and he was comforted.

Just then, Paul’s nephew came to see him with worrying news. “Uncle, the Jews have planned to not eat or drink anything until they’ve killed you.” Paul knew what to do. “Speak to Captain Lysias about this,” he said.

Lysias listened kindly to Paul’s nephew. Quickly and quietly, he sent Paul away to the district of Caesarea, with a letter that explained everything to the governor. Now if the Jews wanted to be a part of the judgment against Paul, they would have to travel there.

Throughout all of this, Paul knew he was not alone; God was with him. And he did his best to reach out to people and love them just like Jesus did. Though he made some mistakes, God forgave them and assured Paul that He was still with him and would work it for good. Each of the Jews there, as well as the Roman officers, had the chance to see the love of Jesus through Paul. Would you like to have the comfort and security of God’s presence with you no matter what you’re going through, like Paul did? Let’s ask God today to give us His comfort and presence.

29. Governor Felix Makes His Choice

For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2

 Acts 24 / AA 39

Paul was now a prisoner. He was brought to Caesarea, the district of Felix the governor. The Jewish leaders were determined to be at Paul's trial, so they made the long trip there. They brought with them a man called Terullus, who told lies about Paul. Felix listened attentively. He could see clearly that Tertullus was lying, and he invited Paul to speak and defend himself against what they were saying.

When Paul spoke, he proved that none of the accusations were true. He explained the real reason why the Jews were accusing him: "They don't agree with the way I worship God, yet I have always believed everything that is written in the Scriptures." He continued, "After years of being away, I came to bring offerings to my nation. But some Jews from Asia found me in the temple. These men are saying I caused an uproar in the temple and in Jerusalem, but this is not true. What happened is that I spoke about the resurrection of the dead, and they don't agree with that."

Everything that Paul said, as well as the way he behaved, was exactly what Lysias had written in his letter to governor Felix. Felix knew that Paul was innocent, but he was afraid of offending the Jews. So instead of letting him go, he announced, “We will continue this trial when Lysias arrives.” Meanwhile, Paul was kept in prison. But even within the prison, Paul received certain freedoms, and visitors were allowed to come and spend time with him.

One evening, governor Felix and his wife Drusilla brought Paul to them. They wanted to hear what he had to say about Christ. Paul spoke openly and clearly about why he believed in Jesus, and about God’s character and law. “It’s important to live according to God’s law,” he told them. He shared with them what Jesus has done to help us keep God’s law and take away our sins. He showed how this fulfilled what God said the Messiah would do and that Jesus’s life was the model of how we should live.

Drusilla was Jewish and she understood what Paul was saying, but she was not willing to repent of her sins, and she rejected Paul’s message. But Felix was not Jewish, and he was hearing these things for the first time. He felt Paul was speaking the truth, but it filled him with terror because he suddenly realized how far he was from living according to God’s will and ways. All he had to do was repent, and God would have accepted him and comforted him, but instead of repenting, he rejected the message because it was disturbing to him. He said to Paul, “Go, and when it’s convenient for me, I will call for you.”

For two years, Felix visited Paul and talked with him. He knew that Paul was innocent, but he was afraid to free him because he knew it would make the Jews angry. And if he had big problems with the Jews, he knew he would lose his position as governor. “Pay

money for your freedom,” he suggested to Paul. But Paul refused to do that. Felix wanted Paul to be free, but he didn’t want to be the one to free Paul; he was too busy protecting his position as governor. But it didn’t do him any good to protect himself in such a selfish and dishonest way. He soon ended up having other problems with the Jews, and he ended up losing his position as governor anyway. He also lost the chance to hear about Jesus again. How sad that he had rejected the many opportunities that God had offered to him!

Just like Felix received several chances to get to know Jesus and repent, we are given this opportunity. God wants us to know Him and trust Him so that through His Spirit He can change our lives and give us a character like Jesus. It is up to us to accept His offer. Will you accept the love and help that God is offering you today?

30. Paul Speaks before a King and a Governor

But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. Mark 13:9-11



Acts 25 - 26 / AA 40, 41

Felix was no longer the governor of Caesarea; a man called Porcius Festus became the new governor. The Jews asked this new governor several times to send Paul to Jerusalem to judge him, but he refused. “Paul will be judged here in Caesarea,” he decided.

Festus listened to the trial, and he could see that Paul was innocent. But just like Felix, he too was afraid of what the Jews would do if he set Paul free. He asked Paul, “Would you prefer to be sent to Jerusalem and be judged there?” Paul knew that he would not be safe if he was sent to Jerusalem, so he politely asked to be sent to the Caesar, the top authority, instead. Festus was surprised that Paul would prefer to be judged by the Caesar than by his own people, but he agreed to what Paul asked. How strange that Paul was safer among heathen people than among God’s people, the Jews!

Paul wasn't taken to Rome right away. But as he waited for his trip to Rome, God gave him the opportunity to speak about Jesus to another very important man: King Herod Agrippa II.

King Agrippa and his wife Bernice came to visit Governor Festus, and when they heard about Paul, they said, "We would like to hear this man." Paul was brought to a large room where Governor Festus, King Agrippa, his wife Bernice and other rich, important men from Caesarea had gathered. Paul gladly spoke to them about Jesus, and how His life fulfilled the Scriptures. He also shared the story of his conversion. "Now I follow Jesus, my Savior," Paul declared, "I have witnessed for Him in distant lands. This is why the Jews have arrested me."

Everyone was listening attentively. They knew Paul was telling the truth. But Festus was uncomfortable, and he interrupted saying, "Paul, you're not well. So much learning is making you crazy." Paul respectfully replied, "I am not crazy. I am speaking truthfully. I know the king knows these things, for none of this was done secretly."


Then Paul spoke to King Agrippa, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophecies? I know that you do." King Agrippa was a Jew, so he did believe the prophecies, and he could see that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. He was deeply moved by what he had heard, but he answered, "You almost convinced me to become a Christian." What a sad response! Almost! If only the king had accepted what God was trying to tell him through Paul! Paul said to him, "I wish that everyone here were almost, or altogether, as I am – except for these chains." How Paul wished that these men could experience the peace and forgiveness that Jesus had given to him! Sadly, Agrippa refused this offer. He rose from his seat, letting the others know that the meeting was over.

Festus, Bernice and the others stood up, too. Then they talked among themselves about Paul. They all agreed that he was innocent. “He does not deserve prison or death,” they said. King Agrippa said, “We can’t set him free, because he asked to be judged by the Caesar. There’s nothing we can do.”

Paul had been able to speak of Jesus to kings, governors and other important men. He had not been afraid, because he knew Jesus had promised to give him the right words to say, and he trusted in this promise. Someday you might have to speak before important authorities and explain to them why you follow Jesus. Like Paul, you can trust that Jesus will guide you and give you the right words to say. Let’s thank Jesus today for this promise, and ask Him to help us trust Him so that He can guide our words and actions.

31. Paul in a Shipwreck

When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Proverbs 16:7

 Acts 27:1 - 28:10 / AA 42

It was finally time for Paul to be taken to Rome. His friend Aristarchus from Macedonia travelled with him as his helper. Another friend, Luke, traveled as a prisoner together with Paul. A centurion called Julius was in charge of them, and he treated them kindly.

They traveled by ship, and it was a long, slow trip because of the winds. On the way, they stopped at the city of Sidon, where Paul had some friends. Centurion Julius kindly let Paul spend time with his friends outside the ship, before continuing their journey.

They eventually reached a port called Fair Havens. They spent a long time there, waiting for better winds for sailing. It was almost winter by now, and it was very dangerous to sail in winter weather. Should they set sail anyway, and try to reach the next port? Or should they stay in Fair Havens? Julius the centurion needed to make a decision. He asked Paul what he thought. Paul answered, "I believe we should spend the winter here. If we travel now, the ship will be damaged and people will die." But the owner of the ship didn't want to stay in Fair Havens. He argued, "No, this is not a comfortable place in which to spend the winter. Let's try to reach the next port. We will be more comfortable there."

Julius decided to continue their trip. He hoped they would reach the next port soon. But sadly, a terrible storm caught them while they were still at sea. The storm lasted several days, and the ship began to leak. For two weeks they all tried to save the ship, but the leak got larger and larger. The sky was so dark, so covered with heavy clouds, that they couldn't see the stars or the sun, so they didn't know where they were. They were sure they would all die right there in the sea, and they were terrified.

But Paul was not afraid. He prayed, asking God to save the people on this ship, and God told him that He would. Paul comforted them, saying, "Sirs, you should have followed my advice to avoid this problem. But I have good news: only the ship will be lost; none of us will die in this storm. The angel of God told me that I must be brought before the Caesar, and that everyone sailing with me will be safe. I believe God, and it will be as He said."

The crew was encouraged by Paul's words, and they went back to work trying to save the ship. Finally, they realized that they were arriving near some land. It was still nighttime, so they cast four anchors so the ship would stay where it was until morning. They didn't want to crash against any rocks that might be near the shore.

When the sun came out, they still didn't know where they were. The sailors were discouraged. "Let's sail away on the lifeboat; the others can just stay on the ship," they secretly planned. But Paul knew what they were thinking, and he said to them and to Julius, "These men will die unless they stay on this ship." Julius believed Paul, and he had the soldiers cut off the ropes of the lifeboat and let it fall off into the sea, so no one would be tempted to use it.

Now Paul encouraged them to eat. "You need food for your health. God will keep you safe; don't worry," he promised them. Then

Paul took some bread, thanked God for it, and began to eat. The rest of the people on the ship ate, too. When they had finished eating, they lightened the ship by throwing the rest of the wheat into the sea.

After this, they tried to sail to the shore, but the ship got stuck in sand, and the back part of the ship broke. They could not stay in the ship any longer; they would all have to swim to shore. But the soldiers were worried: there were prisoners on board. What if they swam away and escaped? Wouldn't it be better to just kill the prisoners to avoid this problem? Thankfully, Centurion Julius decided not to kill anyone. "Let them swim to shore," he commanded. He knew that they were all still alive because God was with Paul the Prisoner. Julius could never hurt Paul now!

Everyone left the ship now. Some men swam to shore, and others floated on pieces of broken ship. When they reached the shore, Julius counted them, and not one person was missing.

But where were they? They soon learned that they had reached an island called Melita. The people there were kind and helpful, and quickly started a fire to keep them warm. Paul began to gather sticks to help with the fire. He didn't realize that one of the "sticks" was actually a snake, and when he tried to put the sticks into the fire, the snake came out and bit him.

