



Fall Bible Reading Plan

Launch

Week of October 11

Week 1

Day 1: HISTORY

We grow up listening to all kinds of fairy tales. We hear stories of knights and princesses and castles. We marvel at legends of dragons, unicorns, and other mythical creatures. As we mature, so do our stories. Yet, the wonder of adventure and the dream of rescue never fail to capture our attention. But, what if the story we long for actually happened? What if there was a King who led a great rescue? What if there was an adventure out there for each of us? Only the Gospel dares to say that such things are reality.

READ Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3

- *How does Luke describe his work in putting together his gospel? What lengths did he go to in verifying what he wrote?*
- *Luke says he wants us that everything we were taught is true. What difference does it make to know that the events recorded in Scripture actually happened?*

READ 1 Corinthians 15:1-9; 2 Peter 1:16-18

- *What kind of eyewitness testimony does the Gospel have? What kind of foundation does this give our faith?*

Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus rose. The Bible records events that actually and literally happened. Moreover, these things didn't happen in a corner. They occurred out the open for hundreds of eyewitnesses to see. As Christians today, we aren't devoting our lives to superstitious myths or legends. Our faith is factual. Our hope is historical. Because God intervened in our past, we can have confidence in what He'll do in the future.

Day 2: WITNESSES

What's your first response when something amazing happens to you? You want to tell people about it! Whether it's news about our family, our health, or our job, we want to share the spectacular with the people we love! There's just something about good news that's meant to be shared. The beginning of the book of Acts reminds us of this truth. Jesus' parting words to the disciples commanded them to go out into the world and tell everyone about what they had seen and heard!

READ Acts 1:6-26

- *What did Jesus tell His disciples to do in Acts 1:8? What does a "witness" do?*
- *How did the apostles suggest filling Judas' vacancy? What criteria did they use?*

READ 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

- *What message and task has God given us? What does this say about our mission in the world today?*

We are witnesses. We are ambassadors. We each have a story to tell of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. We have experienced His goodness and grace. Sharing your faith doesn't require you to preach a sermon or memorize some theological treatise. Sharing your faith is about telling the story of what Jesus has done for you and how He has changed your life. We bless others by telling them the story of how we have been blessed in and through Christ.

Day 3: SPIRIT

The Old Testament prophets foresaw a day when the Spirit of God would be poured out on the world. The prophet Ezekiel, for example, longed for that time when our very hearts would be renovated by God's Spirit: **"I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws"** (Ezekiel 36:26-27). On the day the church was born, those promises and longings for the Spirit became a reality:

READ Acts 2:1-13

- *What was it like when the Spirit descended? What did the Spirit empower the believers to do?*
- *The Spirit empowered the first Christians to speak different languages. What does this show us about God's desire to reach all people and nations?*

READ Galatians 5:16-26

- *How does the Spirit motivate us to live? What are some practical ways you can "keep in step" with the Spirit today?*

Jesus gave His disciples an incredible mission. They were supposed to go out into the world to be His witnesses. In order to succeed in that task, they would need a new power. They would need His strength to help them reach the ends of the earth. More than that that, they would need new hearts with new priorities to guide them. Through His Spirit, God would give them everything they needed to do everything He asked. The same is true for us today.

Day 4: PENTECOST

The Jewish feast of Pentecost was a day when the Israelites would gather together to celebrate the harvest. As they brought in the firstfruits of that year's crops, they would remember God's provision and the great blessings He had provided throughout the year. It's only fitting, then, that God would use this feast to mark the birthdate of the church. On this Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter would preach the first Christian sermon. His words celebrating Christ's work would bring in an incredible first harvest for the Gospel.

READ Acts 2:14-41

- *What stands out to you about Peter's sermon? What does He say about who Jesus is and what He has done?*
- *How did the crowd respond? What did Peter tell them to do? How many accepted his message?*

READ Hebrews 4:12-13

- *What does the Bible accomplish in our own lives and hearts? How is this similar to what happened on Pentecost?*

From the very first day of the church's existence, the proclamation of Jesus Christ has been its power and its lifeblood. The 3,000 who responded to Peter's first sermon set the stage for thousands of years of life change to come. Even today, our lives serve as a testament to the continued power of the Word. The Gospel Peter preached is the same Gospel we believe and proclaim today. More than that, it's the same Gospel that has changed our own hearts and lives.

