



KINGDOM PURPOSE

Part One

Forty Daily Devotions
from the Book of Acts
(Based on the NKJV)

Introduction

Acts is a book about the church and the work of the church! I cannot imagine being without it. As we read this exciting history, we will meet some new believers and follow their ministries. We will see mighty things done by common people as they were energized by the power of the Holy Spirit. We will watch as many followers are forced to endure hardships and persecutions. Because the Holy Spirit does not withhold any necessary information from us, we will see the church at its best and its worst. We will see conflict between believers. We will witness believers filled with pride and lying to the church and God. Sometimes it is not a pretty picture, but neither is life in the world in which we have been called to be witnesses ourselves. We will laugh and we will cry, but in the end, we will praise God because we know more about the church and its Kingdom Purpose.

Daily Reading Schedule

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
1	Acts 1:1-11	7/16/2024
2	Acts 1:12-26	7/17/2024
3	Acts 2:1-13	7/18/2024
4	Acts 2:14-24	7/19/2024
5	Acts 2:25-37	7/20/2024
6	Acts 2:38-3:3	7/21/2024
7	Acts 3:4-16	7/22/2024
8	Acts 3:17-4:4	7/23/2024
9	Acts 4:5-16	7/24/2024
10	Acts 4:17-28	7/25/2024
11	Acts 4:29-5:4	7/26/2024
12	Acts 5:5-16	7/27/2024
13	Acts 5:17-28	7/28/2024
14	Acts 5:29-42	7/29/2024
15	Acts 6:1-12	7/30/2024
16	Acts 6:13-7:10	7/31/2024
17	Acts 7:11-22	8/01/2024
18	Acts 7:23-35	8/02/2024
19	Acts 7:36-47	8/03/2024
20	Acts 7:48-60	8/04/2024

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
21	Acts 8:1-13	8/05/2024
22	Acts 8:14-25	8/06/2024
23	Acts 8:26-38	8/07/2024
24	Acts 8:39-9:10	8/08/2024
25	Acts 9:11-22	8/09/2024
26	Acts 9:23-35	8/10/2024
27	Acts 9:36-10:5	8/11/2024
28	Acts 10:6-16	8/12/2024
29	Acts 10:17-30	8/13/2024
30	Acts 10:31-43	8/14/2024
31	Acts 10:44-11:9	8/15/2024
32	Acts 11:10-20	8/16/2024
33	Acts 11:21-12:2	8/17/2024
34	Acts 12:3-15	8/18/2024
35	Acts 12:16-13:3	8/19/2024
36	Acts 13:4-15	8/20/2024
37	Acts 13:16-28	8/21/2024
38	Acts 13:29-41	8/22/2024
39	Acts 13:42-14:2	8/23/2024
40	Acts 14:3-15	8/24/2024

Day 1: Acts 1:1-11

“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me.’” (Acts 1:4)

Learning to Wait

After His suffering and resurrection, Jesus validated who He was by many “infallible (convincing) proofs” (v. 3). Note that these “infallible proofs” were clearly shown to the apostles. These men are the ones that He is about to commission to carry the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. If nothing else, they needed to be absolutely 100 percent convinced that they were giving their lives to a true and noble purpose. After these convincing proofs, they were not sent out immediately but were told to “wait.” Imagine being so convinced about something and then having to wait before you could do anything about it! But the Lord would make what they were to soon receive well worth the wait. They were going to receive power from the Holy Spirit. This life-filling, life-changing power would be what would make them God’s witnesses, or living testimonies, of what faith in God could do. We all need to learn to wait on God. We far too often run ahead of God and then wonder why we do not see His full blessings on our ministries. The presence of God’s Spirit is the conclusive proof of our **Kingdom Purpose!**

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God to fill you with His power to be a witness to those you meet daily. **Remember**, the word “witness” speaks more to what we *are* than to something that we *do*. **Establish accountability** with another believer today and let them know that you are involved in this devotional process and committed to daily Bible reading and prayer. **Invite** someone to join you on your journey.

Day 2: Acts 1:12-26

“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” (Acts 1:14)

The Importance of Scripture and Prayer

After witnessing Christ’s ascension to heaven and receiving a message from angels (two more “infallible proofs”) the apostles returned to Jerusalem and gathered with some fellow believers in an upper room and entered into a season of prayer. It was at this time that Peter spoke to the church about the need to replace Judas. Note that Peter had a scriptural basis for what he believed that the church needed to do. The reference to the “Scripture” quoted in Acts 1:16 was to Psalm 41:9. Due to Judas’ death, it was necessary for the church to choose someone to take his place. This action, too, was supported by Scripture (Psalm 109:8). The newly appointed apostle was to be chosen from those who had been with them during the whole time that Jesus led them in ministry (vs. 21-22). Perhaps these were some of those who made up the 70 who are referenced in the gospels (Luke 10:1). We are not sure. However, two were chosen, and then the Holy Spirit revealed that Matthias was the one to be chosen, and he was added to the eleven apostles. We will see the church having to choose people to serve in different capacities as we read Acts. Note that these choices are best made when they are scripturally based, and prayer bathed.

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God to remind you to always look to His Word for guidance, to *base* your life decisions on His Word, and to *bathe* those decisions in seasons of prayer. **Contact** someone who is involved in spiritual leadership today and **encourage** them by letting them know you are praying for them. **Volunteer** to assist in the work of the church in some area of ministry.

Day 3: Acts 2:1-13

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind...” (Acts 2:2)

“Suddenly”

Most translations use the word “suddenly” to introduce the description of the sights and sounds of the Day of Pentecost. However, a careful look at the Bible reveals that Pentecost came 50 days after the first Easter and 10 days after the ascension of Christ as described in Acts 1. That means the apostles and their fellow believers had been in one accord and one place for approximately 10 days. If we had been among that group that met and prayed for 10 days, we might not have considered these things to be so sudden at all! However, any time God moves mightily among His people, it becomes a landmark in time. This is why Jesus taught us to pray “always” (Luke 18:1). This is why Paul taught the church to pray “without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). God told us there is a time for everything under heaven. We believe it is a time for God to move upon His people, not only in our church and nation, but around the world! We are praying to that effect, and we must never stop praying. We must faithfully pray with the realization that the answer to our prayers may lie just around the next spiritual corner or over the next spiritual hill.

Prayer Emphasis: **Commit** yourself to being faithful to this season of prayer and devotional Bible study. **Encourage** others within God’s family to pursue God’s **Kingdom Purpose** with you. **Ask** God to make His presence known to you in mighty ways and to fill you with His Holy Spirit.