The island people were horrified, and they watched silently. "This man will die in minutes," they thought, "This snake is really poisonous! This probably happened to him because he must have done something terrible. Maybe he was a murderer!"

But Paul wasn't worried. He just shook off the snake and continued with what he was doing, as if nothing had happened. Minutes went by, hours went by, and he did not die. Now the people were amazed. They thought, "Maybe this man is a god! How could he

not die from that snake bite?” After this, the island chief, whose name was Publius, took Paul and the other men into his home and treated them like special guests.

The whole group ended up staying in Melita throughout the winter. And all this time, God used Paul to bless the people on this island. He healed many people in the name of Jesus. The first man he healed was the father of Publius, who was sick with a fever and bleeding. The people of Melita loved Paul, and treated the whole group kindly. When the group was ready to continue their trip, the people of Melita filled their ship⁴ with everything they might need.

God had kept His promise to Paul and had protected each and every person on the ship. Through Paul, God blessed Julius and the rest of the sailors and passengers, and he also blessed the people of Melita. Just like God used Paul, He wants to use you to bless others, too. Will you ask Him today to help you to be a blessing to those around you?

⁴ They boarded another ship that had stopped at Melita for the winter, too.

32. Paul's Prison Home

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Romans 8:18



Acts 28:11-31; Philemon / AA 43

Paul was being taken as a prisoner to the city of Rome. It was a long trip by ship, and they had spent the whole winter in the island of Melita after being shipwrecked.

Now they were on board once more.

On the way, they stopped at the city of Puteoli. Paul had Christian friends in this city, and Centurion Julius allowed him to spend seven days with them. Paul was grateful to be given this precious time. But all too soon, he had to board the ship again to continue their journey. They finally reached their last port. From here, they would have to walk forty miles to reach Rome, because Rome could not be reached by ship.

It was a long walk, and on the way, crowds would gather to watch the group of prisoners and soldiers. “What terrible things did these men do? Why are they prisoners?” the people wondered. It must have been hard for Paul to walk while people looked and frowned at him! But soon, this feeling changed, because suddenly, a man recognized Paul. He cried out and ran to Paul, hugged his neck and cried with happiness. “I got to know Jesus through you!” he said joyfully.

As the group kept on walking, this happened again and again. The Christians gathered around Paul, greeting him and crying, and the soldiers stopped and waited. The soldiers wished they could just keep on walking, but they respected Paul and decided not to interrupt these happy meetings. “We love you, Paul, and we are grateful for your work,” the Christians assured him. This gave Paul comfort and courage, because it was not easy to be a prisoner.

When Paul arrived in Rome, the chief captain who received him decided that Paul would not be sent to a dungeon. He allowed Paul to rent a house and stay there as a prisoner, instead of being in a jail cell, because governor Festus and Centurion Julius had spoken so kindly of him.

Soon after, Paul invited the Jewish leaders who lived in Rome to come and speak with him. They didn’t know why he was a prisoner, so he told them his story and why he believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Some of the Jewish leaders believed that Paul was telling the truth, but others rejected his message, because it went against their own ideas.

Paul spent two years in his prison home. He couldn’t leave – he was under house arrest. All this time, he was able to receive visitors and speak to them freely of Jesus. He also spent time writing letters to the faraway churches to encourage them. Because he was suffering as a prisoner and couldn’t travel to visit the believers, people were interested in reading his letters and in hearing what he had to say.

Since Paul couldn’t leave his prison home, he needed other people’s help. Several of his friends stayed with him and helped him with his needs. Luke, Timothy, Tychicus, Demas and John Mark were some of the men who cared for Paul. Remember John Mark, the young man who had abandoned Paul and Barnabas during a difficult

trip? Well, by now he had grown into a brave young man, and Paul loved him dearly. Another young man, Demas, only helped Paul for a time. Sadly, he later decided to focus on getting rich, and he stopped following Jesus.

Another man who helped care for Paul was Onesimus. Paul was grateful for all his help, but there was a problem: Onesimus was a runaway slave. His master was Philemon, a Christian from Colossae. Paul knew that the right thing would be for Onesimus to return to his master. “Go back,” he encouraged him. To help Onesimus, Paul wrote a letter to Philemon⁵. In his letter, he said, “Please receive Onesimus as a beloved brother. He has been so helpful to me that I would have liked him to stay here with me. Please receive him as myself, and I will pay you whatever he owes you.” With this letter, Onesimus felt brave enough to return to his master. We don’t know how Philemon reacted when he saw his runaway slave, but if he really loved Jesus and respected Paul, he must’ve treated Onesimus kindly, especially because the letter Paul wrote was so heartfelt.

Why did Onesimus have to go back to his master? Did God want slavery? No. Slavery was not a part of God’s plan, but it wasn’t Paul’s job to force all the Christians to free their slaves. What he did do was to teach them how to live so that, eventually, slavery wouldn’t even make sense to them anymore. He asked masters to treat their slaves as brothers and sisters, and he taught the slaves to work for their masters as if they were doing it for Christ. This changed the way that Christian slaves and masters treated each other, and it made their lives better.

⁵ The book of Philemon in the Bible.

Even in prison, Paul was able to keep teaching and blessing people. It was clear to those around him that he was innocent and didn't deserve to be a prisoner. But prison didn't stop him from sharing Jesus. Even today we can read some of the letters he wrote while staying in that house in Rome. God can use any situation and turn it into something good, if only we will trust Him through it, just like Paul did. Will you ask God to help you trust Him today, so that He can use you and turn every situation into something good?

33. Blessings from the Prison

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. James 1:2-4

 *Philippians, Colossians / AA 44, 45*

The believers in the city of Philippi looked at each other. “Paul is still in prison,” they said, “Let’s send him gifts to support him. He needs our help”. The Philippians wanted Paul to feel loved, supported and comforted, so they lovingly gathered their offerings to send him. They asked one of their members, Epaphroditus, to travel to Rome to visit Paul and take him their gifts.

Paul was deeply grateful when Epaphroditus arrived. He was glad for the generous offerings the Philippians had sent him, but most of all, he was comforted by having Epaphroditus with him. This man stayed with Paul for a long time and took care of him tenderly. Paul needed this kind of help, because he could not leave his prison home.

Soon after arriving at Paul’s home, Epaphroditus became ill. In fact, he grew so sick that everyone was sure he would die. “Please heal him,” Paul prayed. To everyone’s joy and relief, he got better. Paul said to him, “I’m so grateful that you are well! And I enjoy having you here with me. But I think you should return to Philippi. I

know the believers there have heard of your illness, and they will want to see you. But before you leave, let me write them a letter.”

Paul sat down and wrote a beautiful letter to the believers in Philippi – this letter is the book of Philippians in the Bible. Paul wrote and thanked the Philippians for the gifts and offerings they had sent him. Of all the churches, the church of Philippi had been the most generous of all. Then he wrote, “I am so thankful to God that He healed our friend Epaphroditus. If he had died, I would have felt terrible sorrow.” Paul kept on writing his letter, encouraging the Philippians in their relationship with Jesus.

Then Paul wrote something really special: “Greetings from the household of the Caesar.” The household of the Caesar? Yes! There were servants of Nero the Caesar who had heard Paul and accepted Jesus. It wasn’t easy for these people to follow Jesus, because they worked in a place that was full of evil. Nero the Caesar was cruel and selfish, and so were many of his servants. It was hard for the Christian servants to remain pure and good when they saw and heard wicked things every day. But God gave them the strength they needed, and they were comforted when they heard that other Christians, like the Philippians, would be praying for them.

When Paul first became a prisoner, the Christians thought that he would no longer be able to preach, but the opposite happened: people were even more willing to come to his home and listen to him, simply because he was a prisoner. They felt like he was somebody important and pitied him for being unable to leave, while also admiring him that he was so true to what he believed. Maybe those who were rich were not as interested in his message, but the poor and the slaves treasured what Paul taught them: God loved them and had plans for

them also! It was such a wonderful miracle that the gospel of Jesus had reached the servants of Nero the Caesar!

Paul talked about Jesus with anyone who was willing to come and hear him. He also wrote letters. One of these letters is the one we just mentioned, the letter to the Philippians which Epaphroditus took with him when he returned to Philippi. At around the same time, he wrote a letter to the church of Colosse. This letter is the book of Colossians in the Bible. In his letter, Paul warned the Colossian believers: “Stay away from false teachings. Follow Jesus, not false teachers.” He also wrote, “Stay away from worldly practices that are against Christ.” He also wrote much about the special relationship Christ had with God as His only begotten Son. The loving advice that Paul wrote to these churches is useful to us today and can help us to better understand how to live our lives with Jesus.

Both in Rome and away from Rome, people continued to be encouraged and taught by Paul. The believing servants from Nero’s household treasured his teachings, and the churches that received his letters treasured his words. God was using this whole unfortunate situation of imprisonment to reach people who would not have been reached otherwise. How wonderful that Paul, even though he was suffering, chose to trust God and continue to share the gospel rather than feel sorry for himself. Will you ask God to give you this trust in Him, too? Can we remember others instead of focusing on ourselves? Let’s ask Him to help us trust Him fully, no matter what happens to us.

34. Freedom and Arrest

And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.
Matthew 10:18-19



2 Timothy / AA 46, 47, 48, 49

Paul was a prisoner in Rome. After two years, the guard in charge of him changed. The previous guard had liked Paul, but the new guard didn't like him. At around the same time, Nero the Caesar married a Jewish woman. This woman was friends with the Jewish leaders, so the Christians were sure that she would easily convince Nero to kill Paul. Nero was a heartless man: he did whatever was good for himself, without caring at all about others. He had killed his own family members just so that he could become the Caesar. His own servants were disgusted by the things he did, and terrified of him at the same time. What would this wicked Caesar do to Paul?

Paul knew that, most probably, he would never be free again. But he was at peace, and he trusted that God was with him; he was not afraid to die. Finally, the day came for him to go on trial before Nero the Caesar. What would the Caesar do to Paul? The believers dreaded hearing the news. But to everyone's surprise, Nero decided that Paul was innocent, and just like that, Paul was set free.

Paul was grateful to be free again! He immediately began to travel again to visit as many churches as he could. He was getting old and knew that he would probably not live much longer, so he wanted to do as much as possible while he was still able.

