

# 40 Days through Acts' Good News

## Week Five

Each day's guide is broken into three sections, with a special 4<sup>th</sup> section at the end of each week:

1. **The story for the day.** The entire story of Acts has been divided into 6 week's worth of daily stories. Rather than dividing the daily passages into equal lengths, they are divided into logical story units. Some days will be quite short, others a bit longer; but, hopefully, it will always be a manageable length of passage telling a satisfying episode in the life of the church. For your convenience, we've included the text of the story in the *New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1996). We've found this translation to be in fresh, modern language that has really helped us to do what we most want to do: enter into the story ourselves. As you read the passage, try to read it from the perspective of the disciples and the other people who interact with Jesus. Really get inside the story. What is it like to go through this experience with these early followers of Jesus?
2. **Points of Interest.** This section briefly explores aspects of the day's story that might be especially interesting or potentially confusing. It offers some historical notes and references that might help to interpret the story, frames some of the issues or questions addressed, and gives suggestions of ways to look at the story and what it might mean for us.
3. **Taking it home.** In this section, we offer some suggestions for how the day's reading apply practically to your life and the life of our church. Each day, we will ask 3 questions:
  - a. **What does Jesus want to do through you?**—During these 40 days, we are all asking God for 'a thousand-percent return' on our lives: when we invest our lives in his purposes, he has told us to expect to see the impact and the satisfaction of our lives multiply by a thousand percent. Each day, we will ask ourselves how our passage helps us to understand how to invest well or what we can expect when we do.
  - b. **What does Jesus want to do through your six?**— In the Cambridge Vineyard, we encourage everyone to have a list of six people for whom they are *seeking spiritual blessing*. These six people are local friends, family members, colleagues, and acquaintances who aren't presently actively seeking God, but in whom we see some spiritual interest, or in whose lives we see God at work. Even if you aren't quite sure there is a God yourself, we encourage you to pray for more spiritual blessing for your six, perhaps saying something like, 'God, I'm not even sure you're there, but if you are, please give more peace to my next door neighbors.' Then, watch and see what happens. It can't hurt. If nothing happens, no harm has been done. If something does happen, your six will have more blessing in their lives, and you will have experienced an answer to prayer.

Over the course of this guide, we will see that Acts makes the stunning claim that God not only wants to bless your six, but he has a high calling on them and a big destiny. Each day, we'll consider ways that we can pray for that destiny to be fulfilled in their lives.
  - c. **What does Jesus want to do through our church?**—God not only has big purposes he wants to pursue through each of us, he also has big purposes for us a church. We'll also pray each day that these dreams God has given us as a community will be fulfilled.
4. **Family Devotional Ideas.** At the end of each week's Bible study guide you'll find a paragraph suggesting themes and ideas you can explore with your children ages preschool through middle school at home. They'll be divided into two mini-sections, one for kids approximately ages 2-7 and one for kids approximately ages 8-12. The ideas apply to the entire week's bible text, so to make the most use of these suggestions you'll want to read them at the beginning of each week.

We owe a debt of gratitude in the formation of this guide to C. Peter Wagner's *Acts of the Holy Spirit* (Regal Press, 2000). Over the course of this guide, we will point out insights which come directly from Wagner's commentary; but it also most certainly influenced our thoughts on Acts more broadly in ways we aren't even completely aware of. If you'd like to read more about Acts, this book would be an excellent place to start.

## Monday, April 19th

### Acts 18:18-19:7

<sup>18</sup> Paul stayed in Corinth for some time after that and then said good-bye to the brothers and sisters and sailed for the coast of Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. (Earlier, at Cenchrea, Paul had shaved his head according to Jewish custom, for he had taken a vow.) <sup>19</sup> When they arrived at the port of Ephesus, Paul left the others behind. But while he was there, he went to the synagogue to debate with the Jews. <sup>20</sup> They asked him to stay longer, but he declined. <sup>21</sup> So he left, saying, "I will come back later, God willing." Then he set sail from Ephesus. <sup>22</sup> The next stop was at the port of Caesarea. From there he went up and visited the church at Jerusalem and then went back to Antioch.

<sup>23</sup> After spending some time in Antioch, Paul went back to Galatia and Phrygia, visiting all the believers, encouraging them and helping them to grow in the Lord.

<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had just arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. <sup>25</sup> He had been taught the way of the Lord and talked to others with great enthusiasm and accuracy about Jesus. However, he knew only about John's baptism. <sup>26</sup> When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately.

