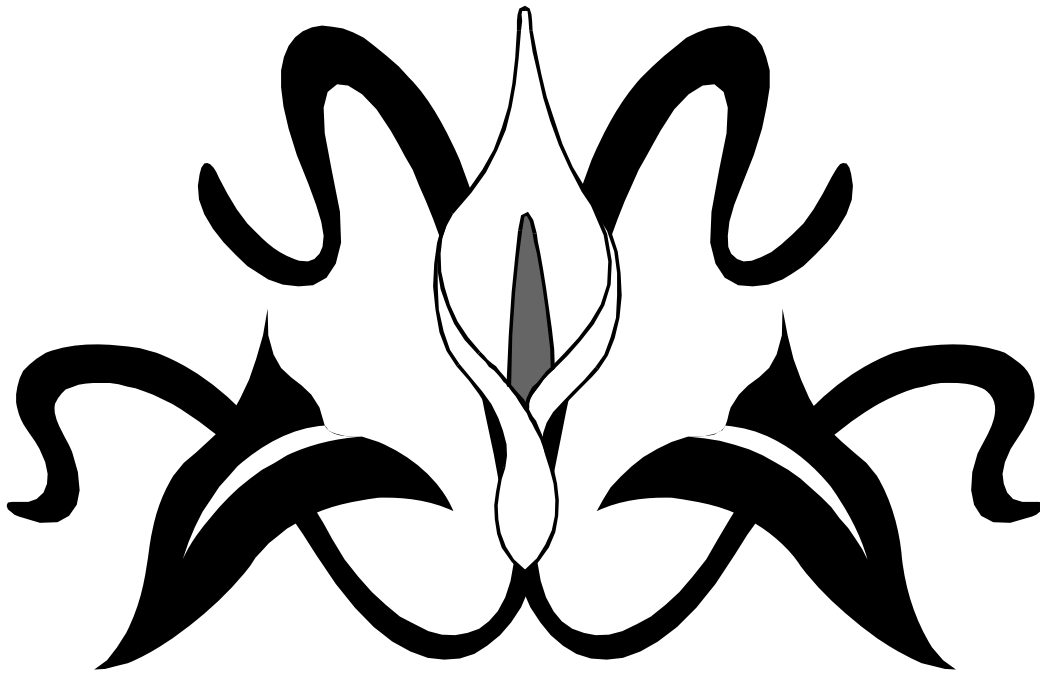


Camelback Bible Church

Children's Church

Grades 4-6



Leader's Guide

Year 2

4-6th Grade Children's Church

Year 2 Curriculum

Lesson 1 - The Majesty of God

Theme: Our God is a majestic God whose power far surpasses even the greatest of kings.

Text: Daniel 4

Memory Verse: *Daniel 4:35* *All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"*

Teacher Direction:

1. Share the following background with students: the book of Daniel was written while the people of Judah were in exile. These people must have been wondering if God was still in control or if He had deserted them forever. The book of Daniel reminds the people that God is indeed in control. He still rules with sovereign power and their present plight is not out of His loving control.

2. In the course of the lesson help children to understand what we mean by majesty. According to the dictionary it means "sovereign power and dignity". In this lesson we focus on the power which God has to accomplish His will in His time and in His way.

3. Relate the story of King Nebuchadnezzar found in Daniel 4. The story can easily be told from the first person as it is in fact presented. As you relate the story, contrast the majesty of Nebuchadnezzar and that of the Lord God.

The vision seems to indicate that Nebuchadnezzar had great sovereign power. His kingdom was expansive. He controlled many peoples. His accomplishments were extensive. His own reflection on his kingdom left him feeling quite proud since he thought **he** was responsible for it all. But this was not reality.

The reality is that the Lord God is the majestic one. He puts men in leadership and takes them out. He humbles the proud and exalts the humble. All this is in His control. His control is over all the nations and it is from generation to generation. Men may not be inclined to acknowledge this, but when God wants to, He reminds them of this truth in a dramatic way. Verse 3,17,25,31,34-35, and 37 all reinforce this point.

4. Application ideas

A. Shun pride that takes glory from God and places it on man. God is looking for boys and girls who are most concerned with God's glory, not their own.

B. In the midst of adversity remember that our Lord is majestic, having the power to accomplish His perfect purposes. It is right to trust a majestic God.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion Questions:

A. What do we mean by God's majesty? (Majesty is God's sovereign power and dignity. It is the power that enables God to accomplish His will in the time and manner He chooses.)