Day 5: COMMUNITY

“It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18).

From the very beginning of the Bible, God had been clear that mankind needed community. We weren't built to do life by ourselves. The early church understood this truth. Banding together, they built a community unlike any the world had ever seen before. Their compassion and care for one another was evident in almost everything they did. From Day One, the church recognized that following Jesus isn't an individual pursuit; we were meant to do this together.

READ Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37

- *What did the early Christian community devote themselves to? How did these priorities reveal themselves in action?*
- *What would it look like for the church today to live with this same sense of community? Think of some practical ways you can make this kind of community a reality.*

READ Ephesians 4:20-32

- *What do these commands teach us about our community? How do they show us what love looks like on a practical level?*

“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples” (John 13:35).

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples on the night before He died. They certainly made a huge impression on the men who would soon lead the church. Perhaps that's because they not only heard Jesus' words on love; they saw His love in action. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross presented them with a vivid blueprint of what love looks like. That same kind of love ought to define and unite the community of faith today.

Trouble

Week of October 18

Week 2

Day 6: OPPOSITION

For a while it looked like the early church was going to have it easy. Their first weeks were filled with incredible success and amazing growth. They looked unstoppable. And yet, trouble would soon come at them from all sides. While some of the conflict would come from within their own community, their loudest critics were those outside the faith. The leaders who had persecuted Jesus would soon turn their sights on those who preached in His name.

READ Acts 4:1-31

- *How did Peter and John use their persecution as an opportunity to share the Gospel?*
- *Look again at Acts 4:23-31. What did the church pray for as they went through this time of opposition? What was the response?*

READ James 1:2-4

- *How should we view times of testing and trial? What can God produce in us through those difficult times?*

From this point on, the early church would face an almost constant barrage of pain and persecution. They would be targeted by both the religious leaders and the Roman government. By the time everything was said and done, even Caesar himself would find reason to attack the church. Yet, the church would not yield. The first Christians continued to preach the Gospel in spite of the opposition they faced. They had no choice. They had to obey God rather than men.

Day 7: DECEPTION

Soon after their first taste of persecution, the church faced trouble of another kind. But this threat didn't come from outside the church walls. No, this threat was internal. The community that had embraced each other with such sacrifice and hospitality would soon find itself threatened by selfishness and hypocrisy. Even in the midst of the mess, God was at work to make sure His church stayed on mission.

READ Acts 5:1-16

- *What did Ananias and Sapphira try to do? Why do you think God punished them so severely?*
- *What ultimately happened as a result of this? How did God use even their deception to help the church?*

READ Colossians 3:5-15

- *Based on these verses, what should relationships within the church look like? How can we live these commands out in our relationships with one another?*

Though the church sometimes faces danger from without, it almost always faces danger from within. There's the danger of division, the danger of disunity, the danger of self-centeredness. Our own selfish desires and unchecked egos can get in the way of what God wants to do through the church. For that reason, we must constantly remember what this is all about. It's not about us, it's all about Him. It's not our church, it's His church. If we put anything other than Him at the center, we run the risk of ruining it all.

Day 8: CONFLICT

Conflict is a natural part of almost every relationship. You can't live or work with anyone without some kind of disagreement or misunderstanding eventually rearing its head. So, it should come as no surprise that the early church had its fair share of conflict. One of the most significant occurred in Acts 6. Some of the widows in the church began arguing about some disparities in the church's benevolence program. The way the church handled this disagreement set the stage for centuries of church leadership to come.

READ Acts 6:1-7

- *What was the nature of the disagreement in the church? What solution did the Apostles suggest for handling this conflict?*
- *What qualifications were given for these leaders? What does this teach us about those who would lead in the church?*

READ I Timothy 3:1-13

- *Think about all of these characteristics of leaders. How would these qualities help the church better navigate times of conflict and division?*

In the two thousand years since the selection of these first "deacons," the church has continued to experience disagreements and disunity. Some of us have personally experienced the sting of church conflict. But the example of the early church reminds us that community and unity is are our ultimate goals. If we want to be the community of faith God designed us to be, we're going to have to learn how to navigate our disagreements in a good and godly way. After all, unity is worth fighting for.