<sup>27</sup> Apollos had been thinking about going to Achaia, and the brothers and sisters in Ephesus encouraged him in this. They wrote to the believers in Achaia, asking them to welcome him. When he arrived there, he proved to be of great benefit to those who, by God's grace, had believed. <sup>28</sup> He refuted all the Jews with powerful arguments in public debate. Using the Scriptures, he explained to them, "The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus."

<sup>19</sup> While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior provinces. Finally, he came to Ephesus, where he found several believers. <sup>2</sup> "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them.

"No," they replied, "we don't know what you mean. We haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

<sup>3</sup> "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked.

And they replied, "The baptism of John."

<sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John's baptism was to demonstrate a desire to turn from sin and turn to God. John himself told the people to believe in Jesus, the one John said would come later."

<sup>5</sup> As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.

#### Points of Interest:

- 'they arrived at the port of Ephesus'—Ephesus was the largest and most important city in the province of Asia (present-day Turkey), with a large commercial port. Perhaps as many as 300,000 people lived in Ephesus.
- 'Paul left the others behind'—Ephesus is a new city for Paul. Ephesus may have been where he was trying to go when the Lord gave him a vision to direct him toward Macedonia instead. This time, he's just stopping through on his way to Antioch and Jerusalem, but apparently he is intending return; so, while he continues his trip, the rest of his team stays in Ephesus, either to prepare the way for Paul or simply because the trip to Jerusalem doesn't involve them.
- 'visited the church at Jerusalem'—the type of vow Paul had taken, called a Nazirite vow, required a trip to Jerusalem at its completion. The Nazirite vow was a spiritual act of thanksgiving to God.
- 'explained the way of God more accurately'—Apollos seems to have heard about the Messiah from the teachings of John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin who had a preaching ministry whose intention it was to prepare the way for Jesus. He was acting on and teaching everything he knew, persuasively leading people toward Jesus even though he knew nothing of Jesus' actual ministry. Aquila and Priscilla fill in the blanks for him. Aquila and Priscilla could have looked down on Apollos because of his ignorance; but instead they use their greater knowledge to equip him for even more powerful ministry.
- 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'—to Paul, it's not enough to believe the story of Jesus. He wants them to experience the benefits of having the Holy Spirit fill them.
- 'The baptism of John'—perhaps these are people who had learned from Apollos before Aquila and Priscilla told him about Jesus, or perhaps they had heard the teachings of John independently. John

the Baptist had only ever preached in Judea, but his words have apparently spread far and wide, preparing the way for Jesus' message among several of the first people Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila meet in distant Ephesus.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *Through you:* John the Baptist had a tremendous impact with his ministry. Many years after his death, and hundreds of miles away from where he preached, his message was still leading people toward Jesus. You too can have such a lasting impact. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the gift of John the Baptist, the ability to lead people you never even know toward Jesus.
- *Through your six:* Apparently, Apollos was a more gifted teacher and evangelist than Priscilla and Aquila; but he needed Priscilla and Aquila to mentor him in order to reach his full potential in using his gifts for Jesus' purposes. In what ways do you see that your six are more gifted than you? Look for ways to show them how Jesus can make that gift come alive.
- *Through our church:* Paul doesn't want people simply to believe in Jesus; he wants them to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Today, there are many people who believe in Jesus but have never been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Ask God to make us into a church that brings the filling of the Holy Spirit to these people as we encounter them.

## **Tuesday, April 20th**

### **Acts 19:8-20**

<sup>8</sup>Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup>But some rejected his message and publicly spoke against the Way, so Paul left the synagogue and took the believers with him. Then he began preaching daily at the lecture hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup>This went on for the next two years, so that people throughout the province of Asia--both Jews and Greeks--heard the Lord's message.

<sup>11</sup>God gave Paul the power to do unusual miracles, <sup>12</sup>so that even when handkerchiefs or cloths that had touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and any evil spirits within them came out.

<sup>13</sup>A team of Jews who were traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus. The incantation they used was this: "I command you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" <sup>14</sup>Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. <sup>15</sup>But when they tried it on a man possessed by an evil spirit, the spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul. But who are you?" <sup>16</sup>And he leaped on them and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and badly injured.