But Paul's freedom didn't last long. The next year, the Roman authorities became unhappy because there were so many new Christians in Rome. Nero was annoyed that so many of his servants were now Christians, and he treated them cruelly.

Then Nero did a terrible thing: he secretly started a huge fire in Rome that burnt up almost half of the city. Why did he do this? We're not sure. Some say he wanted more land to make his palace bigger. But he also used the fire as an excuse to blame the Christians. "The Christians did this!" he lied, and then he began to kill thousands of Christians, even little children. At the same time, he pretended to be kind and generous by helping the people who had lost their homes in the fire.

The Jews didn't mind what Nero was doing. When they saw that Nero was blaming the Christians, they thought, "We can tell him that Paul is to blame for this fire!" They knew that Paul hadn't caused the fire; in fact, Paul wasn't even in Rome at the time! But their plan worked: they convinced Nero to arrest Paul and bring him back to Rome. This time Paul was not taken to a home prison; he was put inside a dark dungeon.

Some of Paul's friends wanted to travel with him to Rome, but Paul asked them not to. "Stay in your cities; it's not safe for you in Rome. Also, I have enough friends in Rome," he said to them. But when Paul was put in the dungeon, he noticed that, one by one, his friends in Rome left him. Some of them had to leave to do missionary work in other cities, but many of them simply left because they were

afraid. Only two friends stayed with Paul: Luke and Onesiphorus. Paul wrote a letter to Timothy and told him how comforted he was to have these two friends with him.

Soon after, Paul was brought to trial before Nero. He knew that this time he would probably not be set free, but Jesus strengthened him. As people watched the trial, they were amazed. They saw Paul's calm, gentle and peaceful face. "He's innocent," they thought.

When it was Paul's turn to speak, he didn't even try to defend himself. Rather, he spoke about Christ. What he wanted, most of all, was for everyone in that room to accept Jesus as the divine Savior sent from God! As he spoke, his face shone like the face of an angel. Many of the men who watched the trial ended up accepting Jesus, because they could not forget what they had seen and heard during that trial.

Nero also listened. He felt his sinfulness and guilt, and he was afraid. He dared not condemn Paul. For a moment, he desired the peace and purity that Paul was speaking about. For a moment, he thought that God might forgive him and that he too could have a relationship with God. But he quickly dismissed these thoughts. "Take him back to the dungeon!" he ordered.

Paul was grateful that God had given him a chance to speak of Jesus to the Roman court. But once in his cell, he thought of his friends. So many of them had either left him or could not be with him for other reasons. He longed to at least see Timothy, the dear friend who was like a son to him. Paul knew that any time now, he might be killed, so he decided to write a letter to Timothy, asking him to come to see him. In this letter, he gave counsel to Timothy and encouraged him in his work with the churches. It took Timothy a few months to

make the trip from Ephesus, where he was working, to Rome to be with Paul.

Paul was able to speak of Jesus to the highest authorities in the world at the time. Angels had given him the right words to say. Someday, we might have to speak about Jesus to high authorities, too. We don't need to worry about what we will say or do, because Jesus has promised that He will give us the words to say. But we need to know what Jesus is like today. Won't you spend time with His words, the Bible, so that He might give you words of blessing to speak?

35. The Deaths of Paul and Nero

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Romans 8:6

 AA 49, 50

Nero was impressed by what Paul had spoken during the trial. He almost asked for God's forgiveness. He almost asked for the peace and purity that God was offering him. He almost wanted to be adopted into the family of God as a son. But he was too proud to repent, and he let the opportunity pass. He sent Paul back to his dungeon so he could think about these things a while longer.

Nero felt he could not condemn Paul, because it was clear that he was innocent. But as time went by, he felt annoyed to have Paul in prison; just knowing that Paul was there was a reminder to him that he was sinful and guilty, and he didn't like these thoughts. He was also annoyed that so many people in Rome had become Christians. He didn't like that several of his own servants were Christians as well. Their attempts to live pure, selfless lives made him feel bad for his life of self-indulgent excess. Finally, he decided that it was time for Paul to be condemned, and he ordered that Paul be beheaded.

Nero decided that Paul would be killed quietly and privately. He didn't want a large crowd watching, because he was afraid that those watching would end up becoming Christians, too. There were only a

few people who were there for Paul's execution, and they were amazed at how Paul behaved. Paul was cheerful and peaceful. He showed forgiveness to the men who were about to kill him, and he trusted in Christ. Of those who watched Paul's execution, several became Christian, and they even ended up dying for their faith a few years later, just like Paul.

Before dying, Paul tried to encourage the few Christians who had come with him to the place of execution. He reminded them of God's faithfulness and he focused on Jesus, not on what was about to happen to him. Even through his death, he helped and comforted others.

Nero never had peace after Paul died, because by killing Paul, he showed that he had rejected God. Shortly after Paul was killed, Nero sailed to Greece. There he behaved so badly that he ended up feeling embarrassed and ashamed. He returned to his home in Rome and began having wild parties, behaving in ways that a ruler is not supposed to. He hoped these parties would help him forget about how guilty he felt, but of course he could not forget. He could have asked Jesus to forgive him even then, but he didn't.

One day, while he was having one of his parties, something terrible happened. He heard a large noise on the streets: it was a large enemy army that had come to attack Rome. The streets filled up with an angry mob that wanted to kill Nero the Caesar. He was terrified. He thought of killing himself right there, but he was too scared to. He escaped to the countryside, but his enemies soon found him. Nero didn't want his enemies to capture and torture him, so he ordered a slave to kill him quickly so he wouldn't suffer. He was only 32 years old. How different his life would have been if only he had been reconciled with God when he was given the opportunity!

Paul died after a long life of faithful service to Jesus. He was at peace and had the assurance of a life well lived through Jesus. Nero died without peace and without the forgiveness of Jesus. He died knowing that he was sinful and guilty, and he had no comfort. Yet both men had been given the chance to get to know Jesus and receive newness of life. One chose to accept it, the other did not. We have this same choice today. Do you choose to accept Jesus and His ways today?

36. Peter the Apostle

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

Philippians 3:8



1 Peter, 2 Peter / AA 51, 52

Peter spent his whole life teaching others about Jesus. Remember when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost? Right after that, Peter worked hard among the Jews in Jerusalem, trying to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. He especially spent time preaching of Jesus during the feasts, because this was a time when Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem to worship.

Before Peter met Jesus, he had been strong-willed and independent. He thought he could keep God's law and be a good person all by himself. He thought he was a loyal friend to Jesus. But then he ended up doing something terrible: he denied Jesus just before He was crucified. After this happened, Peter was never the same. He realized that he could only keep God's law with the Spirit of Jesus. He realized that he was not a good person, and not a good friend, but that if he was with Jesus, Jesus could change him and help him have a pure character.

Just before Jesus returned to heaven, He assured Peter that he was forgiven. And He asked Peter to care for the "flock", the group of believers. Peter was honored to do this for Jesus. For the rest of his

life, he worked to teach and strengthen the group of believers, while at the same time he preached and helped to bring new people into their believing family. And as Peter worked, he constantly remembered that he could do nothing unless he depended completely on Jesus.

The believers loved Peter. He was kind, loving and patient, because this is how Jesus had treated him even when he had made a terrible mistake. The younger men watched Peter and wished to become ministers just like him, and they learnt from him. He was a much-loved teacher and leader in the new church. Peter didn't travel much like Paul and some of the others did. He stayed mostly in Jerusalem, but there were men who learnt from him and later traveled to other lands to teach these same truths to others.

Like Paul, Peter wrote letters to believers in other cities. Two of his letters are in the Bible: they are the books of first and second Peter. His letters were encouraging to the believers because he wrote them at a time when Christians were suffering persecution. He wrote about how to hold on to Jesus and not lose faith. He also explained how Christians should live, and how ministers should conduct themselves. He wrote about how God develops Christian character in His children, and that it was important to keep on studying the Scriptures and prophecies to strengthen their faith and their knowledge of truth.

Peter worked among the Jews for many years, and eventually he ended up being arrested, too. He was arrested at around the same time that Paul was. Nero the Caesar ordered that he be sent to Rome. Just like Paul, Peter ministered to others from prison as best as he could. Peter wasn't surprised that this was happening to him, because

Jesus had let him know that he, like Jesus, would end up being crucified.

Peter was finally condemned to be whipped and crucified. He felt it was a privilege to give his life for the gospel of Jesus, and he thought it was too much of an honor to die the way that Jesus had died. “I denied Jesus. I know that He was forgiven me, but I still can’t forgive myself. I shouldn’t die in the same way He did,” said Peter. Instead, he asked if he could be crucified with his head down.

Peter didn’t think he was losing anything by dying for Jesus, because Jesus had done so much more for him. He trusted Jesus throughout, and we will be able to meet Peter when Jesus resurrects him and all the others who died believing in Him.

Is Jesus as important to you as He was to Peter? Would you be willing to live and to die for Him, because He has done so much for you and knows what’s best for you? Ask Him today to help you to know Him better so you can love Him so much that He can become what’s most important in your life.

37. John, the Beloved

For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.

So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

Romans 14:8



John, 1-3 John / AA 53 - 56

John was called “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. He was especially close to Jesus, and he was with Jesus during some of the most special moments of His life. Remember when Jesus was transfigured up on the mountain and Moses and Elijah came to visit Him? John saw that; He saw Jesus shining bright as the Son of God. He also watched Jesus sweating blood and suffering in the garden of Gethsemane. And when the priests and the mob arrested Jesus, John stayed nearby and listened to the whole trial. He was also there when Jesus was placed on the cross, and from the cross, Jesus honored John by asking him to take care of His mother, Mary. When John heard that Jesus was risen, he was one of the first to run to the tomb.

John was known as a kind and gentle apostle, but he had not always been this way. He and his brother James were nicknamed “sons of thunder” because they got angry so easily and were quickly offended when things didn’t happen the way they wanted. By spending time with Jesus, John began to change. He didn’t like to have a bad temper; he wanted to be kind, caring and gentle like Jesus. And the more he was with Jesus, the more he became like Jesus.

John spent the rest of his life working to help others learn about Jesus. He wrote five of the books in the Bible: one of these books is the gospel of John, in which he wrote about the loving, unselfish life that Jesus, the Son of God, lived on earth. In this book, John really focuses on Christ's relationship to His Father. He also wrote three letters to the churches, which are in our Bible as First, Second and Third John. In his letters he wrote about the love of God and how important it is to love one another. He taught that we should give ourselves to Jesus and trust Him, because only He can help us to be good; we cannot do it ourselves. He also wrote the book of Revelation, which tells the history of the church and the world from John's time until Jesus comes again.