Day 4: Acts 2:14-24

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.’” (Acts 2:14)

Peter Stood

Today, we see Peter standing up to speak for God for the second time in the Book of Acts. As we visualize him first standing before the local church body (Acts 1:15) and now before the masses that had gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, it is hard to believe this is the same man that denied even knowing Jesus just 50 days before! I am sure it was difficult for Peter to take that first stand with the small group that met together for prayer. It may have been even more difficult than it was to stand here and speak to this large group of people. Many of the people here may not have known much about Peter – if they even knew him at all. Even then, most of them probably did not know about his earlier boast to never deny or forsake Jesus or of the three denials made so soon thereafter on the night of Jesus’ betrayal and trial. However, stand he did, and the Holy Spirit was careful to record it for all generations of believers to know. Notice that on both occasions when Peter stood to speak, he referenced words from the Scriptures. People may be able to argue with our past failures, but they cannot argue with the Word of God. We need to stand, and we need to speak, but we need to do both with the understanding that the world does not need “a piece of our minds.” The world needs the Word of God!

Prayer Emphasis: **Share** something you have learned from God’s Word with someone today. **Look** for an opportunity to stand up for Christ in some situation. **Confess** any critical or condemning attitude toward any believer that may have failed you in the past and **ask** God to help you to **forgive** them. **Encourage** someone else to stand for Christ at every possible opportunity.

Day 5: Acts 2:25-37

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:36)

“Lord and Christ”

The resurrection of the Lord is a basic doctrine throughout Acts. On five separate occasions in this book, the apostles declared themselves to be witnesses of the resurrected Christ (2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-41; and 13:30-31). The apostles relied on the testimony of what they knew from the Scriptures and what they saw and experienced in their own lives. They not only believed Jesus had been resurrected, but they believed He had been “exalted to” the heavens to sit at “the right hand of God” the Father (v. 33). Peter references Psalm 16:8-11 and makes the point that David is not speaking of himself in that Scripture or in Psalm 110:1, which is quoted in Acts 2:34-35. Peter also reminded his listeners that David was dead and buried and that his grave remained undisturbed. This section concludes with a warning that all Israel should be aware that God made the same Jesus they crucified, both Lord and Christ. Not only was He the Savior, but He was also the Sovereign God! Hearing these words brought a mournful cry from the congregation. They were cut to the heart and cried out, “What shall we do?” (v. 37). The question remains for us today. What should we do with this knowledge that our Savior is to also be our Lord?

Prayer Emphasis: Acknowledge Christ as Lord of your life today. Make Him aware of your willingness to serve Him. **Ask** Him for guidance as you go about your day. **Pray** this prayer several times today and continually **remind** Him that you are here and willing to serve.

Day 6: Acts 2:38-3:3

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 2:38)

A Good Answer

We read yesterday where some of the people who had been listening to Peter speak asked, “What shall we do?” (2:37). How would you have responded to their question? How would you respond to a neighbor or fellow employee if they were to ask you a spiritual question such as that? Peter told these convicted listeners that they were to, “Repent and let every one of you be baptized!” There was no question in Peter’s mind that the Lord was willing to save all who would but believe in Him. Verse 41 references those who “received his word” – leaving us to understand that there must have been some who chose not to believe at that time. About 3,000 were added to the number of believers on that day, and they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to fellowship. Fellowship is described here as the breaking of bread and prayer. Breaking of bread probably refers to both communion and common meals. They continued to meet every day in the temple courts and in their homes. God continued to add to the church daily. We are also told there were people being saved “daily” (2:47). Is there any wonder that we are told at the beginning of that verse that they were “praising God”?

Prayer Emphasis: Practice your testimony and **prepare** yourself for opportunities to share Christ with others. **Continue** steadfastly in the Word and be careful to spend time with your fellow believers. **Praise** God and **thank** Him for all that He does for our church. **Pray** for at least one of our church ministries today.

Day 7: Acts 3:4-16

“And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.” (Acts 3:9-10)

Indisputable Evidence

Yesterday we were introduced to a man who had been crippled at birth and later carried to one of the gates of the temple to beg for money from those who were entering the temple courts. I find it interesting that this man’s friends did not position him outside the door of some bar, restaurant, or just outside the entrance of some business in the marketplace. The poor beggar saw Peter and John about to enter the temple to pray and asked them for money. Peter and John had something for this man that was far better than a few coins! What they had to offer this man was something that money could not buy! Peter took the man “by the right hand and lifted him up and immediately” the man was healed (v. 7). The man jumped to his feet and began to walk. When the people saw him, they recognized him as the man who was begging at the temple gate. They were all filled with wonder and amazement at the power of God! Peter made sure the Lord received the credit for all that was done that day and used the moment as an opportunity to speak again of the resurrection and the power of Christ to change lives completely. The indisputable evidence was right there before their very eyes! In Acts, Luke mentioned the name of Jesus 33 times. How many times will you mention Him today?

Prayer Emphasis: Look for an opportunity to **witness** to someone today about what Christ has done in your own life. **Tell** them how your life was before Christ, how you came to meet Christ, and then explain the difference that He has made in your life!

Day 8: Acts 3:17-4:4

“Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day...” (Acts 4:1-3)

Jailbirds

Can you imagine how the Jews reacted to Peter’s reference to their “ignorance?” (3:17). He leaves them little excuse for their ignorance because he clearly explained how Moses and the prophets had told them of the One who was to come. He explained that Christ had come to the Jews to bless them and help them turn from their wicked ways. This was all just too much for the proud, arrogant religious leaders to whom Peter was speaking. As Peter and John continued to speak to the people, priests and guards from the temple rushed upon them and took them away to jail! Since it was so late in the day (remember it was about 3:00 in the afternoon when Peter and John met the man outside the temple gates), the preachers and their new convert had to spend the night in jail! I cannot imagine the joy and enthusiasm of this newly healed man being any less exuberant in jail than it had been outside the temple. The revival meeting that these believers were having must have made for a long and interesting night for their fellow prisoners and the guards!

Prayer Emphasis: Prepare for opposition if you are going to be a living witness of the resurrected Christ! **Remember** that Jesus warned of persecution upon those who would follow Him. **Commit** to continue for Christ no matter how the world may react. If possible, **do** something kind for a needy person today.

Day 9: Acts 4:5-16

“And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.” (Acts 4:5-6)

The Morning After

There are many important themes throughout the Book of Acts. Earlier we mentioned joy as a primary theme. But, along with joy, we must mention opposition. Yesterday, we read about Peter and John taking part in the miraculous healing of a crippled man. Today, we find them standing before rulers, being questioned about the events of the day before. This brings us to yet another theme in Acts, that being the expansion of the work of the church despite opposition! In verse eight, we find Peter speaking for the fourth time in Acts! This was a man greatly changed from the one who boasted so loudly and failed so miserably on the night of the Lord’s betrayal. What made the difference? We are told that Peter was, “Filled with the Holy Spirit!” Earlier, one might have read Peter’s boasting of never betraying Jesus and concluded that he had been “full” of himself! Now, it is the Holy Spirit that guides his speech. Because of this, his words are not about what *he* would or would not do, but about what *God* had done. He clearly states that salvation can be found in Jesus alone. The courage of Peter and John was obvious to the rulers who sought to silence them by intimidation. There was no denying that God had been at work in and through the lives of these men.