Day 9: MARTYR

Described as a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit," Stephen was a natural choice to help lead the church through the situation with the Grecian widows. Yet, Stephen would soon face an even greater challenge. As his ministry started gaining more and more attention, Stephen soon found himself called before the Jewish authorities. His passionate, Spirit-filled defense of the faith would grant him a distinction beyond merely being one of the first "deacons" of the church:

READ Acts 7:1-8:1

- *What did Stephen have to say to the Sanhedrin? How did they respond to such a strong message?*
- *According to Acts 8:1, who was counted among the participants in Stephen's death? What impact do you think this might have had on him?*

READ I Peter 1:6-9

- *How did Peter say the church should respond to trials and persecutions? What is the reward for standing firm through these difficulties?*

While Stephen would be the first Christian martyr, he would be far from the last. Some scholars estimate that as many as 70 million believers throughout the years have proclaimed the Gospel at the cost of their life. As the Kingdom of Heaven has spread across the kingdoms of men, it has been met with hostility, aggression, and violence. Still, God's people have not backed down from their testimony. Throughout the ages, Stephen's sacrifice has served as a reminder of what it means to follow Jesus with everything.

Day 10: SCATTERED

On the day of Stephen's death, the religious leaders might have thought they had the church on the run. With believers fleeing Jerusalem because of the mounting persecution, it looked like they might have finally succeeded at diffusing the new faith. In actuality, they had done the opposite. As Christians fled Jerusalem, they continued to tell others about the Good News. Rather than extinguishing the church, the Sanhedrin had actually expanded its reach. God used persecution to push His people back out on mission.

READ Acts 8:4-17

- *Where did the believers go as a result of the persecution? How did this fulfill what Jesus had commanded them to do in Acts 1:8?*
- *How did reaching out into Samaria break down some of the barriers in that day? What are some ways we can do the same thing today?*

READ Romans 8:28-39

- *God used the persecution of the church to do something incredible. What assurance does that give us as we read promises like the ones in Romans 8?*

“The believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went” (Acts 8:4). Even in the midst of their heartbreak and fear, the first Christians were faithful in sharing the Gospel. Their faithfulness in the darkness ensured that the Good News would continue to spread. What His enemies had intended for evil, God used for good. Could it be that our difficulties today are also doors for God to do that same kind of work through us?

Transformation

Week of October 25

Week 3

Day 11: BLINDED

The martyrdom of Stephen was a turning point for the early church. The death of their first martyr had given the church new life outside of Jerusalem. It was also a turning point for a man named Saul. As a leading Pharisee, Saul had been a participant in Stephen's death (Acts 8:1). For Saul, it wasn't enough to punish one Christian; he wanted to arrest them all! Blinded by his rage against the growing church, Saul set out to Damascus intent on persecuting the believers there. On the road into the city, Saul found out just how blinded he really was.

READ Acts 9:1-20

- *Who did Saul encounter on the road to Damascus? What message did Jesus have for him?*
- *Who did God call to go and help Saul? Why had Jesus selected Saul? What task had been appointed to him?*

READ Acts 26:9-23

- *Years later, Paul would recount the story of his conversion before a Roman official. How did what happened on the road to Damascus come to define Saul's life?*

With Saul's conversion, the church's greatest persecutor had become its greatest preacher. The one who had violently set himself to destroying the church had been chosen to build it up. By the time all was said and done, Saul (also known as Paul) would start dozens of churches, preach to countless of thousands, and inspire millions of believers through his epistles recorded in the New Testament. Only God could use one who was blinded to help so many people see.

Day 12: PREPARATION

As you might imagine, Saul's conversion to the faith was met with a fair amount skepticism. The believers who had run at the very mention of his name weren't exactly keen to invite him into their homes. Thankfully, there were some Christians who were willing to move past their fear to embrace their new brother in the faith. As Saul traveled to various churches – including the church in Jerusalem – God was at work preparing him for the ministry ahead.

READ Acts 9:20-31

- *How would you have responded to news of Saul's conversion? Would you have welcomed him or avoided him?*

READ Galatians 1:13-2:10

- *How did the apostles in Jerusalem welcome and encourage Paul in his ministry?*
- *In what ways was Paul's ministry similar to that of Peter and James? In what ways was it different?*

From the moment of his calling on the Damascus Road, Paul knew that he had been selected for a special purpose. He would be God's instrument to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles. He would take the Good News to people far away from God. What makes this especially remarkable is that the church hadn't reached out to the Gentiles yet. God was preparing Paul for work that hadn't even begun! Before the church even knew what they needed, God was equipping them for the road ahead.