John, like Peter, worked among believers. Other apostles were sent to lands where no one had heard about God or Jesus, but John's work was to teach and strengthen those who were already believers. He helped people understand how to be a part of God's kingdom by treating them the way Jesus had treated him: he was always calm and patient. Instead of arguing and trying to change people's minds, he simply told them about what he had seen and heard from Jesus.

John was the last living disciple; he saw many of his beloved friends persecuted and killed. His brother James was killed by the sword, Stephen was stoned, Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified. John was one of the few disciples who was alive when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its beautiful temple.

The Jewish leaders were frustrated to have John nearby. They just wanted the people to believe that Jesus was dead, but with John around this was impossible. People noticed how kind, gentle and wise John was, and they knew he had been with Jesus. Through the life of John, many became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. As if that

wasn't enough, the Jewish leaders were upset because John's presence would comfort the believers who were being persecuted. Because of John, the believers didn't give up their faith in Jesus, even when they faced hardships.

The Jews finally managed to get John sent to Rome for trial. They brought in false witnesses who told lies about him, but they could not prove that he had done anything wrong. Yet somehow, John's enemies managed to condemn him. They threw him into a huge metal pot filled with boiling oil. They were sure he would die, but God saved his life just like He saved Daniel's three friends from the furnace. While John was still inside the pot of oil, his enemies heard him say, "My Master was patient as Satan and his angels tortured and humiliated Him. Now I'm being given the chance to suffer for His sake, and it's an honor for me. I am a weak and sinful man, but Christ was holy, harmless and sinless." When his enemies heard this, they took him out of the boiling pot.

Finally, the Caesar, Emperor Domitian, sent John to the isle of Patmos as a prisoner. "No one will hear him now, and he will die on this island," said Domitian. Patmos was not a pleasant place to be in; it was rocky and hardly had any trees or plants, and this is why it was chosen as a place for prisoners. But to John, the island became a blessing. He had the company of God, Christ and the angels, and he could rest from the work he had been doing all his life. In the quietness of the island, he received instructions from Jesus to the church for all future time. This is where he wrote the book of Revelation, a book which tells us what would happen after he died. It is a remarkable explanation of the history of humans and God from John's time until now, and until the very end. He received more visions on this island than during all his earlier years.

Even though Patmos was a barren island, John still felt blessed to be out in nature. The blue skies, the rocks and the waves still taught him lessons about God. He could see God's power next to his own human weakness. The rocks reminded him that he could feel safe in Christ the Rock. He made friends and converts even on this lonely island. The emperor had meant for Patmos to be a terrible experience for John, but it wasn't so. John had Jesus, and Jesus turned this situation for good.

John lived a long life, and throughout this time he followed Jesus and worked for Him. Today we are still blessed by the books that John wrote. John gave his life to Jesus and let Him lead him, and this friendship with Jesus helped John to develop a beautiful character, just like Jesus'. Jesus wants to have this kind of relationship with each of us, too. Will you give your life to Him today and let Him guide you, like He did with John?

38. Jesus Among the Golden Candlesticks

**I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last...
I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore;
Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.
Revelation 1:11, 18**



Revelation 1 / AA 57

All of the apostles had already died for believing in Jesus. Only one of them was still alive: it was John. He was now a prisoner in the island of Patmos. The Roman emperor, or Caesar, had sent him there because of his belief in Jesus. But John was not discouraged. He knew Jesus and believed in His love and care, and trusted that God was with him, even in the lonely island of Patmos.

One Sabbath day while John was in Patmos, he received a vision. He heard a voice behind him, saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” What is Alpha and Omega? Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. John knew about these letters because most people in the Roman empire spoke Greek. The voice continued saying, “I am the first and the last.” Who was speaking? It was Jesus. He is the beginning and the end, just like Alpha and Omega are the beginning and the end of the alphabet. He is the first and the last; nothing exists without Him.

Jesus continued speaking, “Write down what you see in a book, and send it to the seven churches in Asia.”

Now John turned around to see the voice that was speaking to him. He was having a vision, and in this vision, he saw seven candlesticks. Jesus was in the midst of these candlesticks. He was wearing a long garment and a golden belt. His head and hair were white as snow, and his eyes were like a flame of fire. His face shone as bright as the sun. His feet were shiny as brass, and His voice sounded like many waters. In his right hand He had seven stars, and a two-edged sword came out of His mouth.

John was filled with awe and fear. He fell at the feet of Jesus as if he were dead. But Jesus kindly touched him with His right hand and comforted him, saying, “Don’t be afraid, I am the first and the last. I live, and I was dead, but I will be alive forever. I have conquered death. Write down all these things that you will see in this vision.”

What did this vision mean? Jesus explained it to John: The seven candlesticks were the seven churches of Asia. These churches were Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. The seven stars on the right hand of Jesus were the angels, or the leaders, of these seven churches.

Jesus loves each of His followers dearly and cares for them. He walked among the seven candlesticks, or the seven churches, showing that He is very near to each of His children. He held the seven stars, or the leaders, in His hands, showing that He wishes to care for and lead His people.

“I am the first and the last,” Jesus assured John. We can have eternal life because Jesus is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, and He will live forever. He wants to give us His strength

and His life to overcome sin, if we will accept it. He will not leave us alone. “Don’t be afraid,” He comforts us.

The last time that John had seen Jesus looking so bright and shiny had been when He was transfigured on the mount. At that time, John had not completely understood how special that moment was. But now he was amazed. How comforting it was to know that Jesus cared for him and for the churches, and that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end! What a wonderful message he would write to share with the Christian believers!

Do you believe that Jesus is the first and the last, and that He will live forever and wants to give you eternal life, too? Imagine Him walking among the golden candlesticks, His churches, and holding the seven stars in His hands. Think of how tenderly He cares for each of us. Will you accept His offer of life to you, and will you thank Him for His loving care today?

39. A Message to the Seven Churches (Part 1)

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Revelation 3:22



Revelation 2 / AA 57

John was in vision. He saw Jesus, shining and bright, standing among seven golden candlesticks. These seven candlesticks represented the seven churches in Asia. These were real churches that existed in the time of John, and the messages for each of them had to do with the needs and problems that each of those churches had.

But each of these churches also represents a period of time in John's future. As John heard these messages, he saw what was going to happen with God's church in the future, right until the end of time.

The first church was Ephesus. It represented the early church in the time of John. Jesus said to this church, "You are hard-working and patient. You shared the gospel even though you faced terrible difficulties. You have been careful about rejecting wrong teachings, and you've been faithful to my word. But there's a problem: you've lost your first love for me." Jesus was reminding this church that a deep love for Him was fading, and how could they be excited to share the gospel if they didn't love Him? And how could they love one another if they didn't have the love of Jesus? "Repent, and return to how you were before," Jesus invited. "I hold the seven stars and I

walk among the candlesticks,” Jesus reminded. If this church could only think about how much Jesus cared for them, they would easily love Him back.

To the church in Smyrna, the second church, Jesus had only words of encouragement. “You seem so poor, but you’re actually rich. You’re being persecuted terribly by the Jews, but that hasn’t stopped you from reflecting my character. Many of you will end up in prison, and for ten days you will have tribulation”. In prophecy one day is one year, so “ten days” meant ten years. Not long after the time of John, the Christians would be persecuted terribly for ten years, and after that, the Roman Empire would accept Christianity.

Knowing that persecution was coming is not easy to hear, and Jesus didn’t want this church to be discouraged. He said to them kindly, “Be faithful, knowing that you will receive a crown of life. You will have eternal life.” Jesus reminded them, “I am the first and the last, I was dead, and now am alive.” This church could be sure that Jesus would give them eternal life, because He had conquered death.

Now Jesus spoke to Pergamos, the third church. It represents the church that the Roman Empire accepted. He said, “You have been faithful, even when one of your members, Antipas, was persecuted and lost his life. But sadly, now you have accepted some false teachings that are confusing others.” Jesus invited this church to repent. He encouraged them with a promise: “To those who hear, I will give hidden manna to eat, and a white stone with a new name written on it.” The manna represents God’s Word, and a new name represents a new character. Jesus was offering this church, and anyone who is reading this, to believe His Word and to let Him change their characters. “I am the one who has the sharp two-edged sword,” Jesus reminded this church. What is the sharp two-edged

sword? It is the Bible. Jesus is telling this church to not ignore God's Word. Everything that we believe needs to come from the Bible, and not simply from what other people say.

Thyatira was the fourth church. It is the church that began to be ruled by the Papacy. Jesus said to it, "I know how faithful and patient you are, and that you're full of love for one another. You serve one another gladly, and you consider others before yourself. However, there is a problem: you have permitted some false teachings to come into the church, and the members are beginning to do things they shouldn't, things that will lead them away from God's kingdom." Jesus encouraged this church with a promise: "Be faithful until I come. If you overcome, you will rule with me after my second coming. And I will give you the morning star." What is the morning star? It is Jesus Himself. When we have the truth, we have Jesus! Jesus also reminded them, "I am the Son of God, who has eyes like flames of fire, and feet like fine brass." Fire can help to remove impurities in metal; in the same way, Jesus is like a fire that helps to remove untruths from our lives.

Jesus offered each of the churches what they needed: a reminder of His tender love for them, the assurance that He would give them eternal life, and the encouragement to keep believing in Him and following the truths in His Word, the Bible. We need each of these things today, too, and Jesus is offering them to us. Will you ask Jesus to give you more of His love and His truths today?

40. A Message to the Seven Churches (Part 2)

Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any many hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20

 *Revelation 3 / AA 57*

John was having a vision. In this vision, Jesus was giving a special message to each of the seven churches in Asia. He had already spoken to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos and Thyatira. Now Jesus continued speaking to the church in Sardis. This represented the post-Reformation church.

“Be watchful,” Jesus warned, “Your works, your character, are not perfect before God.” What did this church need in order to have a pure character? It needed the Spirit of Jesus. He reminded them, “I have the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.” These “seven spirits” are God’s Spirit, the Spirit that Jesus offers to give us to make us pure. He also said, “Remember how you received this message, and hold fast, and repent, otherwise you will not be ready when I come, and you will feel that I came secretly like a thief.” But not everyone in this church had this problem; there were a few members who were listening to the Spirit of Jesus and letting Him work in their lives. Jesus said, “There are some who have not dirtied their garments, and they will walk with me in white.” In the Bible, white garments represent a holy and pure character, and dirty garments

represent a sinful character. Jesus encouraged this church with a promise: “Those who overcome will receive a white garment, and their names will be in the Book of Life.”