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God to give you the courage to stand against the opposition that will surely come when you set out to fulfill God’s **Kingdom Purpose** in your own life. **Pray** for the power of the Holy Spirit to be evident in your life. **Seek** ways to **express** your faith and courage by **sharing** with others what God is doing in your life.

Day 10: Acts 4:17-28

“So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John...said to them... ‘For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” (Acts 4:18-20)

A Case of the Can’t Help Its

Today’s reading contains the story of the first of four times that some followers of Jesus were brought before the Sanhedrin. We will later see Stephen (Acts 6:12) and Paul (Acts 22:30) standing before a group of men who were much like the supreme court of their day. Peter and the apostles will be back before this court later (5:27). Did you notice the courts’ avoidance of even mentioning the name of Jesus in verse 17? They use the words “this name” to avoid speaking the name of Jesus. They obviously wanted to be sure Peter and John understood them because they called the two preachers back before them to command them not to speak any more to anyone about Jesus. However, Peter and John were not intimidated and responded that they could not help but speak to others about the things they had seen and heard. The court reemphasized their threats to the preachers and then let them go. Peter and John were soon again with their fellow church members reporting on the events of the previous two days. After hearing the report, the church “raised their voice to God with one accord” in praise and adoration.

Prayer Emphasis: **Expect** opposition if you are going to pursue God’s **Kingdom Purpose** in your life. **Commit** to remain faithful even in the face of opposition. **Encourage** someone else who may be facing opposition and let them know that you are praying for them.

Day 11: Acts 4:29-5:4

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word.” (Acts 4:29)

A Prayer for “Boldness”

How did the followers of Christ respond to the threats of the court? They asked God to enable them to speak for Him with even greater boldness! They also asked God to show Himself mighty through healings and other miraculous signs that would be done through the name the rulers would not even mention – Jesus! Verse 31 tells us that after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And God answered their prayer for boldness! It is a blessing to read words like, “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul” and “neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common” (v. 32). It is obvious that the people of the early church shared everything they had. This kind of love and devotion could only come “When they had prayed,” (verse 31). When we pray, God will also unite us in heart and mind. When we pray, God will teach us to look not only to our own needs but to the needs of others as well. And, when we pray, we will be bold in our witness for Christ.

Prayer Emphasis: **Renew** your commitment to prayer today. **Share** the devotional site address with someone today and **ask** them to join you in your devotional reading and prayer time.

Day 12: Acts 5:5-16

“Then Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.’” (Acts 5:9)

Ananias and Sapphira

We read the first part of this story yesterday. As we continue to read this story today, we see what can happen when people seek to promote themselves over the work of the Lord. A couple in the church watched as Barnabas sold a parcel of land that he owned and then donated the full proceeds of the sale to the church. Ananias and Sapphira sold some property of their own and then conspired to make the church believe that they, too, were donating the full proceeds to the Lord’s work. In yesterday’s verses, we see they would not have been criticized for only giving a portion of the money to the church. One at a time they were questioned by Peter, and they both lied to Peter about whether they had given the full amount of the sale proceeds to the church. Earlier, we read of stories about believers being filled with the Holy Spirit and then speaking the word of God with boldness. Today, we read of believers being filled with Satan and lying to God and their church leaders. Soon after this shocking sequence of events, we see the church back at work and lives being changed for the glory of God. Our money is just one way that we can honor God and help the church. God does not expect us all to give the same amount or in the same way. However, and whatever we give, we give so that God’s **Kingdom Purpose** can be fulfilled in our midst.

Prayer Emphasis: **Review** your personal giving record and see if you believe you have been faithful in your giving to God and His church. **Commit** to giving back to God from your income and **remember** to do it in a way that brings no honor or glory to yourself. **Surrender** your resources to God and watch Him bless you in a mighty way!

Day 13: Acts 5:17-28

“Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him...were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.” (Acts 5:17-18)

Repeat Offenders

Once again, we see the apostles arrested and placed behind bars. And this time, it appears all 12 of them are there. However, God used an angel to supernaturally release them and instruct them to “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life” (v. 20). So, early the next morning, the apostles returned to the temple and continued to spread the word of God to all who would listen! Today’s reading contains the story of the first of three jail-related miracles. The obedience of the apostles to the angel’s message was clear. Even after what must have been a sleepless night in jail, they were up at daybreak and back in the temple courts preaching and instructing the people. Unaware of the “Great Escape,” the Sanhedrin sent word to the jailers to have the apostles brought before them. The messengers went to the jail, but the apostles were no longer there. You can imagine how confused they were as they returned to the court to report that they found the jail secure, complete with guards standing at the doors, but with no prisoners found inside the cells! Soon the word came that the apostles were once again standing in the temple courts preaching the Word of God! Without meaning to, the rulers paid a wonderful compliment to the apostles when they said, “You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine” (v. 28).

Prayer Emphasis: Believe that God can, and will, use supernatural means to assist you in fulfilling your **Kingdom Purpose**. **Realize** that He did not love these first believers any more than He loves us and He expects no less from us than He did from them. **Claim** God’s blessing on your life and ministry and **serve** Him faithfully today.

Day 14: Acts 5:29-42

“But Peter and the other apostles answered and said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” (Acts 5:29)

Government Ends Where God Begins

Peter and the apostles restate a basic principle that they previously mentioned in Acts 4:19–20. They told the officials that Christians are to obey their government unless their government demands they disobey God. The resurrection story is retold with emphasis on the fact that Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father. The apostles affirm their loyalty to the One who died for them, rose again from the dead, and is now with the Father in Heaven. This infuriates the rulers to the point that they desire to have the preachers executed! Talk about being like Jesus! Here these guys have been preaching for a short time, and already the religious rulers are trying to kill them! A Pharisee named Gamaliel reminded the rulers that nothing at all could come of the work of these vagabond preachers if God were not truly with them. He further stated that there was nothing that could be done to stop these men if they were indeed the ministers of God. The apostles were flogged and released after being warned once again not to teach and preach in the name of Jesus. The wounded preachers rejoiced at the opportunity to suffer for Jesus and went about preaching the gospel daily in the temple courts and from house to house.

Prayer Emphasis: Have you had some experience with disappointment? Have you suffered for Christ in any way? **Rejoice** in your sufferings and **praise** God for the opportunity to be identified with Him in such a glorious way! **Encourage** someone in the ministry today and let them know that you are praying for them.