Day 13: BARRIERS

For centuries, Jews and Gentiles had little to do with one another. The requirements of the Jewish religious and ceremonial law made it difficult for them to interact with those who didn't hold to the same standards. For their part, the Gentiles saw many of the Jewish customs as odd and unnecessary. There was a lot of hatred and division between the two groups. But the message of the Gospel would soon break down centuries worth of barriers.

READ Acts 10:9-48

- *Describe the vision Peter had. What lesson was Peter supposed to take away from that experience?*
- *How did God Himself show up to validate Cornelius' conversion? What does this show us about God's acceptance of Gentiles?*

READ Galatians 3:26-29

- *How does Jesus bring unity to different people groups? What does this kind of unity look like?*

The conversion of Cornelius marked a turning point for the church. For the first time, Jews and Gentiles were together in community. The Gospel had already spread geographically; now, it was poised to spread ethnically. It turns out that God's Kingdom was unlike any other kingdom, transcending all lines of culture and race. God had taken people who were previously separated and brought them together as one. The Christ who unites us is far greater than anything that might divide us.

Day 14: UNITY

Bringing the Gentiles into the church was not without its problems. Uniting people from different cultures inevitably leads to conflict over the rules and regulations of the new community. As the Jews and Gentiles had spent centuries apart, they had some differences to work out. One of the most pressing centered on circumcision. Though circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Israel, it wasn't widely practiced among the Gentiles. The disagreement over this ancient practice threatened the fragile unity of the newly integrated church.

READ Acts 15:1-21

- *What was Peter and James' rationale for their decision? According to Peter's words, how are we ultimately saved?*
- *What decision did the council make? What requirements did they put on Gentile believers?*

READ Ephesians 2:11-18

- *How does our unity with Christ bring us into unity with other believers? What's one thing you can do today to live out that kind of unity?*

“How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1). The Jerusalem Council's decision on circumcision meant that the church could finally move on from such a divisive issue. As news of their pronouncement spread across the church, believers everywhere were encouraged and strengthened by what they heard. With the issue settled, outreach to the Gentiles could begin in earnest. Through Christ's work, all nations would become part of the Kingdom.

Day 15: SENT

As the message of the Gospel began to take root across the Roman Empire, churches other than the one in Jerusalem began to rise to the forefront. Principal among them was the church in Antioch. Located about 300 miles north of Jerusalem, the church in Antioch stood at the intersection of some important Roman trade routes. People from all across the known world would travel through Antioch. Its strategic location made it the epicenter of missions and evangelism.

READ Acts 13:1-12

- *What decision did the church in Antioch make? Who led them to take this step of faith?*

Read Acts 15:30-16:10

- *What happened when Paul and Barnabas brought the news of the Jerusalem Council back to Antioch? How did the believers respond?*
- *What did Paul and Barnabas plan on doing? What happened to keep them from traveling together? In what ways did this affect what Paul did?*

The church in Antioch had been founded because of the missionary efforts of the first believers. Because of that, missions became a part of their DNA. The Holy Spirit called them to continue the work by sending out missionaries of their own. As Paul and Barnabas (and later Paul and Silas) traveled across the Roman Empire, they took the Good News everywhere they went. The work that God began in Paul on the Damascus Road had spread across the world.

Mission

Week of November 1

Week 4

Day 16: PHILIPPI

After feeling called to Macedonia, Paul and Silas made their way to the city of Philippi. This was no ordinary city. As a Roman colony, its inhabitants enjoyed special privileges within the Empire, granting citizens a fair amount of prestige and wealth. Paul and Silas' preaching in the city would also give it another distinction: the first church planted in Europe. The Gospel that had so stretched across Judea and Samaria now began its spread to the ends of the earth.