<sup>17</sup>The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. <sup>18</sup>Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. <sup>19</sup>A number of them who had been practicing magic brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. <sup>20</sup>So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'so Paul left the synagogue'—it was always Paul's custom to go to the synagogue first. But just because the synagogue refused to hear the message doesn't mean the message was stopped.
- 'power to do unusual miracles'—earlier, the Holy Spirit filled Peter so powerfully that his shadow was causing miracles. Similarly, Paul's handkerchiefs are causing miracles here. The Holy Spirit is using Paul to reach Ephesus and Asia just as he used Peter to reach Jerusalem and Judea.
- 'But who are you?'—Jesus' name is powerful, but it's not a magic incantation. The sons of Sceva learn the hard way that you need legitimate authority and real power to cast out demons by the name of Jesus. Fortunately, Jesus is very generous with his authority and his power. To receive his authority, all you have to do is become his follower. To receive his power, you only have to be filled with his Spirit. In chapter 2, Peter says that Jesus desires everyone to receive this power. The Holy Spirit is available to the sons of Sceva, but they haven't turned toward Jesus and received it.
- 'burned them at a public bonfire'—it seems like the people of Ephesus learn two very important lessons from the sons of Sceva: they learn just how big a difference it makes to be filled with the Holy Spirit; and they learn that evil spirits are not to be toyed with. In response to these lessons, they turn

to Jesus, and they firmly and permanently reject forms of spiritual power that come from a source other than the Holy Spirit.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *Through you:* The Holy Spirit had already given Paul the power to perform miracles, but here he takes it to a whole new level. Ask God to bring you to a whole new level in hearing his voice, in healing, in prophecy, or in any way you have already experienced his power before.
- *Through your six:* Are any of your six seeking spiritual power apart from Jesus? Ask the Holy Spirit to preserve them from being overpowered like the sons of Sceva, and to draw them to himself instead.
- *Through our church:* Peter experienced an outbreak of the Holy Spirit that totally changed Jerusalem, and Paul saw Ephesus transformed by the name of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray that we would have the chance of seeing such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit here in Boston.

## **Wednesday, April 21st**

### **Acts 19:21- 20:6**

<sup>21</sup>Afterward Paul felt impelled by the Holy Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before returning to Jerusalem. "And after that," he said, "I must go on to Rome!" <sup>22</sup>He sent his two assistants, Timothy and Erastus, on ahead to Macedonia while he stayed awhile longer in the province of Asia.

<sup>23</sup>But about that time, serious trouble developed in Ephesus concerning the Way. <sup>24</sup>It began with Demetrius, a silversmith who had a large business manufacturing silver shrines of the Greek goddess Artemis. He kept many craftsmen busy. <sup>25</sup>He called the craftsmen together, along with others employed in related trades, and addressed them as follows:

"Gentlemen, you know that our wealth comes from this business. <sup>26</sup>As you have seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods aren't gods at all. And this is happening not only here in Ephesus but throughout the entire province! <sup>27</sup>Of course, I'm not just talking about the loss of public respect for our business. I'm also concerned that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its influence and that Artemis--this magnificent goddess worshiped throughout the province of Asia and all around the world--will be robbed of her prestige!"

<sup>28</sup>At this their anger boiled, and they began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" <sup>29</sup>A crowd began to gather, and soon the city was filled with confusion. Everyone rushed to the amphitheater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, who were Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. <sup>30</sup>Paul wanted to go in, but the believers wouldn't let him. <sup>31</sup>Some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, also sent a message to him, begging him not to risk his life by entering the amphitheater.

<sup>32</sup>Inside, the people were all shouting, some one thing and some another. Everything was in confusion. In fact, most of them didn't even know why they were there. <sup>33</sup>Alexander was thrust forward by some of the Jews, who encouraged him to explain the situation. He motioned for silence and tried to speak in defense.

<sup>34</sup>But when the crowd realized he was a Jew, they started shouting again and kept it up for two hours:

"Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

<sup>35</sup>At last the mayor was able to quiet them down enough to speak. "Citizens of Ephesus," he said. "Everyone knows that Ephesus is the official guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, whose image fell down to us from heaven. <sup>36</sup>Since this is an indisputable fact, you shouldn't be disturbed, no matter what is said. Don't do anything rash. <sup>37</sup>You have brought these men here, but they have stolen nothing from the temple and have not spoken against our goddess. <sup>38</sup>If Demetrius and the craftsmen have a case against them, the courts are in session and the judges can take the case at once. Let them go through legal channels. <sup>39</sup>And if there are complaints about other matters, they can be settled in a legal assembly. <sup>40</sup>I am afraid we are in danger of being charged with rioting by the Roman government, since there is no cause for all this commotion. And if Rome demands an explanation, we won't know what to say." <sup>41</sup>Then he dismissed them, and they dispersed.