B. An understanding of the majesty of God could have encouraged the people of Judah in what way? (In their exile it would have assured them of God's loving control over their circumstances)

C. In what ways can an understanding of the majesty of God be an encouragement to you? (Answers will vary)

D. What lesson was Nebuchadnezzar supposed to learn from all this? (See 4:25 for the answer)

E. What are your accomplishments, abilities, possessions...? How does God want us to view them? (All accomplishments and privileged positions are gifts from God who requires us to use them for His glory - refer children to 1 Cor. 4:7. When we do not realize that all is from God we will tend to be proud like Nebuchadnezzar.)

Prayer

- ◆ Take time to praise God for His majesty.
- ◆ Thank God for every blessing He has bestowed on you and ask Him to help you use them all for His glory.
- ◆ If you are going through a difficult time, commit again to trust in God's sovereign power through it all.

Lesson 2 – The Grace of God

Theme: God's grace is expressed in His richly blessing the unworthy.

Text: 2 Samuel 9

Memory Verse: *Ephesians 1:7* In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Teacher Direction:

1. Share with children a little background for this story. From the time Saul was rejected as King because of his disobedience (1 Sam 15), David (the heir apparent) became his enemy. Saul tried to pin David to a wall with his spear; he chased David around the countryside attempting to kill him; he lived to see the demise of David. All this was to no effect because God would have His way. Upon the death of Saul, one of Saul's sons, Ishbosheth, usurped the throne. Again God's will prevailed. David was finally crowned King over all Israel.

Of all of Saul's house there was only one who was at peace with David and who accepted God's plan to make David king. This one was Jonathan who made a covenant with David to protect one another's families. It was this covenant that moved David to show the kindness of God to Jonathan's descendant, Mephibosheth.

2. As you relate this story emphasize the contrast between David and Mephibosheth. David is the chosen one of God, the king over all Israel. He has immense power and God has used him to begin conquering a kingdom of great size. Mephibosheth, on the other hand, is a dead dog (his own words - 9:8). He is crippled in both legs. He is the grandson of Saul, the man who persecuted David for years. He has nothing to offer David to merit any of David's kindness.

3. Having contrasted the persons of David and Mephibosheth, show the great kindness (lovingkindness in the Old Testament, grace in the New) of David. He takes a dead dog, one crippled in both legs, one greatly indebted but having nothing to contribute, and he elevates him to favored status (he dines often with the King).

Show children that this is **similar** to the grace of God with us (no human example completely shows the nature and immensity of God's grace). God, the great King, the Holy One, the sovereign of the universe takes notice of us - dead dogs in our trespasses and sin, having nothing to offer and not meriting any of God's goodness to us. He, too, elevates us to favored status and desires to commune with us often. What a marvelous wonder is God's grace!

4. Application ideas

- A. We should thank God for noticing us and showing us kindness in His Son
- B. Mephibosheth's posture with which he approached David is the posture with which we ought approach our God.
- C. We need to have God's grace permeate our relationship with others.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion questions:

- A. What do we mean by the grace of God? (His unmerited favor to the unworthy)
- B. How did David show the grace of God to Mephibosheth? (He took this “dead dog”, cared for him, and gave him a favored position)
- C. How does God show his grace to us? (He takes unworthy sinners and gives them a new heart and a favored position in His Son. This is only one way.)
- D. How can we show God’s grace in our relationships with others? (We can treat the unworthy and the unlovely with great love and kindness remembering this is how God treats those who believe)
- E. Who in your life needs to experience God’s grace through you?

Prayer

- ◆ Come to God and receive His grace in Christ Jesus
- ◆ Thank God for the riches of His grace in Christ Jesus
- ◆ Ask God for His strength to display His grace in your relationships

Lesson 3 – The Faithfulness of God

Theme: God's faithfulness is seen in His unchanging character and in His unswerving commitment to His promises.

Text: Numbers 22-24, 31:16

Memory Verse: *Numbers 23:19* God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Teacher Direction:

1. It would be good to place this story in its historical context. Israel has been delivered from Egyptian bondage. They have spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness for their disobedience. More recently they have resumed their trek to the promised land and have been engaged in and won several significant battles. This has some of the nations in the area quite worried.

2. As you relate the story of Balaam, emphasize the faithfulness of God. God made a covenant with Abraham back in Genesis 12 and 15. Every Scripture from that point on confirms that God is true to His promise. He promised to make Abraham a great nation, to make his name great, to bless those who blessed Israel and curse those who cursed her. This story is just one example of many that shows that God is faithful to what He promises.