READ Acts 16:11-40

- *Who was the first convert in the city of Philippi? Why, in that culture, would it be significant that the first person to respond to the Gospel would be a woman?*
- *What happened when Paul and Silas ended up in prison? How did God use their chains to advance the Kingdom?*

READ Philippians 2:1-18

- *Writing to the church years later, Paul still held up Jesus' example to them. How does Jesus' life motivate us to live?*

The Gospel spreads to a new place. People flock to hear the message of the Kingdom. The church upsets the established order. Persecution breaks out. The pattern established in the city of Philippi would become the blueprint for church planting in the first century. Whenever the church entered a new city, its early success would be buffeted by emerging persecution. And yet, the Gospel continued to spread. People continued to come to know Jesus. The early evangelists understood that their calling was worth any cost.

Day 17: THESSALONICA

Located on the Aegean Sea, Thessalonica was a prosperous harbor city and port town. Its location and affluence made it one of the greatest cities in Macedonia. So, it's only natural that Paul and Silas would head there after their eviction from Philippi. Just as before, they found a populace more than willing to hear and accept the Good News. Unfortunately, the hostility they encountered made their stay in Thessalonica a short one.

READ Acts 17:1-9

- *Why were the religious leaders able to accuse the believers of treason? Which King were the early Christians professing?*

READ I Thessalonians 2:1-8; 4:9-18

- *How did Paul reflect on his short time with this congregation? To what did he compare his relationship with this church?*
- *How did Paul encourage these believers to live? What was their ultimate hope and reason for living this way?*

While Acts' account of Paul and Silas' ministry in Thessalonica has them staying in the city for no more than a month, it was time well invested. The Thessalonian church endured its early persecution and flourished in a hostile city. More importantly, the church inspired two New Testament letters that endure to this day. In fact, many scholars believe that I Thessalonians represents the earliest Pauline epistle in the New Testament. The effect of those three weeks continues to speak even into our day.

Day 18: ATHENS

After their short stay in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas moved on to the city of Athens. Though Athens had been a city of great renown in years past, its glory years were long gone by the time Paul visited the city. Though Athens had lost a lot of its commercial and political power, it still maintained some of its educational and philosophical reputation. Thus, when Paul entered the city, he encountered many who wanted to hear the intellectual side of Christianity.

READ Acts 17:16-34

- *How did Paul engage the crowd in Athens? In what ways did he use their own cultural touchstones to point to the Gospel?*
- *What were the various responses to the Gospel? How does this compare with the responses we see to the Gospel today?*

READ 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

- *Why does the preaching of the Gospel seem like foolishness to some? How does it show us the wisdom of God?*

As the Gospel continued its spread across the Roman Empire, it encountered countless obstacles. Some of those obstacles took the form of religious opposition. Others looked more like intellectual disagreement. Yet, whether his opponents were Pharisees or philosophers, Paul's approach remained the same. He held up the cross. He spoke about grace. He preached Christ. The "foolishness" of God's plan was so much greater than any human plan. It still is.

Day 19: CORINTH

In the heyday of the Greek Empire, the city of Corinth had been one of the most important cities in the world. As Rome advanced through the world, the city became one of their great casualties, being nearly razed to the ground. In fact, it was only about 100 years before Paul's visit that the city had been re-founded. But, that century had seen incredible growth, with the population of Corinth estimated to be somewhere between 200,000-400,000 people in Paul's day. This made Corinth the ideal place to plant a church.

READ Acts 18:1-17

- *What message did Jesus speak to Paul while he was in Corinth? How do you think this affected the way Paul viewed his ministry?*

READ 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

- *In what ways does Paul describe the power behind his ministry? How is that same power available to us today?*
- *How did Paul view his sufferings? What would it take for you to view your difficulties in the same way?*

Corinth was not an easy city for the Gospel to take root in. The wickedness and immorality of the city made it a kind of ancient Las Vegas – a place with the reputation that anything goes. While the church was not without its problems (see the letter of 1 Corinthians for an exhaustive list), it shone in the midst of the darkness and debauchery. Jesus had told His followers that they would be the **"light of the world"** (Matt. 5:14). As the Corinthian church reminds us, that task begins with being a light for our cities.

Day 20: EPHESUS

After returning once more to Antioch, Paul again decided to head back out on another missionary crusade. This journey would take him to the city of Ephesus, a city he had only briefly visited before (Acts 18:19-21). On this trip, Paul would remain in the city for over two years. He would proclaim the Gospel and build relationships that would come to define the later years of his ministry. But, his ministry there would not be without some of the same struggles and hardship he faced in other towns.