<sup>1</sup>When it was all over, Paul sent for the believers and encouraged them. Then he said good-bye and left for Macedonia. <sup>2</sup>Along the way, he encouraged the believers in all the towns he passed through. Then he traveled down to Greece, <sup>3</sup>where he stayed for three months. He was preparing to sail back to Syria when he discovered a plot by some Jews against his life, so he decided to return through Macedonia.

<sup>4</sup>Several men were traveling with him. They were Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; Aristarchus and Secundus, from Thessalonica; Gaius, from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus, who were from the province of Asia. <sup>5</sup>They went ahead and waited for us at Troas. <sup>6</sup>As soon as the Passover season ended, we boarded a ship at Philippi in Macedonia and five days later arrived in Troas, where we stayed a week.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'this magnificent goddess worshiped throughout the province of Asia'—Ephesus was indeed famous for its temple to Artemis. It was the world center for worship of Artemis, one of the major Greek goddesses.
- 'also concerned that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its influence'—just like in Jerusalem, the followers of Jesus in Ephesus encounter widespread, violent opposition when the temple is threatened. When worship of Jesus begins to grow in a city, the existing religious institutions are threatened, and they lash out. In the case of both Jerusalem and Ephesus, the people who gain power, prestige, and wealth through these religious institutions naturally fight back to protect their interests. But perhaps there is more to the story than simply a human response. In Paul's later letter to the Ephesians, he says, 'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Ephesians 6:12, NIV). Perhaps there is a spiritual power behind the Artemis cult in Ephesus which is actively fighting against Jesus, his message, and his people, trying to maintain control over this city.
- 'whose image fell down to us from heaven'—it is thought that the main image of Artemis at the temple in Ephesus was a comet.
- 'Paul sent for the believers and encouraged them'—Paul, who was an accuser in the Jerusalem persecution, is now an encourager. The temptation to scatter and lay low must have been very strong, but Paul wisely gathers them together: 'A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken' (Ecclesiastes 4:12).
- 'he encouraged the believers in all the towns he passed'—Paul probably did many things as he passed through these towns: taught, corrected, selected leaders. But Luke chooses to focus on Paul's role as an encourager. It's as if the biggest threat to their life in Jesus is that they would lose heart or give up. Paul goes back through these cities, reminding the believers there of the goodness of following Jesus, and telling them that it is worth it to keep following, and that they are able to keep following.
- 'he discovered a plot by some Jews against his life'—Syria is the province in which the controversy that leads to the Council of Jerusalem began. Apparently, Paul's role in approving that Gentiles do not have to become Jews has earned him enough hatred that some Jews (it is unclear whether or not they claim to be followers of Jesus) are willing to murder him. Paul's life is in danger twice in this passage, and his reactions are intriguing. In Ephesus, he has to be convinced not to go into the amphitheater, but here he avoids an entire province because of a death threat. Paul doesn't seem to be too afraid of danger, but he also doesn't ignore it. In both of the instances in this passage, he ends up deciding that the situation is not worth risking his life.
- 'Several men were traveling with him'—the spotlight of this story is frequently on Paul, but it is significant to notice that Paul does not pursue his ministry alone: he has an entire team who supports him in his church-planting mission.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *Through you:* Church-planting is something that is best done in teams; even Paul couldn't have accomplished what he did without the team which traveled with him. If God has given you the desire to plant a church, ask him to provide you with people to go with you. If you don't feel ready to or called to play a lead role in a church plant, ask God if he has a part for you to play on someone else's team.
- *Through your six:* Have any of your six taken steps toward Jesus recently? Look for an opportunity to offer an encouraging word to them. Frequent, well-timed encouragement can make a huge difference as a person tries to follow Jesus.
- *Through our church:* Hopefully, as we prayed yesterday, God will allow us to play a part in revolutionizing Cambridge and Boston with Jesus' good news. If we do, we are certain to threaten the religious and spiritual powers that have been used to being in charge. Pray that God would protect us from these spiritual forces, and that he would give us the power by the Holy Spirit to withstand their attacks in Jesus' name.