Within the story this is affirmed most forcefully in Numbers 23:19. God affirms that what He speaks He acts on and what He promises He fulfills. He had given Balaam a word and that word is unchanging. It will come to pass. Though men change their minds and even lie, the God of heaven is in no way like this. By nature He is wholly true and this does not change.

3. It might be good to contrast God's faithfulness with Balaam's unfaithfulness. Balaam so much wants to benefit personally from this venture that he keeps trying to find ways to please Balak. When asked to prophecy a second time Balaam inquires again with the Lord hoping he might be able to profit in the end. Though God changes not, Balaam seems easily changed when it comes to the possibility of personal profit. Later when Balaam's first two prophecies seem to go against Moab, Balaam tries not to receive an omen direct from the Lord. Perhaps he hoped he might through this still be able to receive some riches from Balak. When this fails it is believed that Balaam gave counsel to Balak (see Numbers 25 and 31:16) . This counsel, motivated by greed, resulted in Israel intermarrying with Moabite women, idolatry and the discipline of God. In all, we see a man who is not faithful, whose course is easily swayed by personal gain.

4. It might be interesting to consider the faithful behavior of Balaam's donkey. Though abused by his master, the donkey was faithful to preserve the life of his master. Such faithfulness Balaam knew he was not deserving of.

5. Application ideas

A. We should have great security knowing that our God is faithful - true to what He has promised. We who are part of the New Covenant know that God will accomplish what concerns us.

B. As those made in the image of God, we should be faithful in all our dealing with others. This might translate into loyalty in friendship, keeping our promises even if it costs us...

C. We should cultivate faithfulness to our God setting aside personal profit in order to accomplish his will.

6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion questions:

A. What do we mean by the faithfulness of God? (God does not change. He is wholly true. What He says He will do).

B. How did God show His faithfulness to the people of Israel? (He was true to His promise to Abraham throughout the generations.)

C. How did Balaam show his unfaithfulness? (For the sake of personal profit he kept trying to compromise his ministry.)

D. How can we show faithfulness to God and to others? (To God: choosing His will, His glory and His profit above our own. To others: Be true to our word, being loyal to our friends - not dumping our friends so that we can be part of the "cool" group...)

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God for His faithfulness.
- ◆ Ask God to help you be faithful to Him and others.

Lesson 4 – What is Worship?

Theme: Worship in its many forms is the appropriate human response to divine disclosure.

Text: Revelations 1:9-20, 4

Memory Verse: *Revelation 5:13b* “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

Teacher Direction:

1. This lesson is designed to answer the question, “What is worship?” The answer is encapsulated in our theme above: worship is the appropriate human response to divine disclosure.

2. Our story text comes from the book of Revelations. The genre of this book is called “apocalyptic literature”. Though this type of literature is full of symbolism, often difficult to interpret, it is not necessary to try to understand each symbol in this lesson. The worship focus of the lesson can be understood without analyzing each symbol.

3. Background: John is writing this book from the island of Patmos where he has been exiled for his proclamation of the gospel. After Christ’s death and resurrection, persecution of Christians escalated. This book was probably written during the time of Domitian, a harsh Roman Emperor known for his tactics of persecution.

4. Our text offers two visions of God. The first is a vision of Christ in the earthly realm. Rev. 1:12-16 lays out this glorious vision. The second is a vision of God, the Father in the heavenly realm. Rev. 4:2-3,5-6 set out this splendid vision. Without going into excessive description use these passages to extol the majesty and wonder of this disclosure of God. Help children see how grand our God is!

5. Having recreated these visions in the minds of the students, talk next about the response to the visions. John’s response was that he fell at his feet as dead. So powerful was this vision, so holy the person of Christ, that John could not sustain energy enough to stand. The ones in heaven who were before the Almighty had a similar response. They could not cease to praise and extol His holiness. The elders fell before him and proclaimed his glory, honor and power.

6. Help children understand that when we truly get a glimpse of who God is, we, too, will be apt to fall before Him in praise, thanksgiving, wonder and awe.

7. Application ideas

A. Seek to understand who God really is and then seek to respond in an appropriate manner.

B. We must all humble ourselves before our God.

C. We ought to reverently and joyfully praise and worship God individually and corporately.

8. Suggestions for group time

Discussion questions:

A. What did you learn about God's character from the vision in Revelation? (God is holy, majestic, powerful, awesome, glorious...)