READ Acts 19:8-41

- *What were some of the things that happened in Ephesus during Paul's ministry? What evidences do you see of the great spiritual warfare in the city?*
- *How did the faith of the early Christians impact even the economy in their hometown? What happened as a result of this?*

READ Ephesians 6:10-20

- *How do you think the Ephesians' experiences with spiritual warfare impacted how they understood the need for the "armor of God"?*

Over the course of his missionary journeys, Paul traveled nearly 8,000 miles – most of them by foot! He preached the Gospel in around 50 cities and saw countless thousands come to faith in Jesus Christ. Even today, nearly two millennia after his death, Paul stands as the most successful and influential evangelist of all time. Though none of the churches he planted still stand today, the work he did for the Kingdom endures. His life lived on mission challenges us to live the same way in our day.

Prison

Week of November 8

Week 5

Day 21: FAREWELL

Paul had experienced trouble all throughout his missionary journeys. At times it probably felt as though he was being chased from town to town by the same angry mobs. And yet, something told Paul that things were about to get much worse. The Spirit began warning him that greater persecution awaited him whenever he returned to Jerusalem. Sensing that the time was right to make that journey, Paul set his face toward whatever awaited him there. On his way, he decided to stop in and say his final goodbyes to some of his closest friends.

READ Acts 20:13-38

- *What was Paul's final charge to the Ephesian elders? What did he entrust them to do?*
- *Read Acts 20:24. How does this verse sum up Paul's philosophy of life? What would it look like for you to live this way?*

READ Revelation 2:1-7

- *These words were spoken to the Ephesian church decades after Paul's death. How had Paul's final speech impacted this church? What had they still missed out on?*

"...My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus..." (Acts 20:24). With these words, Paul bid farewell to the elders in the church he loved so much. While these words had always described Paul, they would soon take on new meaning. Paul's trip to Jerusalem would set into motion a chain of events that would see him imprisoned for years. His testimony for Christ would become his testimony in front of judges and magistrates. Paul's words would come to define his life.

Day 22: ARREST

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, the church leaders welcomed him with open arms. They were excited to hear about Paul's work in reaching Gentiles across the world. Because many false rumors had been circulating about Paul, they asked him to go up to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer purification sacrifices to silence his critics. Unfortunately, Paul's accusers anticipated this action and sent the Temple crowd into a frenzy. With a riot poised to break out, the Roman Temple guard sprung into action. Their intervention allowed Paul the chance to defend himself:

READ Acts 21:37-22:23

- *How did Paul defend himself before the crowd? What does this tell us about how Paul viewed those events on the Damascus Road?*
- *At what point did the crowd start to react to Paul's speech? Why do you think they had such a visceral reaction?*

READ Ephesians 3:1-7; 4:1

- *How did Paul identify himself in these passages? Based on this, how do you think Paul viewed his imprisonments?*

Though the Roman guards initially treated Paul with contempt, their stance softened once they recognized his status as a Roman citizen. These days citizenship is often conferred at birth. In Paul's day, citizenship was a privilege few possessed. When the commander of the guard heard Paul was a citizen, he made sure that Paul was treated according to the legal standards of the Empire. That included the right to have his case heard – a right Paul would soon exercise.

Day 23: TRIAL

After the first of many nights in prison, Paul was called in front of the Jewish religious leaders. The Sanhedrin, of which Paul had once been a part, was the final authority in all matters concerning the Temple and the Jewish faith. By bringing Paul before this governing body, the Roman commander hoped to gain a better understanding of the previous day's riot. Unbeknownst to him, Paul would use the Pharisees and Sadducees' disagreements on the resurrection to end the impromptu trial.

READ Acts 22:30-23:11

- *Why did Paul say he was on trial? What response did this provoke in the Sanhedrin?*
- *Who appeared to Paul the night of the trial? What message did He bring?*

READ Romans 1:8-17

- *How did Paul view his travels to Rome? What was he eager to do there?*

Paul's first trial would provide a template for almost every other hearing he would experience. He would give his testimony. The authorities would be confused over what to do. Paul would return back to prison with no clear idea of what would happen next. No one seemed to know exactly what to do with Paul. No one, that is, except Jesus. All this confusion around his case would ultimately lead to an opportunity for Paul to preach in the heart of Rome itself. While it would be a while before Paul would get there, his journey to the capital was well under way.