## **Thursday, April 22nd**

### **Acts 20:7-38**

<sup>7</sup>On the first day of the week, we gathered to observe the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching; and since he was leaving the next day, he talked until midnight. <sup>8</sup>The upstairs room where we met was lighted with many flickering lamps. <sup>9</sup>As Paul spoke on and on, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, became

very drowsy. Finally, he sank into a deep sleep and fell three stories to his death below. <sup>10</sup>Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. "Don't worry," he said, "he's alive!" <sup>11</sup>Then they all went back upstairs and ate the Lord's Supper together. And Paul continued talking to them until dawn; then he left. <sup>12</sup>Meanwhile, the young man was taken home unhurt, and everyone was greatly relieved.

<sup>13</sup>Paul went by land to Assos, where he had arranged for us to join him, and we went on ahead by ship. <sup>14</sup>He joined us there and we sailed together to Mitylene. <sup>15</sup>The next day we passed the island of Kios. The following day, we crossed to the island of Samos. And a day later we arrived at Miletus.

<sup>16</sup>Paul had decided against stopping at Ephesus this time because he didn't want to spend further time in the province of Asia. He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, for the Festival of Pentecost. <sup>17</sup>But when we landed at Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come down to meet him.

<sup>18</sup>When they arrived he declared, "You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now <sup>19</sup>I have done the Lord's work humbly--yes, and with tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. <sup>20</sup>Yet I never shrank from telling you the truth, either publicly or in your homes. <sup>21</sup>I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike--the necessity of turning from sin and turning to God, and of faith in our Lord Jesus.

<sup>22</sup>"And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me, <sup>23</sup>except that the Holy Spirit has told me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. <sup>24</sup>But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus--the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love.

<sup>25</sup>"And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again. <sup>26</sup>Let me say plainly that I have been faithful. No one's damnation can be blamed on me, <sup>27</sup>for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants for you.

<sup>28</sup>"And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock--his church, purchased with his blood--over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. <sup>29</sup>I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup>Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following. <sup>31</sup>Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you--my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you.

<sup>32</sup>"And now I entrust you to God and the word of his grace--his message that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself.

<sup>33</sup>"I have never coveted anyone's money or fine clothing. <sup>34</sup>You know that these hands of mine have worked to pay my own way, and I have even supplied the needs of those who were with me. <sup>35</sup>And I have been a constant example of how you can help the poor by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

<sup>36</sup>When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them. <sup>37</sup>They wept aloud as they embraced him in farewell, <sup>38</sup>sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they accompanied him down to the ship.

#### Points of Interest:

- 'continued talking to them until dawn'—Paul is really trying to make the most of his time on this final evening. He doesn't even let the fact that someone fell asleep, fell to his death, and had to be raised again stop him from finishing what he has to say.
- 'But my life is worth nothing'—Paul has found something more valuable even than life itself: the mission Jesus has given him of telling others the good news.
- 'the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love'—Paul has only one message, about the necessity of turning from sin, but he doesn't speak this message out of a desire to judge or condemn. It's a message of wonderful kindness and love, focusing on God's abundant mercy and goodwill.
- 'Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock'—Paul has been a faithful shepherd of this flock. He is leaving now and officially placing the responsibility for the flock in the hands of the elders. It's their flock now.
- 'Watch out!'—Paul, at great cost to himself, has faithfully led the people of Ephesus toward Jesus; but not everyone has such pure intentions. Even the Ephesian elders themselves will be tempted to preach a message that draws people to themselves rather than Jesus. If the elders are going to continue the good shepherding of Paul, they need to keep a watch on their own heart and on the motivations and intentions of other teachers who come along.
- 'They wept aloud'—Paul preached to them with tears, and they say good-bye to him with tears. Paul and the Ephesian elders have let one another into their hearts.

#### Taking it home:

- *Through you:* One of the fruits of Paul's decision to devote his life to bringing Jesus' message to others is deep, heart-felt connection with others. As you give yourself to Jesus' purposes, ask that he bless you with the best friendships you have ever had.
- *Through your six:* Paul had a clear conscience concerning his relationship with the Ephesians. He knew that he had faithfully passed on to them the whole message God had for them. Has God given you any message for your six that you have been holding back on delivering? Ask God to give you the boldness and the opportunity to pass along everything he wants for your six. For them, it could mean a chance to receive God's wonderful kindness and love. For you, it brings the blessing of a clear conscience.
- *Through our church:* Paul here tells the elders that it is a very real temptation to become a wolf rather than a shepherd. Pray that God would protect us from ever changing Jesus' message to gain something for ourselves. Pray that God would keep us from selfishness and that we would always remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

## Friday, April 23rd

### Acts 21:1-16

<sup>1</sup>After saying farewell to the Ephesian elders, we sailed straight to the island of Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes and then went to Patara. <sup>2</sup>There we boarded a ship sailing for the Syrian province of Phoenicia. <sup>3</sup>We sighted the island of Cyprus, passed it on our left, and landed at the harbor of Tyre, in Syria, where the ship was to unload. <sup>4</sup>We went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week. These disciples prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup>When we returned to the ship at the end of the week, the entire congregation, including wives and children, came down to the shore with us. There we knelt, prayed, <sup>6</sup>and said our farewells. Then we went aboard, and they returned home.