Day 15: Acts 6:1-12

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint...” (Acts 6:1)

Choosing the Seven

The daily preaching and teaching in the temple courts and from house to house resulted in a great increase in the number of believers. However, where there are more people, there is always going to be more potential for problems and disagreements. Some of the believers felt that their widows were not being treated fairly in the daily distribution of food and monetary assistance, so they brought a complaint against their fellow believers and that complaint eventually made its way to the apostles. As much as it might have grieved the early church leaders to hear of this oversight and the complaining about it, they knew it would not be right for them to cease teaching and preaching to take care of the problem themselves. They wisely instructed the believers to choose seven men from among the church who could assume the oversight of this ministry. These men were to be filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Everyone was pleased with the suggestion and seven men were chosen to serve in this special capacity. In this situation, a problem became a blessing because even more people became involved in personal ministry and the apostles were free to minister the Word of God to the people. As the Word of God spread, the number of the disciples continued to increase rapidly.

Prayer Emphasis: **Pray** for harmony within our fellowship of believers. **Seek** constructive answers to problematic situations. **Look** for someone who could be being overlooked in some way and find someone to work with you to make sure that their need is being met. When you see a problem arise, **avoid** criticism, and **seek** an appropriate resolution.

Day 16: Acts 6:13-7:10

“And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.” (Acts 6:15)

Stephen

The last part of yesterday’s reading found Stephen, one of the seven disciples chosen to minister at the tables for the widows, being used of God in some powerful ways. Some of the religious leaders took issue with Stephen’s work, and, after not being able to stand against him by way of argument, they persuaded people to accuse Stephen of blasphemy. Thus, Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin. This is the third of four times in Acts when the Lord’s followers were literally taken to court simply because they were living out their faith. As the Sanhedrin waited for a response to their accusations, they all saw that Stephen’s face was like the face of an angel. Although I am not sure exactly what they saw, I am sure they saw something that convinced them that they were dealing with someone similar to the twelve apostles who had caused them so much trouble before! The high priest asked for an explanation, and what he received was what we know to be the longest recorded message in Acts! A point of interest is that this high priest is probably the same high priest who presided over the trial of Jesus.

Prayer Emphasis: **Pray** for believers around the world who are suffering persecution, even to the point of the loss of life, simply for believing and preaching the Gospel. **Make an effort** to learn something about the kinds of persecution that believers are experiencing today. **Thank God** for the blessing of freedom that we enjoy in our country.

Day 17: Acts 7:11-22

“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” (Acts 7:22)

Old Time Preaching

Yesterday, we began to listen in as Stephen preached to the Jewish people, using the Old Testament story to try to convince them about Christ. He began with Abraham (v. 2) and continued on through the Bible story to Solomon and the prophets (vs. 47 & 52). A key point in the message is found in verse eight where Stephen mentioned the covenant that God made with Abraham came long before the tabernacle or temple were ever built or any of their religious traditions had been established. Stephen moved through a list of personal relationships and situations to try to show the Sanhedrin that the one thing Israel had failed to see in all their ceremonial worship was that God desired a personal walk with them as individuals. What good is it to come together in any place to worship God if He is not truly worshipped in our own hearts? It was a difficult point for the religious leaders to deal with that day, and it remains a difficult point for religious people today. God does not live in a building, but in the hearts of His followers! We need to see ourselves as “mobile chapels” as we navigate our way through our daily routines. Today’s reading concludes with Moses and the fact that he was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Here is just another point well made by the preaching deacon, Stephen! God’s people do not live by the wisdom of this world, but through the in-dwelling Spirit of God!

Prayer Emphasis: Be a “mobile chapel” today! **Acknowledge** that God lives in you and that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit! **Live out** your faith everywhere that you go today!

Day 18: Acts 7:23-35

“Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren...” (Acts 7:23)

Moses! Moses!

All the verses in our reading today are still part of Stephen’s sermon to the Sanhedrin, and all of them deal with Moses and his personal relationship with God. Our Scripture begins with the statement of Moses’ age (40 years) when he first attempted to answer the call of God to help his people, and it closes with Moses standing before the burning bush some 40 years later. It might be beneficial for all of us to hear what Stephen had to say about these facts today. Moses first attempted to serve God in his own wisdom – and probably some of that Egyptian wisdom that we mentioned in yesterday’s focus verse! He tried to accomplish through the flesh something that God wanted done through the Spirit. So, his first attempts to assist his people were utterly rejected and resulted in failure. God used circumstances to get Moses out of Egypt and to Midian so that Moses could spend 40 years preparing to do things God’s way! Getting Moses out of Egypt was easy enough, but getting Egypt out of Moses was another thing entirely! It is much the same with God’s people today. The world wastes no expense or effort to flood our minds with its wisdom. However, as it was with Moses then, so it is with God’s people today. God’s work can only be done in God’s wisdom and God’s ways!

Prayer Emphasis: Spend some time having a “Midian Moment” today! **Ask** God to clear your mind of everything but His wisdom as you seek to hear Him speak to you. **Acknowledge** that your own wisdom and strength fall short of what it takes to be a blessing to anyone. **Open** your heart to God and **ask** Him to fill you with His wisdom.

Day 19: Acts 7:36-47

“He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt...” (Acts 7:36)

What a Difference

The “he” in verse 36 refers to Moses. This would be the same Moses that tried earlier, without success, to be a deliverer for Israel. But here we are told that “he” led Israel out of Egypt and that “he” did many miraculous signs and wonders in the process! But, before we become too infatuated with Moses, let’s look back to verse 35 and be reminded that all Moses did he did through the power of the One that he had met at that burning bush back in Midian! It really wasn’t Moses who led God’s people out of Egypt! It was God that led the people out of Egypt, and He allowed Moses to be a part of it! It is the same for every one of us today. God still works in mighty ways and accomplishes amazing things. How blessed we are that He has called us to be a part of His **Kingdom Purpose!** It is clear to see that leading God’s people was no easy work. Just as Moses had to be out of Egypt for some time before God could get the Egypt out of him, so it was with all the people that he was called to lead and serve. Their own hearts were easily turned back to Egypt! Moses could help the people get out of Egypt, but only God could get the Egypt out of the people. It is not hard to see where Stephen is going with this message. He is trying to tell his listeners that they were at risk of making the same mistakes as their forefathers. They were listening to *people* and looking to *places* instead of developing a personal relationship with God!

Prayer Emphasis: Get personal with God today. **Talk** to Him throughout the day and **seek** His guidance in all that you do. **Listen** for His voice as He speaks to you in divine wisdom today. **Ask** Him to make this 40 day experience a blessing in your personal life.