Day 24: THREATS

With Paul languishing in prison, the Sanhedrin had him right where they wanted him. They viewed the apostle – and his teaching – as a threat to their traditions and their power. So, they did everything they could to manipulate the Roman judicial system to their benefit. On one notable occasion, the Jewish leaders plotted to use a routine prisoner transfer to assassinate Paul. Thankfully, their plot was discovered and dispersed by the Roman commander who had first arrested Paul.

READ Acts 23:12-31

- *What was the plot against Paul? Who discovered it? What does this show us about God's protection over Paul even in prison?*
- *Where did the Roman commander have Paul transferred to?*

READ Philippians 1:12-19

- *What had Paul's chains allowed him to do? How did he continue to keep his ministry in view even while in prison?*

Paul's transfer into Roman custody would open up even more doors for him to share the Gospel. As he awaited his hearing in the courts of the Roman Governor Felix (and his eventual replacement Governor Festus), Paul preached the Gospel to whoever would listen. Occasionally, he would even use his trials as an opportunity to launch into a sermon! Paul's trials and troubles were merely a pulpit from which to proclaim the Good News. In all things – even the bad things! – Paul stayed true to his calling.

Day 25: APPEAL

Paul's transfer to Roman custody brought its own set of problems. The Roman legal system could run slowly. In Paul's case, he remained under the care of Governor Felix for over two years awaiting a fair trial. Part of the delay was because of the complexity of Paul's case. The other part of it was that Felix was hoping for a bribe to let Paul go free (Acts 24:26). Eventually, Governor Felix was replaced by a new governor – Porcius Festus. New ownership didn't exactly translate to new results. Once again, it looked like the Roman judicial system might keep this charade going indefinitely. Perhaps that's why Paul decided to take matters into his own hands.

READ Acts 25:1-21

- *Why did the Jewish leaders want Paul brought back to Jerusalem? What was Paul's response to this?*
- *Do any of the Roman officials seem to have thought Paul was guilty? Why do you think they kept this charade going?*

READ Romans 8:31-39

- *What was Paul's outlook as he faced some of these difficulties? How can this impact our outlook when we face our own troubles?*

One of the quirks of the Roman legal system was that citizens of Rome had the right to appeal to Caesar. If their case proved difficult to solve or there was no clear precedent, the citizen could ask for the ruler of all Rome to decide their fate. As a Roman citizen himself, Paul had the right to appeal to Caesar. Seeing that the Roman governors were getting him nowhere, Paul decided the time had come to see what was in store for him in the capital. He had appealed to Caesar, so to Caesar he would go!

Unleashed

Week of November 15

Week 6

Day 26: SHIPWRECK

A distance of 1400 miles separates Jerusalem from Rome. In our day, that's not an incredible distance to travel. You can hop on a plane and be there within 4 hours. In Paul's day, however, a trip to Rome was a complicated affair. It involved travel by land and by sea. So, when Paul appealed to Caesar, he was committing himself to an intense journey into the heart of the Roman Empire. The first leg of the journey would be by boat. Unfortunately, his accommodations were far different from the cruise ships we experience today.

READ Acts 27:7-44

- *What happened during Paul's journey? How did God show Himself faithful in even such a dangerous circumstance?*
- *How many people survived the shipwreck? In what ways did God use Paul to save lives?*

READ 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

- *How many times was Paul shipwrecked throughout his ministry? What does this tell us about this specific shipwreck?*

Nearly every step of Paul's journey led him into some new kind of trouble. Whether it was persecution from the Jewish leaders, opposition from followers of pagan gods, or natural disasters, Paul's path was full of hardship. Even a trip to Rome could turn into a major incident if Paul was on your boat! His words to the anxious sailors – **"Take courage!"** – remind us that our own storms give God a chance to show His power. Even when we feel defeated, He proves Himself dependable. The One who holds us is far greater than any storm.