<sup>7</sup>The next stop after leaving Tyre was Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters but stayed only one day. <sup>8</sup>Then we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food. <sup>9</sup>He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

<sup>10</sup>During our stay of several days, a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. <sup>11</sup>When he visited us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Romans.'" <sup>12</sup>When we heard this, we who were traveling with him, as well as the local believers, begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

<sup>13</sup>But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup>When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The will of the Lord be done."

<sup>15</sup>Shortly afterward we packed our things and left for Jerusalem. <sup>16</sup>Some believers from Caesarea accompanied us, and they took us to the home of Mnason, a man originally from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

#### Points of Interest:

- 'These disciples prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem'—in yesterday's passage, Paul says that he is 'drawn [to Jerusalem] irresistibly by the Holy Spirit.' But in this passage, it is prophesied that Paul should not go there. Is the Holy Spirit contradicting himself? It is said that it is easier to receive a prophecy than to interpret what it means. Perhaps this is an example of that principle. The prophecy of Agabus clearly indicates that Paul will be imprisoned in Jerusalem. Paul also, while feeling compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, heard from God that suffering and imprisonment awaited him there. Perhaps the prophets in Tyre heard the same message as Paul—that he would suffer in Jerusalem—but they interpreted it differently, understandably assuming that it meant he shouldn't go. The Tyrians may not have even been aware that they were interpreting it. Because interpretation of prophecies can often be tricky, it can be a good idea to do what they do with Agabus' prophecy: they discuss it; then they leave the final decision about how to respond in the hands of the person to whom the prophecy is given. Paul acknowledges that it is true that he will suffer, but he believes that it is suffering with a purpose for the sake of Jesus.

#### Taking it home:

- *Through you:* In this passage, we get to see Philip, the Greek-speaker who brought Jesus' message to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch, again; and we learn that he has four daughters with the gift of prophecy. Philip was able to raise up his family into God's mission, and to encourage them in a gift

of the Spirit different from his own. Pray that God would give you the opportunity to pass your love for Jesus on to the next generation—especially if you have children of your own—and that he would equip you to encourage them in their own gifts and ministry.

- *Through your six:* the Holy Spirit speaks to Paul, to guide him and to prepare him for what is coming. Because the Holy Spirit has prepared him, he won't be surprised when his time in Jerusalem is difficult. Ask God to speak by the Holy Spirit to your six, guiding them into the future or warning them about the future.
- *Through our church:* Pray for prophecy in our church. Ask the Holy Spirit to give us words of prophecy for the help and encouragement of others, and the wisdom and discernment to interpret those prophecies well.

## Saturday, April 24th

### Acts 21:17-39

<sup>17</sup>All the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem welcomed us cordially.

<sup>18</sup>The next day Paul went in with us to meet with James, and all the elders of the Jerusalem church were present. <sup>19</sup>After greetings were exchanged, Paul gave a detailed account of the things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his ministry.

<sup>20</sup>After hearing this, they praised God. But then they said, "You know, dear brother, how many thousands of Jews have also believed, and they all take the law of Moses very seriously. <sup>21</sup>Our Jewish Christians here at Jerusalem have been told that you are teaching all the Jews living in the Gentile world to turn their backs on the laws of Moses. They say that you teach people not to circumcise their children or follow other Jewish customs. <sup>22</sup>Now what can be done? For they will certainly hear that you have come.

<sup>23</sup>"Here's our suggestion. We have four men here who have taken a vow and are preparing to shave their heads. <sup>24</sup>Go with them to the Temple and join them in the purification ceremony, and pay for them to have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know that the rumors are all false and that you yourself observe the Jewish laws.

<sup>25</sup>"As for the Gentile Christians, all we ask of them is what we already told them in a letter: They should not eat food offered to idols, nor consume blood, nor eat meat from strangled animals, and they should stay away from all sexual immorality."

<sup>26</sup>So Paul agreed to their request, and the next day he went through the purification ritual with the men and went to the Temple. Then he publicly announced the date when their vows would end and sacrifices would be offered for each of them.