Now Jesus spoke to the church in Philadelphia. This represented the church after the French Revolution, the church who was discovering the prophecies of Daniel about the cleansing of the Sanctuary, and the second coming of Jesus. He had only good things to say about this church, except that it had little strength: “I know your works. I’ve placed an open door before you that no one can shut. I know you have little strength, but you have kept my Word and been faithful to me. Those who claim to be God’s people but are not, will end up worshiping at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you.” Why little strength? They had yet to see the importance of the law of God, and thus could not receive of more strength from Christ.

Jesus continued saying, “Because you have kept my Word, I will protect you from the time of temptation that will come upon the whole earth. I will come quickly; be faithful. To those who overcome, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and they will always be in His presence. I will write upon them the name of my God and of the New Jerusalem. I will also write on them their new name.” Jesus assured this church, “I am holy and true, and I have the key of David. What I open, no man can shut, and what I shut, no man can open.”

If only all the churches were like Philadelphia! This church was faithful and true to what it knew, and Jesus commended them for it. It was given an open door to pass through, to learn how to receive the full righteousness of Jesus before He returned again and the world comes to an end. Jesus had no rebuke to give them; they were following God’s Word, they loved Jesus and trusted in Him.

Sadly, God's people didn't always remain pure. The church that came after Philadelphia was the complete opposite. The last church, Laodicea, represents our time, just before the second coming of Jesus. Jesus had nothing good to say about this church. He could only point out its problems and, because He loves us, He offers solutions. He said, "I know your works. You are neither hot nor cold; you are lukewarm." Lukewarm means the church doesn't even realize it is missing something; it is self-satisfied. What will happen if the church continues this way? Jesus said, "I will vomit you out of my mouth."

Jesus continued explaining the problems in this church: "You believe you are rich and that you need nothing. You think you have the truth and have nothing to learn anymore. But in reality, you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked." Jesus was telling the church in Laodicea that they did not know the truth, they still had plenty to learn, and they had no garments, no righteousness! This church is in a desperate situation! Completely blind of the truth and without the righteousness of Jesus. Jesus is longing to help this church.

Out of love, Jesus offered a solution. He said, "I advise you to buy gold from me, so that you can be rich, and white clothing, so that you can be covered. You should also put eyesalve on your eyes so that you can see." There was a solution for their poverty, their nakedness and their blindness.

But how could they pay for the gold, the clothing and the eyesalve? Jesus was offering it for free. All they had to do was give up their wrong ideas and accept what Jesus was offering them. Before they could receive these things from Jesus, they had to accept their sad diagnosis. It is very difficult for someone who thinks they know the truth and has everything they need to now admit that they in fact

don't know so much and that they need help. Would the church in Laodicea accept what Jesus was telling them?

Jesus knew that this church wouldn't like to hear His rebuke. So He gently said, "I rebuke all those that I love, because I want to help you change. Please repent." Then it is to this church that Jesus offers one of His most precious promises: "I'm standing outside your door and knocking on it. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and we will eat together. Those who overcome will sit on my throne, just like I overcame and sat on my throne with my Father." Jesus said to this church, "I am the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." He could show them their true condition, and He had the power to help them.

There is hope for the Laodicean church, and there is hope also for us. If we let Jesus in and hear His voice, He can heal our blindness and solve our poverty. He can cover us with His white garments of righteousness. He has all the solutions, and He longs to do this for us freely because He loves us so much.

Jesus had just given His messages to the seven churches. There were good things that Jesus noticed, as well as problems that He pointed out, and there were always solutions, if only these churches would accept them. The solutions were always in Jesus and came from Jesus. Today He is knocking at the doors of our hearts; He is asking to come in. He longs to be with us and help us. Will you let Jesus into your heart today?

41. The Throne in Heaven

**Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches,
and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.
Revelation 5:12**



Revelation 4,5

John was in vision. He had just heard Jesus giving a message to each of the seven churches. Now he looked, and saw a door open in heaven. Jesus invited John, saying, “Come up here. I must show you things that will happen.” The voice of Jesus now sounded like a trumpet.

Then John saw a throne set up in heaven, and God was sitting on it. Around the throne there was a rainbow, and coming out of the throne were lightning, thunder and voices. Seven lamps of fire, which represent the Spirit of God, were set in front of the throne, and in front of this there was a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

Around the throne there were four “beasts”, or living creatures. These are good creatures, nor bad. Each of these had six wings and was full of eyes on its front and back. The first looked kind of like a lion, the second looked like a calf, the third had the face of a man, and the last one looked like a flying eagle. These beasts constantly praised God and gave Him glory, saying “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.”

Surrounding all of this were twenty-four seats or thrones. Twenty-four elders sat on these thrones. Some people think these are saints who resurrected when Jesus did. They were dressed in white clothing

and wore golden crowns on their heads. When the four beasts praised and thanked God, the elders knelt down and cast their crowns before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for you have created all things, and they have been created for your pleasure.”

John kept looking. He saw that God was holding a book with seven seals. A strong angel asked in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book? Who can loosen the seven seals to open this book?”

John wept. He was filled with anguish because they couldn’t find any man who was worthy to loosen the seals and to open this book. One of the elders spoke to John kindly. “Don’t weep. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, is worthy to do this.” Who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah? Who is the Root of David? These are all names that the Bible uses to refer to Jesus. Jesus is worthy to open the book, because He never sinned!

Now John looked and saw that in the midst of the throne, surrounded by the four beasts and the twenty-four elders, there was a Lamb. It looked like it had been slain. Who is the Lamb in the Bible? It is Jesus. And this Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which means He had God’s power and God’s Spirit. He could open the book.

This Lamb, Jesus, took the book from His Father’s hand. Now that He had the book, the beasts and the elders fell down in worship, holding harps and golden flasks with incense. The incense represents the prayers of God’s people. They sang a new song which said, “You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals, for you were slain and have brought us back to God. You have made us kings and priests before God, and we will reign on the earth.”

John kept listening. He heard thousands and thousands of angels and living creatures singing loudly, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!” The voices continued, “Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto God and unto the Lamb forever and ever!” The four beasts said, “Amen!” to this song, and the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped God.

What a beautiful song! God gave His Son to us, and Jesus came to live among us and was even willing to die, so we could truly see how much God loves us, and so that we would be willing to return to God. And even though we have sinned and are not worthy to open the book, Jesus is worthy, and He is willing to do it. He is willing to give us all we need so that we can be righteous. Will you thank God for His wonderful gift to us? Will you accept this gift today?

42. The Seven Seals

For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Revelation 7:17



Revelation 6,7

John watched attentively. He was in vision, and he saw there was a book with seven seals. The only way to open this book was to loosen the seven seals, but there was no man worthy to do this. John was heartbroken and cried. How would they be able to read this book? But there was a solution: there was one Man worthy to open the book. He was Jesus, the Lamb. Now the Lamb was about to open each of the seven seals.

The Lamb began opening each seal. After each seal was opened, one of the four beasts who sat near the throne said to John, “Come and see!” And after each seal was opened, there was something to see. The first four seals were horses. When the lamb opened the first seal, John saw a white horse. Its rider had a bow and wore a crown, because he was a conqueror. When the second seal was opened, John saw a red horse. Its rider received a sword, and power to take peace away from the earth. When the third seal was opened, John saw a black horse. Its rider held a pair of balances in his hand. A voice announced, “Wheat and barley will be expensive, but don’t damage the oil and wine!” Then the fourth seal was opened, and John saw a pale, sickly horse. Its rider was called Death, and Hell followed with

him. Death and Hell were given power over one fourth of the earth, to give death and hunger to people.

Now the Lamb opened the fifth seal. This time John saw an altar. Under this altar were the souls of people who had died for believing in Jesus. They had been killed by cruel followers of Satan. In the vision, they asked God, “How much longer will it be until justice is done for us?” The Bible teaches that dead people are asleep and cannot work, talk or praise God. So why were they speaking in this vision? These souls were “crying out” to God just like the blood of Abel had cried out from the earth after Cain had killed him. God knew about what had happened to each of them. Would God do something for them? Yes, of course He would. Each received a white robe, which means that God gave them His righteousness; they would be saved. Everyone who suffers for believing in Jesus can be comforted in knowing that He will give them eternal life. These souls would just have to wait for a little longer, for more believers would die for their faith just like they did.

Now the Lamb opened the sixth seal, and John saw all sorts of things happening on earth and in the sky: there was a great earthquake, the sun became black, the moon turned red, and the stars fell from the sky. The heavens opened up like a scroll that is rolled together, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. What do you think the people on earth did when all of this happened? They all hid themselves in caves and under the rocks of mountains. They said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us! Hide us from the face of God on His throne, and from the Lamb!” These are people who never reconciled their relationship to God, and when they see He is real, they panic.

After this, John looked and saw four angels. Each angel was standing on one of the four corners of the earth, and they were holding the four winds of the earth. As long as the angels held the winds, these winds could not destroy the earth. These winds represent the strife that comes upon the earth, in man and in nature, when God's spirit is removed. John saw that yet another angel had the seal of God and shouted loudly to the four angels, "Don't hurt the earth, or the sea or the trees, until the servants of God have been sealed on their foreheads!" God would have his character represented in his people before allowing the world to completely fall apart.

After this, 144,000 people received the seal of God. Just then, a great multitude from all over the world also came and stood before the throne and before the Lamb. They wore white robes and held palms in their hands. They sang loudly: "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne, and the elders and the four beasts worshipped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be unto our God forever!"

One of the twenty-four elders asked John, "Who are these people dressed in white? Where did they come from?" John didn't know, but he wanted to understand. He replied, "Sir, you know who they are." The elder then explained, "These people have gone through many troubles, but they trusted in Jesus and received His righteousness. Now they will always be in God's presence, and He will live among them. They will never be hungry or thirsty or hot again, because the Lamb will care for them, and God will wipe away all the tears from their eyes."

John watched, amazed. He didn't know what each of these seals meant, but He could rest assured that God knew the future, and that

He would care for His children. There was no need to be afraid of the things that might happen. Isn't it encouraging that those who trust in Jesus and receive His righteousness will be able to live with God in happiness and peace? Would you like to be one of these people? Will you ask the Lamb, Jesus, to care for you and lead you, so that you can be ready to live with God in heaven?