B. How did John and the others respond to their vision of God? (John and the elders fell on their faces, the creatures and the elders offered great and continual praise) Why is this response appropriate? (A true vision or understanding of God can only humble us and cause us to do what we were designed to do, that is, to praise Him)

C. Do you see people responding to God in this way today? (Answers vary) Why or why not? (We often do not respond to God in this way because our view of Him is far too small)

D. How would you define worship? (Worship is a humble response to a great God. It takes many forms such as falling to our face, praise, prayer...)

E. Optional: Look over our worship bulletin. How do we try to increase our vision/understanding of God through our worship? (The songs, scripture readings, creeds, sermons...all try to help us understand the great character of our God) What types of response are we asked to give from what we learn of God? (Worship through praise, prayer, listen to and interacting with the sermon...)

Prayer

- ◆ Ask God for a great understanding of Him. Ask God to make you a true worshipper.
- ◆ Worship God in praise. Lift up His name. Recite the praise recorded in Revelation

Lesson 5 – Worship through Praise

Theme: We worship God when we praise Him for His marvelous works.

Text: Luke 18:35-43 (optional: Psalm 105)

Memory Verse: *Psalm 105:2* Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.

Teacher Direction:

1. The focus of this lesson is worship through praise. Children should come to realize that we worship God when we praise Him for the wonders He does. Note that praise is a response to God. It is stimulated by our contemplation or experience of the workings of God. The narrative chosen for today's lesson should fully show that .
2. As you develop the story carefully relate the plight of the blind beggar. He is barred from the world of sight. He is confined to a beggar's life. Others around him treat him as if he is insignificant. Life is a big struggle for him. Draw this picture in the mind's eye of the children so that they will appreciate the deliverance that is coming in story.
3. Though the emphasis of this lesson is on praise it would be good to consider the faith of the blind beggar. He recognizes that this "Jesus of Nazareth" is truly the Son of David - the promised deliverer. He cries out for mercies. He believes that this one sent from heaven can indeed heal him. He takes a humble posture before Jesus and seeks unmerited favor. Jesus commends this faith and provides the desired healing and perhaps more (the last phrase really reads, "Your faith has and is saving you.")
4. Help children see the response of the people to Jesus' miraculous work. The blind beggar began following Christ and praising/ glorifying God. The people who observed this work gave praise to God. Having experienced or seen the work of God caused these people to praise God, to lift up His name in their midst. This is the appropriate response for those who have been confronted with the mighty works of God.
5. Help children see how this relates to their situation. None of us are much different than the blind beggar. Without Christ we, too, are blind beggars. We have no sight to see God and His truth and we only toy with the poverty this world offers. But God in His mercies passes our way. He helps us to understand who He is. He grants us faith that leads to salvation and to the opening of our spiritual eyes. And what should our response be, but to shout out in praise to God. Every time we contemplate this great work in our life we ought to respond in praise. This is truly fitting.
6. Children can be further encouraged to praise God for all His works. It might be helpful to mention God's works of creation, redemption and providence. Whenever we are confronted with these works they ought to move us to the praise of God.
7. Application ideas
 - A. Praise God for His unmerited favor shown in our salvation and in the way He cares for us each day.
 - B. Come to Christ recognizing your spiritual blindness and cry out for God's mercy.

C. In your private and corporate worship try to understand the marvelous works of God more fully, then respond in genuine praise.

8. Suggestions for group time

Discussion questions:

A. What was the condition of the man sitting by the side of the road? (He was a blind beggar whose condition in many ways was hopeless)

B. How are we like the blind beggar? (We are spiritually blind and hopeless apart from Christ)

C. How did the blind beggar express His faith? (He acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, He persistently cried out for mercy, He believed Jesus was able to cure him and free him from his hopeless state.)

D. What was the response of the blind beggar and the people to this marvelous work of God? (They responded in genuine praise)

E. What are the works of God that should cause us to praise Him? (Creation, Redemption, Providence)

Other Activities:

A. Look over Psalm 105. Determine together or in small groups why the Psalmist was praising God.

B. Look over a hymn (or assign a different one to each group) and determine why the hymn writer was praising God. Suggestions: O for a thousand tongues, Joy to the World, All Praise to God Who reigns above...

C. Look through our worship bulletin. Try to determine how and why we are praising God during the service.

D. Read through or act out the attached story about Isaac Watts, the father of hymnody.

Prayer:

- ◆ Take time to praise God for who He is and for all His works.
- ◆ Praise God for His personal mercies to you

Lesson 6 – Worship through Service

Theme: We worship God when we **work** to build His kingdom.