<sup>27</sup>The seven days were almost ended when some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul in the Temple and roused a mob against him. They grabbed him, <sup>28</sup>yelling, "Men of Israel! Help! This is the man who teaches against our people and tells everybody to disobey the Jewish laws. He speaks against the Temple--and he even defiles it by bringing Gentiles in!" <sup>29</sup>(For earlier that day they had seen him in the city with Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus, and they assumed Paul had taken him into the Temple.)

<sup>30</sup>The whole population of the city was rocked by these accusations, and a great riot followed. Paul was dragged out of the Temple, and immediately the gates were closed behind him. <sup>31</sup>As they were trying to kill him, word reached the commander of the Roman regiment that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. <sup>32</sup>He immediately called out his soldiers and officers and ran down among the crowd. When the mob saw the commander and the troops coming, they stopped beating Paul. <sup>33</sup>The commander arrested him and ordered him bound with two chains. Then he asked the crowd who he was and what he had done. <sup>34</sup>Some shouted one thing and some another. He couldn't find out the truth in all the uproar and confusion, so he ordered Paul to be taken to the fortress. <sup>35</sup>As they reached the stairs, the mob grew so violent the soldiers had to lift Paul to their shoulders to protect him. <sup>36</sup>And the crowd followed behind shouting, "Kill him, kill him!"

<sup>37</sup>As Paul was about to be taken inside, he said to the commander, "May I have a word with you?"

"Do you know Greek?" the commander asked, surprised. <sup>38</sup>"Aren't you the Egyptian who led a rebellion some time ago and took four thousand members of the Assassins out into the desert?"

<sup>39</sup>"No," Paul replied, "I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, which is an important city. Please, let me talk to these people."

### Points of Interest:

- 'have been told that you are teaching all the Jews living in the Gentile world to turn their backs on the laws of Moses'—actually, Paul has not been teaching the Jews to live like Gentiles. He's been

teaching Gentiles that they don't need to live like Jews. But wild rumors have spread about him, even among the church.

- 'So Paul agreed to their request'—as long as it does not compromise his mission to the Gentiles, Paul is perfectly willing to do what it takes to seek peace with the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Even though Paul has a mission to the Gentiles, he is still himself a Jew and practices the Jewish law. In fact, he just recently took the same vow himself. So, he would have no problem doing what James asked of him.
- 'ran down among the crowd'—the Romans had a fortress on high ground near the Temple, from which they commanded the city and kept the peace.
- 'He couldn't find out the truth in all the uproar and confusion'—again, it seems that wild rumors about Paul are spreading around. There seems to be a climate of hysteria surrounding Paul during this Jerusalem trip: the Jewish believers think that he is preaching that Jews abandon the laws of Moses; some Asian Jews think he has brought a non-Jew into the Jews-only precinct of the temple; the Romans think he is an Egyptian guerilla fighter; and many people don't know what's going on, but they're still angry at Paul.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *Through you:* Rather than defend himself against unjust accusations and irrational fears, Paul puts aside his rights and does what he can to seek peace. Are you in a situation right now where there is a lack of peace? What can you do to bring about reconciliation? Consider the possibility that it might take laying down your right to completely defend yourself.
- *Through your six:* The Jews respond to Paul with irrational fear that comes out of entrenched prejudices. All of us make these sorts of blind assumptions about people who see things differently from us, and when we act out of them it can keep us apart from others and from Jesus. Ask God to protect your six from these negative effects of their fears and biases.
- *Through our church:* James and the other leaders of the Jerusalem church welcomed Paul and his team even though it was likely to cause trouble for them. Ask us to increase our ability to welcome other believers who do things differently from us, even if it causes us some trouble to do so.

## **Sunday, April 25th**

### **Acts 21:40-22:29**

<sup>40</sup>The commander agreed, so Paul stood on the stairs and motioned to the people to be quiet. Soon a deep silence enveloped the crowd, and he addressed them in their own language, Aramaic.

<sup>1</sup> "Brothers and esteemed fathers," Paul said, "listen to me as I offer my defense." <sup>2</sup>When they heard him speaking in their own language, the silence was even greater. <sup>3</sup>"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. At his feet I learned to follow our Jewish laws and customs very carefully. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just as all of you are today. <sup>4</sup>And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, binding and delivering both men and women to prison. <sup>5</sup>The high priest and the whole council of leaders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the Christians from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished.