43. The Seven Trumpets

**The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord,
and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.
Revelation 11:15**



Revelation 8-11

It was time to open the seventh seal. John watched attentively as the Lamb opened it. Once it was opened, there was silence in heaven for half an hour.

John looked and saw seven angels before God. Each of these seven angels was given a trumpet. Another angel stood at the altar. He held a golden censer filled with incense. He offered this incense with the prayers of God's people, and smoke went up before God. After he offered the incense, the angel took the empty censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it into the earth. And there were voices, and thunder, and lightning, and an earthquake.

Now the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared to sound. In Bible times, trumpets were used to announce important things that were about to happen. The priests would blow the trumpets to call the people together, to give important announcements, and even to go to war. What were these seven angels about to announce with their trumpets? They were about to announce that Babylon, the kingdom of Satan, was about to fall. With their trumpets, the angels would tell of the terrible things that would happen before the fall of this kingdom. What a relief to know that soon Babylon, Satan's kingdom, will disappear! How will Babylon fall? It will fall by humanity

realizing that they had been told lies about God, and that these lies are destructive. We will see how these lies hurt people all throughout history, and we will be willing to let go of these wrong ideas, and accept God's truths. Babylon will fall when there will be no more untruths keeping us away from God and from receiving the righteousness of Jesus.

John watched as each angel blew a trumpet, and things happened on earth. With the first four trumpets, one third of the earth was ruined: a third of the trees and grass, a third of the sea and sea creatures, a third of the waters and a third of the sun, moon and stars were destroyed.

Now the fifth angel blew his trumpet. This angel was given a key to open a bottomless pit. When he opened it, a lot of smoke went up, and out of this smoke came an army of strange-looking locusts. They had human faces, long hair and lion teeth, and they wore golden crowns and iron breastplates. They had scorpion tails, and for five months they hurt people. Their king was Satan, the destroyer. But even as they went out to hurt and destroy, they were told, "You may not hurt any trees or grass, and you may not hurt the people who have received the seal of God on their foreheads."

The sixth angel now sounded his trumpet. A voice from heaven, from the golden altar, said, "Loosen the four angels that are tied to the river Euphrates, where Babylon is." Now that these angels were set free, they began to destroy one third of the people. Those who survived had a chance to repent of their sins and come to God and His protection, but did they? No. Sadly, they refused to do this.

Now John saw in vision that God was giving His Word, His prophecies, to everyone who would be willing to receive it. He sent His Son Jesus so we could see how loving He is. Everyone who is

willing to accept the truth can receive it. But will everyone accept these truths? No; John saw that there would be many who would reject it. Yet there would be a precious group who would not reject God's truths. They would trust Jesus so fully that they would be able to receive His righteousness and reflect His character perfectly. This is what Jesus is waiting for, because when there is a group of people who fully reflect His character, He will finally be able to come and take us to heaven!

Finally, John heard that the seventh trumpet sounded. This was the moment that all heaven had been waiting for – the moment when Jesus finally receives His kingdom! Babylon was now fallen, and no one would believe Satan's lies anymore; there would be no more sin or evil. Jesus would now reign forever and ever! The twenty-four elders fell upon their faces and worshiped God. And as John looked, he saw something wonderful: the temple of God was opened, and the ark of the covenant could be seen. Before this, the ark had been hidden from everyone's view. This means that, just like people could now clearly see the ark, they could now clearly see and understand God's beautiful character of love and its relationship to His law and government. The people had accepted God's covenant to love them and to be with them forever, and there were no lies to stop them from understanding God's great love for them.

How wonderful and comforting to know that all the sadness and evil will end, and that Jesus will be our king forever! Right now, Jesus can be the King of our hearts. He is waiting to gather a group of people who will allow Him to guide them, and who will accept the gift of a pure, lovely character just like His. We can begin today by accepting His gift. Will you study His life, and aim to be more like Him?

44. The Woman in the Desert

**Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God,
and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down,
which accused them before our God day and night.**

Revelation 12:10



Revelation 12

John watched attentively. He was having an amazing vision from God, in which he was being shown the things that would happen in the future.

Now, as he looked, he saw a woman. She was dressed with the sun and wore a crown of twelve stars, and she had the moon under her feet. She was pregnant and was about to give birth to a baby boy. As soon as the baby was born, a great red dragon came and tried to take it away. But God protected the baby, and He was taken up to God and His throne.

Who was this woman? It was God's church, God's people. The baby, of course, was Jesus. And who was the dragon? It was Satan. John saw that this dragon dragged one third of the stars with him; this means that one third of the angels of heaven followed the dragon and believed his lies.

This vision shows that Jesus was born among God's people, and throughout His life Satan constantly tried to tempt and destroy Him. Was Satan successful? No, he wasn't. Jesus never gave in to

temptation and never sinned, and He returned to His Father in heaven.

Then John saw that the woman, God's church, escaped into the wilderness to be safe from the dragon. She went to a place that God prepared for her, and she stayed there for 1,260 days. This means that when Satan saw that he couldn't cause Jesus to sin, he began to attack God's people. The 1,260 days that the woman hid actually means 1,260 years, because in Bible prophecy a day is a year. There is a period in history called the Middle Ages, or the Dark Ages, that lasted 1,260 years. During the Dark Ages, the truth about God was mostly unknown. The people did not have Bibles to read for themselves, and the priests taught them lies. Only a few small groups of people knew the truth, and they had to hide, just like the woman in the vision, because they were persecuted.

The vision continued. John saw the war in heaven, in which Jesus, who was known as Michael before He came to earth, fought against the dragon and his angels. How does Jesus fight? We are not told here, but from what we understand from the rest of the Bible, we can be sure that Jesus did not hurt or attack anyone. It was probably an argument of ideas and how to interpret the character of Jehovah, the great source of all. When the dragon and his angels were faced with their sin and refused to repent, they did not feel comfortable in heaven any longer, and they left and went to earth instead.

Then a loud voice in heaven said, "Now salvation and the kingdom of God has come! Satan the accuser has been cast down!" The voice was talking about what Jesus did when He was on earth; how He overcame sin and died for us. After Jesus was crucified, Satan was no longer welcome in heaven. God's angels were horrified by what Satan had done to Jesus, and didn't wish to hear what he had to

say anymore; Satan had no more influence in Heaven. Now the only ones who were willing to hear Satan's lies were the people here on earth, and Satan knew that he only had a short time to spread his lies before Jesus came to take His people to heaven.

In vision, John saw that now that the dragon only had a short time, he persecuted God's church relentlessly. John saw the dragon going after the woman, but the woman was given two eagle wings, and she flew into the wilderness. And, just like John had seen before in the vision, again he saw that the woman would spend 1,260 days, or years, in the wilderness, and God protected her. The dragon did his best to attack her; he tried to drown her with a flood, but the earth swallowed up the water and she did not drown, because God was taking care of her.

In the last days, the final effort of the dragon will be to fight against God's children who keep His commandments and who have the testimony, or the truth, of Jesus. It was a long journey to finally arrive at these precious truths, through the 7 churches, seals, and trumpets. God's people will finally bring light to the whole world. How? By receiving the testimony of Jesus and treasuring the commandments of God in their hearts. The dragon, Satan, hates this, and wants to stop it. He will do all he can to get us to believe his lies and to stop believing what God says to us.

God cares for His church, His people, and He has given us Jesus so that we can receive strength and faith. We don't need to believe the lies of the dragon any longer. Let's ask God to keep protecting us and to help us to see His truths. Will you ask Him today for a deeper understanding?

45. Two Strange Beasts

**And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion,
and with him an hundred and forty-four thousand,
having his Father's name written in their foreheads.**

Revelation 14:1



Revelation 13:1 - 14:5

John was in vision. He was standing on the sand and looking at the sea. Then he saw something coming out of the sea: it was a strange-looking beast. It looked like a leopard, but it had seven heads and ten horns, with a crown on each horn, and it had the mouth of a lion and the feet of a bear. It had a name written on each of its heads: the name was “Blasphemy”. What is blasphemy? It is irreverence, hate and disrespect towards God. Do you think this was a good beast? No, it wasn’t.

Remember the dragon? Well, this dragon, or Satan, gave power and authority to this leopard-like beast; the people on earth followed the beast and worshiped it, because they also worshiped the dragon. Who was this beast? John saw that one of its seven heads was terribly wounded, and now we know that this wounded head is the Papacy, or the leadership of the Catholic Church.

We know this because the beast did something terrible for 1,260 years: it spoke lies about God, hiding the truths about God’s love and character, and it attacked God’s children and persecuted them. It claimed control over kings, the right to forgive sins, and felt the whole world should submit to one man – the Pope. These 1,260 years

was the time of the Dark Ages, when people did not have Bibles to read, and were not able to learn the truth about God because the main church of that time, the Catholic Church, did not teach what was in the Bible. Instead, they taught their own ideas and didn't allow people to share any views they disagreed with, and the people were left in darkness. But this darkness would not last forever; God's truths would become known again.

Now John saw another beast. It came out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. Was it a lamb? No, it wasn't; it was only similar to a lamb. This lamb-like beast used the power of the leopard-like beast, and it performed great miracles: it caused fire to come down from heaven. It encouraged the people to worship the first beast, the leopard-like beast. Remember that one of the heads of the leopard-like beast had been wounded? Now this head was healed, and the lamb-like beast was encouraging people to make an image of the leopard-beast and worship it.

Who is the lamb-like beast? It is the country of the United States. This country began as a place where people had complete freedom to worship God (that's why it looks a bit like a lamb), but with time, this same country will force people to go back to false teachings (that's why it speaks like a dragon).

John saw that the lamb-like beast began to push the people to worship the image of the leopard-beast. The image of the leopard-beast began to speak, and it also started to persecute anyone who didn't worship it. It forced everyone to receive a mark on their right hands or foreheads. Without this mark, no one could buy or sell. What was this mark? It was the name of the beast or its number, 666, which represents its character, the thoughts and actions of the beast. Would everyone receive this mark?

No, not everyone would accept this mark. John looked and saw a Lamb – not a beast, but a Lamb – on mount Zion. Who was this Lamb? It was Jesus. There were 144,000 people with Him, and these people did not have the mark of the beast on their foreheads. Instead, they had a different mark: the name of the Father was written on their foreheads. They were filled with the light and truth of Jehovah.