Day 20: Acts 7:48-60

“And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” (Acts 7:59)

The Death of Stephen

Like Jesus, Stephen delivered a hard message to the religious leaders of his day. It is clear to see that their response to Stephen, and his preaching, was much the same as their earlier response to Jesus. As the angry crowd looked at Stephen with hatred, Stephen looked up to Heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He cried out, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” If the high priest who was trying Stephen was the same one that earlier stood in judgment over Jesus, and if these leaders of the Sanhedrin were some of the same men who listened to Jesus preach and had been there for His trial and execution, then these words must have cut them to the heart! These words were almost identical to what Jesus said as He stood before the high priest and Sanhedrin! And then, just as Jesus had spent his dying breath praying for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him, Stephen also prayed for those who were taking his life. Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, but these evil men saw Jesus standing right there in front of them through the faithful witness of a disciple-turned-deacon-turned-preacher!

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God to allow people to see Jesus through your life! **Ask** Him to reveal Himself to you in the times that you need to stand strong and true. After asking, take time to **look** for Him as He comes to assist you through your trials. Do some **research** about martyrs today and **pray** for the many believers who have died or will die simply because they choose to not remain silent about their faith.

Day 21: Acts 8:1-13

“Now Saul was consenting to his (Stephen’s) death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 8:1)

Meet Saul of Tarsus

Today, we find the first mention of Paul the apostle (then Saul) in the Bible. He was present for the preaching and stoning of Stephen and consented to it. He guarded the coats of those who took Stephen’s life. Chapter eight begins with the definite statement that Paul was there and that he approved of the actions taken on that dreadful day. The murder of Stephen opened the door for even greater persecution against the church at Jerusalem and all the believers, except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Here again, God used circumstances to aide Him in the accomplishment of His will. He commissioned the church to go to all the world, and He specifically mentioned Judea and Samaria. Up until now, the church had pretty much stayed in Jerusalem. Even as godly men mourned and buried Stephen, ungodly men made plans to destroy the church entirely. Just as the apostles had preached from house to house, Saul now went from house to house dragging Christians off to prison. Meanwhile, those who fled the persecution went everywhere preaching the word. It seems that Stephen did not preach nor die in vain!

Prayer Emphasis: Consider your own calling to be a witness today. How faithful are you to speak for Christ as you live among a spiritually starving people? **Ask** God to show Himself to others through you. **Be open** to opportunities to **speak up** and to **speak out** for Jesus today. A word of witness can be short and simple and done in a way that is not offensive. **Give** God the credit publicly for something that He is doing in your life today.

Day 22: Acts 8:14-25

“And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money.” (Acts 8:18)

Something Money Cannot Buy

Yesterday’s reading introduced us to one of the nine “Simons” mentioned in the New Testament. This man was referred to as “Simon the Sorcerer” because he practiced sorcery in Samaria for many years. He was a boastful man, to say the least. When Peter and John were sent by the church to visit Samaria, they began to lay hands on people and pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit. There must have been some physical evidence of the receiving of the Spirit, for Simon “saw” (v. 18) that the Spirit was coming upon people after the laying on of the apostles’ hands. He offered the apostles money if they would let him in on the secret to their power. I am sure he had practiced many slight-of-hand tricks among the people for many years, so he assumed there had to be some “trick” to what the apostles were doing. From one “Simon” to another, there was a frank conversation held that day and Simon Peter ultimately indicated that the second “Simon” needed to repent of his wickedness and turn to the Lord! Peter went on to say that Simon, in his greed and love for money, was “bound” in his sin (v. 23). Satan still uses money to hold many people captive today, and the love for money is still the root of many sins in our lives.

Prayer Emphasis: Examine your motives. Has the desire for money, or any other personal gain, ever kept you from being obedient and, therefore, from experiencing the full blessing of God?

Day 23: Acts 8:26-38

“Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza...’” (Acts 8:26)

Sometimes the Way Up is “Down”

We were told that Philip went “down” to Samaria. Samaria is north of Jerusalem, so that language may seem a little odd. However, the word “down” was not used there to describe direction, but rather an elevation. Samaria is significantly lower in elevation than Jerusalem. However, many Jews would have considered a move to Samaria to be a “downward” move from anywhere! In today’s reading, Philip is instructed to go south on the desert road that led “down” from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip obeyed the leadership of the Lord, and the result is the wonderful story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was now on his way home, reading the Bible along the way. It is probable that this man did not receive a lot of attention in Jerusalem because the law specifically prohibited eunuchs from entering the temple and worshipping in the Lord’s assembly. But what would not be accomplished in a building full of religious people could be accomplished by the obedience of one Spirit-filled believer! Philip joined himself to this man’s chariot and used words from the Book of Isaiah to lead him to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The man immediately desired to be baptized and God just happened to arrange for there to be a way for this new convert’s obedience to begin immediately!

Prayer Emphasis: When circumstances do not seem to have you in an upwardly mobile situation, **remind** yourself that God is always working for your good and for the accomplishment of His will in your life. **Look** carefully to your circumstances and **observe** how God is working in your life.

Day 24: Acts 8:39-9:10

“And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus...’” (Acts 9:5)

Five Men

Today’s reading gives us a glimpse into the lives of five men. First, we see the eunuch and his salvation and baptism. He had an immediate desire to advance in his spiritual growth for it was he who first suggested baptism. Then we see him experiencing the joy that only salvation can bring. Second, we see Philip being supernaturally transported to his next place of service. Perhaps since Philip had walked so far to meet his appointment with the eunuch, the Spirit decided to make his next missionary venture a much easier trip. Third, we see Saul of Tarsus (Paul) and his conversion on the road to Damascus. In his zeal to destroy the church, he went to the high priest and asked for letters of authorization to remove believers from the synagogues if he found them preaching the gospel there. Fourth, we see Ananias. Though his mention in the Scripture is brief, we see that the Lord had but to speak his name to get his attention. And his first words were simple and to the point. “Here I am, Lord” was his response to the Lord’s call. The eunuch, Philip, Saul, and Ananias make four. Who is the fifth man? The fifth Man is the Man that met Saul on the road to Tarsus. The fifth Man is Jesus, without whom none of these amazing stories would have been possible.

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God to help you make Jesus the center of the story. Without *Him* we are without *hope*. **Pray** for Jesus to be the center of your life wherever you may be and that He will be first and foremost on your mind as you **pursue** your **Kingdom Purpose**.