<sup>6</sup>"As I was on the road, nearing Damascus, about noon a very bright light from heaven suddenly shone around me. <sup>7</sup>I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

<sup>8</sup>" 'Who are you, sir?' I asked. And he replied, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting.' <sup>9</sup>The people with me saw the light but didn't hear the voice.

<sup>10</sup>"I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that you are to do.'

<sup>11</sup>"I was blinded by the intense light and had to be led into Damascus by my companions. <sup>12</sup>A man named Ananias lived there. He was a godly man in his devotion to the law, and he was well thought of by all the Jews of Damascus. <sup>13</sup>He came to me and stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And that very hour I could see him!

<sup>14</sup>"Then he told me, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. <sup>15</sup>You are to take his message everywhere, telling the whole world what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup>And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on the name of the Lord.'

<sup>17</sup>"One day after I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the Temple, and I fell into a trance. <sup>18</sup>I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry! Leave Jerusalem, for the people here won't believe you when you give them your testimony about me.'

<sup>19</sup>" 'But Lord,' I argued, 'they certainly know that I imprisoned and beat those in every synagogue who

believed on you.<sup>20</sup> And when your witness Stephen was killed, I was standing there agreeing. I kept the coats they laid aside as they stoned him.'

<sup>21</sup>"But the Lord said to me, 'Leave Jerusalem, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!' "

<sup>22</sup>The crowd listened until Paul came to that word; then with one voice they shouted, "Away with such a fellow! Kill him! He isn't fit to live!" <sup>23</sup>They yelled, threw off their coats, and tossed handfuls of dust into the air.

<sup>24</sup>The commander brought Paul inside and ordered him lashed with whips to make him confess his crime. He wanted to find out why the crowd had become so furious. <sup>25</sup>As they tied Paul down to lash him, Paul said to the officer standing there, "Is it legal for you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn't even been tried?"

<sup>26</sup>The officer went to the commander and asked, "What are you doing? This man is a Roman citizen!"

<sup>27</sup>So the commander went over and asked Paul, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes, I certainly am," Paul replied.

<sup>28</sup>"I am, too," the commander muttered, "and it cost me plenty!"

"But I am a citizen by birth!"

<sup>29</sup>The soldiers who were about to interrogate Paul quickly withdrew when they heard he was a Roman citizen, and the commander was frightened because he had ordered him bound and whipped.

#### Points of Interest:

- 'When they heard him speaking in their own language'—Paul is a Hebrew-culture Jew, even a Pharisee; but they assume that he can't speak Aramaic because of their assumptions about him and his beliefs.
- 'a godly man in his devotion to the law —Paul is demonstrating to the crowd that he and the people from whom he learned all deeply respect the law.
- 'The crowd listened until Paul came to that word'—the mere word Gentile seems to confirm that everything they feared about him was, in fact, true. Or, perhaps, it makes clear that they aren't really angry because he is teaching Jews to act like Gentiles; they are angry because he has anything to do with Gentiles at all and because he believes that God cares about them.
- 'to make him confess his crime'—the commander assumes that Paul must have done something more than just say, 'Gentile.' So, he decides to beat it out of him.
- 'This man is a Roman citizen'—there are different levels of citizenship in the Roman Empire, with different privileges attached. Citizens of Tarsus, where Paul was born, are given the status of Roman citizen, the very highest level. Because of this Roman citizenship, Paul is protected against beating and has a more highly protected right to a trial. The commander at first doesn't believe that Paul has such a high status. Paul is only a Jew after all; and he is a commander in a Roman army, but even he had to spend a lot of money to buy this high status.

#### Taking it home:

- *Through you:* Paul has a great deal of faith in the power of his own story. He expects that even an angry mob will be convinced if they really hear his story of how he came to know Jesus. In this case, it doesn't quite have the effect for which he was hoping; but often it is true just how compelling our stories of encountering Jesus are. Look for an opportunity to share your story with someone in the next few days.
- *Through your six:* Paul is surrounded by an angry mob trying to kill him, but he sees in that crowd a commendable zeal to honor God. Are there ways in which any of your six attack you or persecute you that actually demonstrate a zeal for God? Look for ways to affirm those traits in them.
- *Through our church:* We are a church with many people who possess some sort of special social status, through our positions, our degrees, or even our citizenship. Ask God to give us as a church an ability to see how we can use that status to advance Jesus' message.

## Week 5 Family Devotional Ideas:

*Acts Family Devotions are not included this week.*

← --- Formatted: Bullets and Numbering