As John watched, he heard the sound of harps, and these 144,000 people sang a beautiful new song before the throne, the four beasts and the elders. It was such a special song that no one except these 144,000 people could learn it. And who were these? They were a special group of people that had been saved. They had not followed the lies of Satan, but instead, they followed the Lamb, Jesus, wherever He went. They had chosen to let Jesus help them develop their characters to be like Him, and with His help, they had overcome sin.

John had just been shown what was going to happen until the end of time. First, God's truth and His Word would be hidden from the people for 1,260 years. Then many of these truths would be discovered once more, but before the end of time, Satan would deceive people with his lies again. But the good news is that Satan and the beasts do not have all the power. God is more powerful, and those who trust Him, those who follow the Lamb, Jesus, will be able to overcome. They will receive the name of our Father, and they will not receive the mark of the beast, simply because they believe God's Word and trust in Him.

The more we know God, the easier it will be to trust Him, because we will understand how loving and caring He is. God wishes for this to happen in each of us: He wants us to be part of those 144,000 people who will trust Him completely and overcome sin with

His help. Will you accept His invitation today, and ask Him to help you get to know Him more today, that you may trust Him completely?

46. The Three Angels' Message

**Here is the patience of the saints:
here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of
Jesus. Revelation 14:12**



Revelation 14:6-20

Jesus was giving John a wonderful vision about the things that would happen at the end of time. Now John was given the message that God's people will be preaching to the world during the last years before Jesus comes, when the lamb-like beast will force people to worship the other beast. What is this message? It is known as the messages of the three angels.

As John watched, he saw the first angel. It was flying in the midst of heaven. It had the everlasting gospel to preach to every person on earth. This angel said loudly, "Fear God, and give glory to Him, because the time of His judgment has come! And worship Him who created the heaven, the earth, the sea and the fountains of waters."

What did this mean? This angel is telling us to worship God. Is it possible to worship God if you don't know Him? No, it's not. The angel reminds us that God created everything. And we need to get to know Him, to know who He is and to know what His character is like. We can know God by knowing Jesus. When we know Him, we will naturally want to worship Him.

This angel also said that God's judgment has come. This is the time when each person will get to decide what they think about God. Do they believe that God is loving, merciful and fair like the Bible says, or do they think He is mean and cruel? Will they love God, or will they reject Him? During this time of judgment, every person will have a chance to make their decision. Will they choose to do God's will, or will they do the opposite? God has upheld our world so that sin would not destroy it to give the human race time to make this decision. He wants to live with us forever, and is inviting us to live with Him.

Then a second angel followed the first one, and shouted, "Babylon is fallen!" Who is Babylon? It is Satan's lies, and all the confusing, wrong beliefs that stop us from getting to know God. There is no use staying in a city that is fallen, is there? In the same way, it doesn't make sense to keep on believing wrong teachings about God if we know that they are not true. God is inviting us now to come to Him and to stop believing untruths about Him. He wants us to live in joyous freedom that comes when we aren't deceived. He is inviting us to leave Babylon and to be part of the New Jerusalem.

Now a third angel followed the other two, and loudly announced, "If any man worships the beast and his image, and if they receive the mark of the beast on their forehead or on their hand, they will drink of the wine of the wrath of God." What does all this mean? To "drink the wine" of something means to experience something. So those who accept the mark of the beast will experience the "wrath of God." What is this wrath of God? It is what Jesus experienced when He was on the cross. Just before the cross, Jesus had begged His Father, "If it's your will, let this cup pass from me." He was saying, "I wish I didn't have to go through this terrible experience". This "wrath

of God” is not God being angry, but rather, it is God withdrawing from those people who reject Him and choose the beast instead. These people have decided they don’t want God in their lives, and God respects their decision and leaves them on their own. They will then lose God’s protection and experience the consequences, because they chose to move away from His hedge of protection. And the consequences at the end of time will be extremely serious and severe, because the choice is final.

The angel sadly explained how terrible it will be for those who move away from God’s hedge of protection. Why would anyone make that choice? Won’t there be people who will say “no” to the mark of the beast, and who will go to God instead? Yes, there will be. The angel pointed to this precious group and said, “Here are the people who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” This was the group who was following Jesus completely, and who had overcome sin with His help! Now that this group was ready, Jesus could finally come and receive them!

Right after this, John looked and saw a white cloud. Jesus was sitting on it, holding a sharp sickle and wearing a golden crown. Jesus was coming to bring His people home to heaven with Him! The moment that all of God’s people had been waiting for was finally here!

What a wonderfully important message we have been given to share with the world! How do we explain clearly these two systems – Satan’s system and God’s system? God doesn’t want us to trust in the empty ideas of Satan and His representatives, as they don’t have the power to give us eternal life, and they will all fade away. God wants something much better for us: He longs for us to get to know Him, to let go of wrong beliefs about Him, and to trust Him completely,

because He truly loves us and cares for us. Suffering and death will soon end, and God will give us life with everlasting joy and peace!

This message will go to the whole world, and when Jesus has gathered a group of people who let Him change their characters, He will come to take us to heaven. What a joyful day that will be! Will you ask Jesus to help you understand the Three Angels' Message today?

47. The Seven Plagues

And they sang the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

Revelation 15:3

 *Revelation 15, 16*

John watched attentively. He was having an important vision from God, and in this vision he saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. On this sea stood the people that had gotten victory over Satan's lies, victory over sin. These people held harps and sang the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, and joyfully praised God.

Now the temple was opened, and out of it came the seven angels. Each of these angels held a golden cup. These golden cups held the seven last plagues that would fall upon the earth. What were these plagues about? They are plagues that will happen right after everyone has made up their minds about whether they want God in their lives or not. As more and more people reject God, He will accept their choice and begin withdrawing His Spirit that holds nature together, and as a consequence the plagues will fall on them. When God allows man to have the results of his actions the Bible calls it "the wrath of God".

When the seven angels came out of the temple, it was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and no person was able to go into the temple until the seven plagues were over.

The first angel poured out a golden cup upon the earth, and those who had the mark of the beast received painful sores. The second angel poured out his golden cup upon the sea, and the sea turned to blood, and every living creature in the sea died. The third angel poured out his cup upon the rivers and fountains, and they turned into blood.

Now the fourth angel poured out his cup upon the sun, and people began to be burned by the sun, and they began to say bad things about God. These things were happening to them because they had rejected Him and left His hedge of protection. They could have come to God and asked for forgiveness, but they refused to repent. They didn't want God in their lives, and He respected that.

The fifth angel then poured out his cup upon the throne of the beast, and the kingdom of this beast was filled with darkness. The people of this kingdom suffered, but instead of turning to God for help, they spoke badly of Him and blamed Him for what was happening to them. They refused to repent.

After this, the sixth angel poured out his cup upon the river Euphrates, where the city of Babylon is. The river dried up, and it was easy for this city to be conquered. Then John saw something bizarre. Remember the dragon, the beast and its false prophet? John saw that three evil spirits that looked like frogs came out of their mouths! These evil spirits went around the earth doing miracles and trying to gather people to fight against God with them.

As Jesus showed John this vision, He reminded John, "To those who don't know me, it will seem like I came unexpectedly like a thief. But if you pay attention to my Word, and if you receive my righteousness, you will be blessed."

After this, the seventh angel poured out his cup onto the air. And a great voice from the temple and throne of heaven said loudly, "It is done." And there were voices, thunders, lightnings and a great earthquake, the greatest the earth had ever experienced. And Babylon, the kingdom of Satan, was broken. The cities of the nation fell, and the islands and mountains disappeared, and huge stones of hail fell upon the earth. But even after all this, the people still spoke against God and blamed Him for all their problems. They refused to repent. God tried to reach Babylon for thousands of years, giving it chance after chance, but its final destruction eventually came.

How sad it must be for God to have to leave His children who reject Him! When Jesus was on earth and Israel rejected Him, He was filled with sorrow and cried, because He knew that it meant that Jerusalem would be destroyed. God respected their choice then, and He will respect the choice of the world at the end also. The final plagues are simply a result of God withdrawing from the earth and moving away from the people who do not want Him in their lives. But those who know God and love Him will be protected, like the people on the sea of glass. There is no need to be afraid; you can trust Him and believe that He loves you and will care for you. The world is full of problems, and God tells us it is going to get worse until it all falls apart. Will you ask Him to help you get to know Him more so that you can feel safe no matter what storm and plague is raging around you?

48. The Fall of Babylon

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

Revelation 17:14



Revelation 17, 18

John was receiving a long vision in which God was showing him the things that will happen at the end of time. As he was watching, one of the seven angels that had the golden cups came to him and said, “Come, I will show you the judgment of Babylon. She has taught lies and deceived the people of the earth.”

Now John saw a wilderness. In this wilderness there was a woman sitting on a red beast. This beast had seven heads and ten horns, and it was full of names of blasphemy. What does blasphemy mean? It means to speak lies and bad things against God.

The woman was dressed in purple and red clothing, and she was wearing gold, precious stones and pearls, and she held a golden cup in her hand that was full of all the pride, corruption, and lust for power that she had promoted. And on her forehead, there was a name written: “Mystery, Babylon the Great.” This woman enjoyed the fact that some of God’s people had been persecuted and killed for believing in Jesus. Who was this woman? It was Babylon, a false church, the system of lies that Satan has invented so that people would sin and reject God. This woman represents all the twisted, perverse, and destructive teachings that have hurt people as long as

sin has existed. The beast that she rode represents the powers of this world, the kings and leaders of this world who follow Satan's system and believe that it helps them keep power.

John looked at this terrible woman with wonder, trying to understand who she was. The angel said to John, "I will tell you about this woman and the beast that she is riding." The angel then explained that the beast existed, but would eventually die. This beast would fight against the Lamb, Jesus, but the angel promised John that the Lamb would win. The angel said, "The Lamb is Lord of lords and King of kings, and the people that are with Him are called the chosen and faithful." The angel kept on explaining that eventually, the people who had chosen sin instead of Jesus would end up hating the woman that was riding the beast, and they would destroy her.

Now another angel came down from heaven, and lit the earth with its glory. The angel shouted loudly, "Babylon is fallen!" The terrible system of lies that had deceived so many people would not last forever. Then another voice from heaven invited, "Come out of Babylon, my people! Don't take part in her sins, so that you don't receive the plagues!" The voice kept on saying that Babylon would end up suffering for her choices, and she would end up dying, and many, many people, especially kings and businessmen, would feel sad because with her death they would lose most of their comforts and riches.