Day 25: Acts 9:11-22

“So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.’” (Acts 9:11)

A Tough Assignment

Ananias’ obedient response had barely been spoken before he was given a very tough assignment. He was told to go to the house where a sightless Saul was waiting and praying. Ananias was to go to him, lay hands on him, and pray for his sight to be restored. The concerned disciple had his own thoughts on the matter. He knew of Saul and why he had come to their region, so he informed the Lord of what he knew: “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem” (v. 13). In turn, the Lord informed Ananias of what He knew: “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (v. 15). You have to love Ananias! Just a word from the Lord and, concerned or not, verse 17 simply states, “And Ananias went his way and entered the house.” Upon his arrival, he was the first to formally welcome Paul into God’s family by addressing him as “Brother Saul.” He then announced who had sent him and why. With Ananias, there was to be no honor or credit given to anyone but Jesus Christ! He prayed for Paul and the former persecutor’s vision was restored. Paul went immediately about the business of preaching the gospel, ever growing in grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer Emphasis: Develop the habit of saying “Yes” to Jesus – even when you may be fearful about what He is asking you to do. **Realize** that He will not assign us a task that He will not empower us to perform. **Pray** specifically for someone in ministry today, **asking** God to empower them as they tell the story of Jesus.

Day 26: Acts 9:23-35

“Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him (Saul). But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him.” (Acts 9:23-24)

Opposition

Opposition to the gospel is a repeated theme in the Book of Acts. Early on we see Satan using people to assist him in hindering Paul from accomplishing the things that the Lord had chosen for him to do (9:15). Paul was busy doing the Lord’s business while others were busy doing the will of their father, the Devil! They planned to capture and kill this persecutor turned preacher! Under the cover of darkness, Paul’s fellow believers lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall, and Paul escaped to Jerusalem. Unfortunately, he did not receive a warm welcome there either. He tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him and doubted that he was truly converted. Without the help of Barnabas, who knows how Paul’s story would have gone from that point. We finish our reading today with Paul and Peter both doing their thing and ministering for God in their own ways and places. What a joy it is to know there is room for everyone and a place of service for all who desire to follow Jesus.

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God to make you aware of someone who is not feeling connected to our fellowship and **contact** them. **Encourage** them to become involved in our church family. Make them feel welcome and **help** them to find their own useful place of service. **Pray** for the many people who are seeking God’s direction in their lives.

Day 27: Acts 9:36-10:5

“Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.” (Acts 9:41)

A Rolling “Stone”

The work of the ministry kept men like Peter on the move. Yesterday’s reading found him in Lydda where a paralytic man named Aeneas was healed. At that same time, the believers in Joppa lost one of their beloved church members, Dorcas. Since Lydda was only 12 miles from Joppa, two men were sent to get Peter, and soon Peter was there praying for Dorcas. I am sure Peter knew exactly what the people expected. They had heard so much about the miracles that God was doing in Peter’s ministry, and they believed God could do something to prevent the loss of this much-loved, Christian woman. Such expectations would drive anyone to their knees! Imagine the faith it took for Peter to speak to Dorcas and ask her to get up from her death bed. Then imagine the thrill of seeing God raise this woman from the dead! But let’s not stop imagining until we have imagined the joy of her fellow believers when Peter presented Dorcas to them alive! We are not told how long Peter stayed in Joppa, but we are told that he was soon called to Caesarea to the home of Cornelius where he was to minister. Peter, whose name meant “rock” or “stone” was surely gathering no moss!

Prayer Emphasis: Think of someone who has ministered to you and find a way to show your appreciation. Take time to **humble** yourself and **get down on your knees** in prayer before God. **Stretch** your faith and **ask** God for something amazing today! Make a **note** here so that you can come back and record how God answered that prayer.

Day 28: Acts 10:6-16

“And a voice spoke to him... ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’” (Acts 10:15)

A Polished Stone

Before God spoke to Cornelius in a vision and told him to call Peter to Caesarea, Peter was staying at the home of Simon, the Tanner, in Joppa. This background information is significant to the story because tanners were considered to be ceremonially unclean because they had contact with dead animals (Lev. 11:40). Cornelius was a Roman officer and one of the first Gentile converts after the Day of Pentecost. Perhaps Peter’s spending time with an unclean tanner was all part of God’s plan to prepare his heart to minister to Cornelius. We never know what today’s events are preparing us to face tomorrow! Peter also had a vision from the Lord while praying on a rooftop. God allowed Peter to see the heavens open and a large sheet lowered. The sheet was filled with all kinds of presumably unclean animals. God told Peter to kill and eat one of the animals. Initially, Peter refused because he knew the animals were considered unclean. This was the third time the Holy Spirit recorded Peter refusing to do what the Lord specifically told him to do. But God was trying to do more than fill Peter’s empty stomach! He was opening Peter’s eyes to the fact that no one was to be considered unclean or left out of the reach of the Gospel. God was still working on Peter and polishing him up to shine for His glory!

Prayer Emphasis: Take time to really **look** at the people that you meet along life’s way. **See** each of them as someone special and **remember** that Christ gave His life on the cross for that person. **Pray** for more opportunities to witness to others about salvation.

Day 29: Acts 10:17-30

“Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate.” (Acts 10:17)

No Coincidence

You must believe that it was no coincidence that, while Peter was thinking about the vision he had seen, some men, sent by Cornelius, found the house where Peter was praying and asked for him. Never forget that God’s timing is always perfect! What better time could the messengers from the Gentile soldier come to Peter than right after this vision? Soon the messengers explained to Peter why they were there. Peter invited the men into the house and may have even shared a meal with them. The next day, they started out on the two-day trip to Caesarea. Some of the Christian brothers from Joppa went with them on the journey. Cornelius was found waiting at his home. With him were some of his relatives and closest friends. We are not told how many people had been invited, but they are described as “many” in verse 27. Peter began by explaining that it was not customary for Jews to visit or associate with Gentiles, but God had shown him that he should come to them. He then asked why they sent for him. Cornelius told Peter about his own vision from God. I am sure that Peter was ready to listen!

Prayer Emphasis: Realize that God is working around the clock and around the world. He is preparing people to receive His Word from His faithful servants. **Have faith** that God is at work in your life and that He can, and will, do for us all that He has ever done for any of his people in the past.

Day 30: Acts 10:31-43

“And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.” (Acts 10:42)

Ready!

Cornelius explained his vision to Peter. Peter had to be overwhelmed at God’s attention to detail! He told the Centurion exactly where Peter was and completely described Peter’s situation. After an expression of appreciation for Peter’s willingness to come to his home, Cornelius stated, “Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God” (v. 33). The people were ready to listen, and you can be sure that Peter was ready to preach! Above all, God was ready to accomplish His **Kingdom Purpose** – the saving of lost souls. Peter said it all when he said, “And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree” (v. 39). He then spoke to them about the life and death of Christ Jesus. But thank God that he did not have to conclude the story there! He went on to share about the resurrection and the eventual commission to preach the gospel to all people. Peter made a powerful statement when he said, “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (v. 43). (Note the present tense in “witness.”) Too many people fail to understand the value of the Old Testament to the New Testament church! Never forget that “all the prophets” still “witness” of Him!