Day 27: ROME

The shipwreck off the isle of Malta left both the crew and the passengers shaken. As they regrouped on the beach, God once again had occasion to show His power through Paul's message and miracles. After a few months waiting for the weather to change, the time finally came for Paul and his companions to make their way into the capital city of the Empire. It may have taken years, but Jesus' words to Paul were about to become a reality: **"...you must preach the Good News in Rome."**

READ Acts 28:1-20

- *What events happened during Paul's stay on Malta? How does this show God's continued faithfulness to Paul?*
- *When Paul arrived in Rome, who greeted him there? How would this allow him to continue his ministry even while in chains?*

READ Romans 15:23-33

- *Years earlier (before the return to Jerusalem when he was arrested), Paul wrote of his plans to go to Rome. How did God subvert those plans? How did He fulfill those plans?*

A lot had changed in the nearly five years since Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome. In many respects, it might have looked like Paul's plans had been completely derailed. He had hoped to journey to Rome immediately after visiting Jerusalem. A series of legal delays postponed his arrival by years. Though he had hoped to come to the capital as a free man, Paul had arrived in chains. And yet, the change in Paul's circumstances did not mean a change in his calling. He was in Rome to preach the Gospel. He was in Rome to encourage the church. By God's grace, that's exactly what he'd spend his time doing.

Day 28: LETTERS

Paul's arrival in Rome didn't mean his legal troubles were at an end. Indeed, his stay would stretch on over two additional years as he waited for Caesar to hear his case. Yet, just because Paul was stuck in prison didn't mean that he would languish there. The apostle put his extra time to good use, writing some of the churches he had established in his previous journeys. These letters would not just encourage the church; they would also inspire believers for centuries to come.

READ Philippians 3:5-14

- *How did Paul view his past? What was he striving toward in his future? How should this same drive define our lives?*

READ Colossians 1:15-29

- *How did Paul describe Jesus in these verses? What assurance does that give us?*
- *In what ways did Jesus' glory (and His example) motivate Paul's ministry? How can these same things drive us on mission today?*

While his ability to travel was limited, Paul's ability to write was not. From a table in Rome he wrote letters whose impact would stretch around the world and throughout time. Even today, the letters of Colossians, Philippians, and Ephesians are read every single day by Christians everywhere. The words that flowed from Paul's pen have been translated into every imaginable language. Those who thought they had silenced Paul by putting him in prison only succeeded in making sure his impact would be felt for generations.

Day 29: INVEST

Paul recognized that his ministry couldn't last forever. Even before his stint in prison, he knew that the mission was bigger than him. The Kingdom had to keep growing. The Gospel must continue to be preached. So, Paul began to invest his life and leadership in those who would remain after he had gone. He began with a young man named Timothy, who he met during his travels in Lystra (Acts 16:1). Along his journeys, he met and disciplined other men like Apollos and Titus. Paul didn't just want to see the church thrive in his generation; he wanted to lay a foundation for years to come.

READ 2 Timothy 2:1-19

- *Who was Timothy supposed to teach (2:2)? How would this ensure that the Gospel message would continue on?*
- *What practical commands does Paul give Timothy in these verses? How would living these things out affect your own ministry?*

READ Titus 2:1-15

- *What did Paul encourage Titus to teach the church? How can these same teachings inspire us to live today?*

“Teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.” Paul's instruction to Timothy established a pattern that continues to this day. Every generation of Christians has the responsibility to raise up the next. By training our children, raising up disciples, and investing in future leaders, the church of today works to build a foundation for the church of tomorrow. After all, the mission is bigger than us. The Gospel is for all people for all time. As we work in our day, we want to keep an eye toward the days yet to come.

Day 30: UNHINDERED

We expect our stories to come to a satisfying conclusion. We want books to have happy endings. We want movies and TV shows to wrap everything in a nice little bow before the credits roll. We want to know how things turned out. We want closure. Unfortunately for us, the book of Acts offers us no such catharsis. Rather than giving us the conclusion of Paul's trial before Caesar, Luke chose to end Acts on a somewhat ambiguous (but still triumphant!) note.

READ Acts 28:23-31

- *How did Paul spend his two years in Rome?*

READ Philippians 1:20-30

- *What did Paul have to say about his fate? Why was he fine with either outcome?*
- *Where is our true citizenship? How does this help us live courageous lives?*

“He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” Unhindered... it's interesting that Luke chooses to end the book of Acts with that word. From the day of Pentecost, there had been many who had tried to hinder the work of the church. None had been successful. In the years since this proclamation, the church has flourished. Though there has been great persecution and hardship along the way, the Kingdom of God has continued to advance and is continuing to advance even to this day. Just as Luke said, the Gospel was – and is – unhindered.