Now an angel took a huge stone called a millstone, and threw it into the sea. The angel said, "Just like this rock is thrown into the sea and cannot be brought up again, Babylon will be thrown down." The terrible system that Satan had created, the system of sin, lies and deceit which brought so much suffering to human beings, would disappear forever.

This earth has seen a Great Conflict, a war, for 6,000 years. It is a war between Satan's kingdom and God's kingdom. But this conflict will not last forever. We can be sure that soon Jesus will come for us, and sin, sadness and death will be gone forever. How comforting it is to know this! Do you want to be part of God's kingdom? Tell Him today to show you how Satan's kingdom is affecting your life, and how you can be free from it and live in the kingdom of Jesus instead!

49. The Wedding Supper

**Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him,
for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself
ready. Revelation 19:7**



Revelation 19

John had just seen in vision a woman dressed in red. She represented a false church, Satan's system of lies whose fruit is death. And this woman, this system, had now disappeared and would never deceive people again.

Now the vision continued. John heard many voices in heaven, along with the twenty-four elders and the four beasts, began to worship God and praise Him. How could they not praise Him? They felt such wonderful joy from seeing the great love of God and what He was willing to do for His children!

Then John heard an announcement: "It is time for the marriage of the Lamb! The bride is now ready." And the bride was given clean, white linen to wear.

What does this all mean? The marriage of the Lamb is the time when Jesus receives His Kingdom, and then comes to bring His children to heaven with Him. And who will go? Those who are ready, those who have let Jesus change their characters to become pure and holy, those who have received His righteousness. Those who realize that He is good and gentle, as He truly is, and have lived with the truth. This is important, because if we have not understood that we are sinful, but that He is good and loving, when He comes it will be a

great shock to us and we will be terrified. But those who know Him will have agreed to have married Him.

Jesus is the groom and the church is His bride. The bride is also called the New Jerusalem, the capital city of Jesus' kingdom. And what does the white clothing of the bride represent? It represents the righteousness of Jesus, which His people have received.

The angel that was speaking to John said to him, "Write down: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. This is what God says." John was so impressed by what he was seeing and hearing, that he knelt down to worship the angel, but the angel stopped him, saying "Worship God, don't worship me; I am a servant of God, just like you." Only God and His Son are to be worshipped.

Now John saw that heaven was opened, and Jesus sat on a white horse. He wore many crowns and His clothes seemed to have been dipped in blood. Out of His mouth came a large sword. What is this sword? It is the Word of God.

Jesus appears here as a warrior, but a different kind of warrior. The sword comes out of His mouth, because He doesn't fight with sharp swords to kill people. Instead, His "sword" is the words He uses: he speaks God's truth, and in that way, he "fights" against evil and stops all deceit. Those who believe His words will know the truth, and they won't believe Satan's lies.

Jesus was not alone; a huge army followed behind him. Everyone in his army wore white linen clothes and rode on a white horse.

Do you remember the beast? This evil beast got together with its false prophet and gathered the kings of the earth to fight against Jesus and His bright, white army. The false prophet had already deceived the people of the earth by performing miracles, and had convinced them to receive the mark of the beast. Would the beast and his army

win against Jesus' army? Thankfully, they did not! The beast and its false prophet ended up being cast into a lake of fire and destroyed.

And what happened to the rest of the people, to those who had refused Jesus, and had followed the beast instead? Jesus, on His white horse, used His "sword", which is the Word of God. He spoke the truth to them, but they refused to believe it. They insisted on fighting against the Lamb and against God's people, so the consequences of their sins fell upon them, and they were destroyed.

John was amazed. Each person on earth has the invitation to come to the wedding supper of the Lamb, but not everyone will accept it. Those who refuse God and His care will not be protected, because God will respect their choice. But those who believe God's Words and follow His Son Jesus will enjoy the greatest banquet there will ever be. Do you wish to join the wedding supper? Tell this to God today. When Jesus comes to take us to heaven, He will make sure that you're there with Him.

50. The Millenium and the End of the Wicked

**My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.
Psalm 63:8 (ESV)**

 *Revelation 20*

What will happen once Jesus comes to take us to heaven? John was able to see this in the long vision that God gave him. As he looked, he saw an angel come down from heaven, holding the key to a bottomless pit. The angel put the dragon, or Satan, in this bottomless pit for one thousand years. During these thousand years, Satan would be completely alone, and he would not be able to deceive anyone. He would be alone because when Jesus came, He would take all the believers to Heaven with Him, and those who would not go to Heaven would die.

Then John saw that thrones appeared, and those who had been saved by Jesus, and had not received the mark of the beast, sat on these thrones and were given authority to judge. What would they judge? Who would they judge? They would be allowed to judge the fallen angels and the wicked, and the way in which God had dealt with them. For a thousand years, those who were saved stayed in heaven and lived and reigned with Jesus.

John saw that after a thousand years had passed, God brought down the beautiful city, the New Jerusalem, to earth. Now Satan was let loose from the bottomless pit, and the wicked who had died were

raised again (but only for a short time). Satan went around trying to deceive them one last time. He gathered all these evil people, and they surrounded the New Jerusalem, ready to attack Jesus and His people.

But before they could attack the city, God sent fire to these people, and they were consumed. What kind of fire is this? It is like the one Nadab and Abihu faced, or the one Moses saw on the burning bush. When the wicked are faced with their terrible sins, when they see how fair and good God is, it is like a burning fire in their souls. And since the wicked refuse to give up their sins, and since they did not wish for God's help in their lives, they will not survive this fire, and they will be consumed together with their sins.

John tells us a bit more about how the wicked are faced with their sins, the sins they do not wish to let go of. In the vision, he saw a great white throne with Jesus sitting on it. The sight of Jesus on His throne was terrifying to the wicked, and they wanted to flee from Him, but they had nowhere to go. Why did the sight of Jesus scare them so much? It was because His purity and righteousness made them feel their terrible sinfulness. He was so holy and they were so sinful, and they did not have a relationship with Him to feel they were forgiven, because they had rejected it. How different it was for God's people, though! To them, seeing Jesus on the throne was reassuring and comforting, because they knew He loved them and protected them.

Now a book called the Book of Life was opened, the book that tells of the lives and actions of each person. As this book was opened and read, everyone clearly understood why the righteous were with Jesus, and why the wicked were outside the city. This was a terrible time for the wicked, and this full realization of their sins is the "fire"

that consumes them, because they clung to their sins instead of clinging to Jesus for help. In the end, these people died for the last time, and then John says, “death and hell were cast into the lake of fire.” After this, there would be no more death. All those who choose sin and death will get what they chose, but those who choose Jesus and life will receive eternal life.

The vision was clear: Jesus longs to give us life, joy, light and truth, but He will never force anyone to accept His offer. In the vision, those who loved Him and believed Him were not afraid; they were safe and happy, and they received eternal life. After everyone has received what they chose, the whole universe will know, without a doubt, that God is loving, kind and just. Would you like to receive eternal life? Jesus wants to give it to you, along with peace, joy and love. Will you accept it?

51. The New Earth

**And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;
and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying,
neither shall their be any more pain: for the former things are passed
away. Revelation 21:4**



Revelation 21-22

John was now coming to the best part of the long vision that Jesus was showing him, the vision about what would happen to complete the plan of God. Sin was finally over, and would never return, as everything has been made clear. Now there was a new heaven and a new earth, and no more sea. John saw the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven. And a voice announced, “Now God will dwell with His people; He will be with them and be their God!” And God wiped away all the tears and sorrow from His children, and there would be no more sadness, death or pain.

Jesus said, “I make all things new. It is finished. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. If anyone is thirsty, I will give them to drink as much as they want from the fountain of the water of life. Those who overcome will receive all things. I will be their God, and they will be my children.”

Now one of the seven angels that had held the golden cups came to John and said, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he showed John the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, bright with the glory of God. It had a high wall with twelve

foundations, and it also had twelve gates. Each gate was made from a single, huge pearl. The city was built from jasper and gold that was so pure that it was clear as glass. The foundations were filled with precious stones, and the streets were of pure, clear gold. It was the most beautiful city John had ever seen. There was no temple in this city; it wasn't necessary to have a temple because God and the Lamb lived in it already.

This city did not need the light of the sun or the moon, because God's glory shone so bright, that the Lamb was the light of the city. The gates of this city would never be shut. Why? Because there was no night in this city; in Bible times, cities would shut their gates in the evening to keep everyone safe inside. But there was no need to shut any gates now, because nothing wicked would ever come into this city.

The angel now showed John a pure river of clear, crystal water. This river came straight from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And John saw the tree of life. This tree had its trunk on both sides of the river, and it bore twelve kinds of fruit. God's children could eat of this fruit, and its leaves offered healing.

The angel assured John, "God's children will see His face, and they will have His name, His character, on their foreheads. And God will give them light forever; they will not need the light of the sun, nor candles."

Jesus announced, "Behold, I come quickly. Those who keep the words of this book will be blessed." Then John heard Jesus saying, "I will come quickly. Everyone will receive according to their choices. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I have sent my angel to show you these things for the churches. I am the Root of David, and the morning star."

John was eager to write down and share this vision with the rest of the believers. What good news! How wonderful it will be to eat from the tree of life and go through the gates of the city! Is there anything more important in life than being part of God's people, the bride of Jesus?

What a wonderful hope we have! The Bible promises that Jesus will come, and He will help us get ready. Will you let Him help you? We can say, together with John, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Stories of the APOSTLES

The experiences of the Apostles will leave any reader amazed. What would drive men to abandon the comforts of their homes, go on long and dangerous journeys, and risk being whipped, imprisoned and killed, just to share the Gospel? What did their message have, that they were willing to joyfully give up everything, even their lives, just so others could hear it?

As we read the stories of these men, we will better understand what moved them. It was the pure, selfless, forgiving and compassionate love they had experienced in Jesus. This love manifested in Jesus helped them to understand the everlasting love of the Father for them. This amazing love filled their thoughts and touched their hearts, and they could not help but share it with others.

We pray that, as God's last day people, the enthusiasm of the Apostles for the Gospel can also become our own. May the stories in this book help you and your children to grow in your understanding of God's love for you, and may it fuel your enthusiasm for living a life led by the Spirit of God, just like the Apostles did.