Prayer Emphasis: Think about all the people you encounter in a day. **Look** at their faces and **consider** how many of them might be ready to listen to a testimony about Jesus. Be ready to share a personal testimony and witness about God’s salvation whenever and wherever the opportunity arises.

Day 31: Acts 10:44-11:9

“While Peter was still speaking...the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” (Acts 10:44)

A Divine Interruption

Sometimes it is difficult to know exactly when and how to give an invitation at the end of a sermon. This was not a problem for Peter on this day! I am thinking Peter was sure it was time to close his sermon when the Holy Spirit came on the house filled with spiritually hungry Gentiles. The believers who accompanied Peter there were astonished that God would pour His Spirit out upon Gentiles. Notice the order of events: First they believed, then they were filled with the Holy Spirit, then they were baptized in water. Baptism in any other order is not New Testament baptism at all. We are not baptized to *be* saved but because we have *been* saved. Salvation first – baptism follows! If you think that Peter imagined an amazing reception upon his return to Jerusalem and the church, you are probably right. If you think that the church in Jerusalem was totally pleased with Peter’s actions, you are wrong. We are told that they criticized him for entering the homes of Gentiles and eating with them. Eating with someone meant that you accepted them. This same kind of prejudice and bias created problems for Jesus on many occasions. All Peter could do was tell them the story of the vision and the words of the Lord regarding His love for all people of all nations.

Prayer Emphasis: God’s timing is always right! **Thank God** for your own salvation and **spend some time recalling** that very special time in your life. If you have not been baptized, **consider** this act of obedience.

Day 32: Acts 11:10-20

“If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17)

Some Explaining to Do

After explaining about the vision and the arrival of the men from Caesarea, Peter further explained to the church members at Jerusalem how the Spirit told him to go with them without hesitation. He explained about the Holy Spirit coming upon the Gentiles as they believed on Jesus. He specifically explained how the Spirit came upon these new believers just as it had earlier come upon them at Pentecost. He wanted them to see that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit had shown no difference in the way they acted toward the Gentiles. Now, he explained, it was time for the church to think more like God than the self-righteous Jews! Eventually criticism of Peter turned to praise for God and harmony was restored in the church. God is so good to remind us that Stephen’s death was not at all in vain. The Spirit tells us that Stephen’s death caused believers to be scattered to the outermost parts of the world preaching the gospel. However, they too, were preaching to Jews only. Soon the news of the Lord’s outpouring upon the Gentiles reached them, and they began to preach to everyone everywhere! Make a note in the margin of your Bible today. This story marks the first time that the church sought after the Gentiles to preach the gospel to them. Up to this point, Gentiles had to seek out the church! We are finally seeing the church begin to fulfill the great commission.

Prayer Emphasis: We should **expect** criticism along the way as we **seek** to fulfill God’s **Kingdom Purpose**. Even today, there are many people who are considered undesirable by churches and some Christians. **Ask** God to give *you* a love for everyone that *He* loves.

Day 33: Acts 11:21-12:2

“...And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” (Acts 11:26b)

The Church at Antioch

Many people were being saved in Antioch. The news of this reached the church in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch. True to his name (Barnabas means ‘Son of Encouragement’), Barnabas began to encourage the new Christians in Antioch to remain true to the Lord and to serve Him with all their hearts. Realizing that God was doing a marvelous thing, and that he needed more people to help him disciple these new believers, Barnabas went to Tarsus, got Paul, and brought him back to help with the new church in Antioch. They met with the church there for an entire year, teaching them the things of God. They must have taught them well because the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. This is the first of only three times that we will read the word “Christian” in the Bible. This is a significant moment in the life of the church because it represents the fact that Christianity was becoming known as something different than Judaism. These new Gentile believers even sent an offering to the suffering Christians in Jerusalem! Note that each person gave “according to their ability” (11:19). How much easier the work of God would be if all believers would do the same today!

Prayer Emphasis: Evaluate your life and examine it for obvious evidence of Christianity. Do people see your life and know that you are a Christian? Consider your giving to God and the church. Do you really give according to your ability? Pray about becoming a faithful tither and watch God go to work on your financial life!

Day 34: Acts 12:3-15

“Peter was...in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.” (Acts 12:5)

Power in Prayer

Yesterday’s reading concluded with James, the brother of John, being put to death by Herod. This indicates that James must have been one of the early leaders in the church. After that, Herod decided to also arrest Peter. No doubt, his plan was to kill Peter, but he was forced to keep Peter in prison until after the Passover. Apparently, Herod was aware of Peter’s previous escape from prison (Acts 5:19-25), so he made sure that Peter was well-guarded. But while Peter was in prison, the church was in prayer! They were meeting in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Peter was sleeping in the prison when an angel was sent to spring him. This story is filled with amazing facts. The chains fell off Peter’s arms. The prison doors were opened. Peter followed the angel, walking right past the guards and right out the door and gate of the prison. When he arrived at the door to the house where the church was praying, a young lady named Rhoda responded to his knock at the door. Recognizing Peter’s voice, she quickly ran back into the house to tell the church, leaving Peter standing outside! When she told the praying church that Peter was at the door, they chided her and accused her of being out of her mind. The church was praying for Peter, but they were not prepared for the way God was going to answer their prayers!

Prayer Emphasis: If Satan could keep the church from doing just one thing, it might be that he would choose to keep the church from praying. Commit to praying daily and do not forget to pray for suffering believers that are imprisoned even now for their witness for Christ. Pray for someone within our church today. Be sure to let them know that you have prayed for them.

Day 35: Acts 12:16-13:3

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” (Acts 13:2)

Barnabas and Saul

Today, we find the recently freed Peter standing at the door to Mary’s house, knocking and waiting to be allowed to enter, but he was not to remain with his praying friends for long. Knowing that Herod would send search parties, Peter told the praying believers to tell James and the brothers about what happened, and then went to a safer place. We know that Peter was not speaking of James the apostle since he had earlier been killed. So, we conclude that he must be speaking of James the brother of Jesus and the author of the Book of James in the New Testament. This is a strong indication that the Lord’s own brother had risen to a place of leadership within the church. Our verses conclude with the mention of Barnabas and Saul being called to a specific work for the Lord. Despite severe problems and persecutions, God was ever busy sending this early church forward in its **Kingdom Purpose**. Note that Acts 12:24 states, “But the word of God grew and multiplied.” We know that God has not changed, but have we?

Prayer Emphasis: **Pray** for persecuted Christians around the world. Many Christians are imprisoned simply because they have been obedient to God and His Word. **Remember** that people *die* for their faith every day, so seek to **be faithful** to *live* for your faith today. Do something to **spread God’s Word** today.

Day 36: Acts 13:4-15

“And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, ‘Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.’” (Acts 13:15)

“Say On”

The devotional title comes from the last two words found in today’s reading where the leaders in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch looked to Barnabas and Saul and asked if they had a word of encouragement for the believers there. If they did, they were asked to, “say on.” The New International Version does an excellent job with the translation here when it quotes these men as saying, “please speak!” (NIV). Barnabas and Saul had been busy “speaking” since the first day they had been sent out by the church. In today’s reading, we read about them ministering in at least five different cities before arriving at this city and ministering in this synagogue. Along the way, Saul is renamed Paul and called by that name in the Bible for the first time (Acts 13:9). It was from this point on that Paul seemed to become the leader in the missionary journeys that he made alongside Barnabas. Notice how verse 13 references, “Paul and his party.” Included in this story is the mention of John Mark’s defection and return to Jerusalem. Although our two preaching friends did not let this apparent change of command and Mark’s failure stop them from completing their mission, it would later become an issue of contention between them. In the meantime, there was much to do in a place where they were being begged to speak words of encouragement to the church. This left no time for personal hurt, concerns, or complaints.

Prayer Emphasis: **Ask** God to give you the kind of commitment that can overlook personal hurt and disappointment. **Remember** that we will stand before the Lord at the end of our lives and answer only for ourselves and what we have done for Him and His **Kingdom Purpose**. **Speak** a word of encouragement to someone today.

Day 37: Acts 13:16-28

“Then Paul stood up, and...said, ‘Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen.’” (Acts 13:16)

Seizing the Opportunity

Yesterday’s reading left Paul and Barnabas in the synagogue where they were invited to share a message of encouragement to the people. What resulted from the people’s request for Paul to “say on” became the first recorded sermon by Paul in the New Testament. We know he preached many times prior to this, but the Holy Spirit recorded this one for us. Like most preachers, Paul had three main points to his message. Verse 16 makes it clear that Paul’s message was first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. He walked the people through the desert and into the Promised Land. He then guided them through the age of the judges and the time of the kings. He used the Old Testament story to introduce the promised Savior and the message of salvation (vs. 23 & 26). Notice the order of the recipients of the gospel again in verse 26. It is still to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. Paul’s concluding remarks are found in verses 27 and 28. They must have cut through the hearts of his listeners like a sharp sword. He reminded them that they had failed to recognize Jesus for who He was, and even worse, they had condemned and crucified Him just as the prophets had foretold. He told them that the story which they had been reading on the Sabbaths all their lives had been played out before them in real life and they failed to see it!

Prayer Emphasis: Encouragement is a continued theme throughout the New Testament, and as often as it appears we will be reminded to **encourage** someone. A kind word or deed received makes the fulfilling of our **Kingdom Purpose** a little easier to accomplish. **Look** for an opportunity to bring Jesus up in a conversation today and **be watchful** for opportunities to **share** a testimony of your salvation.

Day 38: Acts 13:29-41

“Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead.” (Acts 13:29-30)

“All That Was Written”

As Paul continued to preach, he again reminded the people that the death of Christ was an event which had been spoken of beforehand in the Scriptures. Note that verse 29 mentions, “All that was written concerning Him.” The “all” simply will not allow us to preach the cross only or to leave Jesus on the cross! Paul walks them from the cross to the tomb. But then, he moves immediately to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the fact that many people were eyewitnesses to that miraculous event. This marks the fifth time in Acts that the apostles laid claim to being witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. Some think that the term “raised up Jesus” in verse 33 was made in reference to the ascension and not the resurrection. However, it is more probable that Paul was referring to Jesus being raised from the dead. Like Peter’s earlier sermons, Paul preaches the Scriptures, referencing the Psalms twice and the prophets Isaiah and Habakkuk as he continues his message. This should serve as a strong reminder to us that God uses His *Word* to accomplish His *work*. If we are to be successful in fulfilling our own **Kingdom Purpose**, we must be ready to speak “all that was written” at every possible opportunity.

Prayer Emphasis: **Review** your average day. How many times do you refer to the Scriptures in your conversations? You can **speak** a word from the Lord without giving a Bible reference and watch the impact that it can make. **Determine** to **speak** God’s Word more often.

Day 39: Acts 13:42-14:2

“So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.” (Acts 13:42)

Hungry People

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people hurried to invite them to return and speak to them again on the next Sabbath day. However, some could not wait an entire week to hear more from the Word, so many of them stayed and listened as Paul and Barnabas spoke with them more. This is a good time to realize that the moments after a worship service are well spent speaking of spiritual things to those who have attended. It is a mistake to move immediately to discussions of what is happening in the world of sports or current events. People come to church because they desire to hear something from God. We should be careful to speak spiritual things to them while they are visiting with us. Some of the most productive seed is sown right there in those moments immediately following worship and the preaching of the Word. Notice that the whole city came out to hear the Word of the Lord on the following Sabbath day. Chapter 14 finds Paul and Barnabas in Iconium. What did they do there? They went to the synagogue and preached the Word of God! When it comes to the means of preaching to spread the gospel, I say, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” That may be poor grammar, but it is a positive truth!

Prayer Emphasis: Watch for opportunities to minister to hearts at the conclusion of worship services. We can miss opportunities when we are in a rush to get on with our daily plans and leave hungry souls hanging in the balance. **Speak** wisely to those who linger and realize that it may be that God would have you to **be the one** to help someone today!

Day 40: Acts 14:3-15

“Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” (Acts 14:3)

Boldness Against Opposition

If it had been the intention of the Jews to stop the preaching of Paul and Barnabas by stirring up the Gentiles against them, it was not a very successful strategy! The preachers spent much time in Iconium preaching boldly for the Lord. And the Lord honored the boldness of His preachers by confirming His word through mighty works that He performed through them. However, wisdom is as much a virtue as boldness. So, upon learning of a plot to stone them, Paul and Barnabas headed out for Lystra. It turns out they were not running from a fight but simply to another arena! Upon their arrival in this new, safer place, the two preachers continued to preach and teach about Jesus. This should serve as another reminder to us that God sometimes uses circumstances to accomplish His will. While ministering at Lystra, a man who had been crippled since birth was healed. This marks the third time in Acts that we see a crippled person healed. Notice how similar this miracle is to the one we first read about in Acts 3. I am about to make my computer go “grammar crazy” again as I repeat the age-old adage, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!”

Prayer Emphasis: Our reading closed with Paul and Barnabas rejecting any credit or claim for the miracles associated with their ministry. Take some time to **humble** yourself before God today and **express** your total dependence on Him if any good is to be accomplished in your life. **Contact us** at 850-562-8069 or at gary@seminolebc.com if we can pray for you or minister to you and your family in any way.