Text: Nehemiah 1-3,6:15-16, 12:27-47 (It is recommended that the teacher read through the whole book to understand the flow.)

Memory Verse: *Deuteronomy 10:12* And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, (NIV)

Teacher Direction:

1. Many times when we think of worship we only think of those times we gather together with other believers to study the word, pray and to sing. This, however, is a very limited view of what Biblical worship really is. The truth is our worship of God extends to our service of Him. In fact one of the Hebrew words used to designate worship is also used for the word “serve”. Through the lesson today help children see that we worship God through spirit-led service to Him.
2. Share with the children the relevant history. God made a covenant with Abraham and was faithful to that covenant to the point of creating a nation and placing them in God’s chosen land. The people, however, in time acted unfaithfully and the Lord, as He had promised, judged the people. The city, where God had chosen to have His name honored, was destroyed and the people, who were to honor His name among the nations, were exiled. The book of Nehemiah takes place approximately 140 years after these tragic events.
3. As you briefly relate the story of Nehemiah help the children to see that Nehemiah’s response is a response of worship to God. When he hears how Jerusalem is in shambles he weeps and mourns for days. He spends time in fasting and prayer, confessing his own sins and the sins of his people. As he acknowledges who God is he is moved to work to see Jerusalem restored. He petitions God to grant him success in his endeavor.
4. As the story unfolds, we see God’s hand providing all that Nehemiah needs to accomplish the work. Nehemiah’s request is well received by the King, special letters are written on his behalf, he is given safe passage to Jerusalem, and the people put their hands to the good work. Nehemiah organizes the people who do the work (even amidst opposition) and finally the work is completed. This is all attributed to God (6:16). Finally at the dedication of the wall the people continue their worship through hymns of thanksgiving and songs. Help the children see that worship was occurring from start to finish. The prayers, work and praises were all responses of worship to the God who keeps His covenant.
5. Teach the children that our worship will include work as well. The work especially that it will include will be the work of expanding God’s Kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel. When we come to know God we will be moved to serve Him in many ways, but most certainly in our personal witness. Our worship of God will cause us to want to see His Kingdom expanded. We will want to work hard to see that accomplished.
6. Application ideas

A. We should all examine our lives to see if our worship of God is moving out into service of God.

B. In prayer ask God to show you what work He has ordained for your life to His glory.

C. If you don't have desire to work for God, seek to know Him better. Study His works and His character.

7. Suggestions for group time

Discussion questions:

A. What was the condition of Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah and why was it so? (Jerusalem was in shambles due to the disobedience of the people and the subsequent judgment of God)

B. Why do you think Nehemiah wept so long? (Perhaps he hated to see the city of His great God in such a state. He may have thought it dishonoring to God.)

C. How did Nehemiah display his worship of God? (Weeping for the land, confessing sin, acknowledging God's greatness, planning and working to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem....)

D. How can we worship God through our service today? (Working hard to proclaim Christ in our schools, to our neighbors, wherever we are; doing good works among the needy in my neighborhood; serving my church;)

Prayer:

- ◆ Ask God to show you the works that He has determined for you.
- ◆ If you have works that God has laid on your heart, ask God to prosper your way (as He did Nehemiah's).

Lesson 7 – Church History: John Hus

Theme: Christ is head of the church and has given us His Word to teach us how to live.

Text: 2 Timothy 3:10-17, articles on the life of John Hus, video on the life of John Hus from the Vision Video series “Reformation Overview”.

Memory Verse: *2 Timothy 3:15* and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **Or Ephesians 1:22** And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

Teacher Direction:

1. God loves the church. In fact, He purchased it with His blood; a price which has infinite value and shows immeasurable love. Having been purchased, the church is now God’s own possession, to be ruled by Him and to be useful for His purposes.

The church has been brought into existence to bring glory to God especially as it brings God’s salvation to men. But what happens when the church ceases to conform to those purposes? What happens when the church usurps the reign of her Lord? The result is often gruesome.

It was a dark day for the church into which John Hus was born. Corruption abounded and the true gospel was veiled. But God’s love for His church was manifested in his raising up a man who was willing to give his life so that the church could be called back to its God-given purposes. This is the legacy of John Hus.

2. As you begin this lesson, ask the children for what they would be willing to die. Would they be willing to die to keep someone from stealing their video games or their T.V.? Would they be willing to die to stop someone from destroying their house? Would they be willing to die to protect their family members? Would they be willing to die to defend their country? Would they be willing to die to defend truth? After some discussion encourage the children to listen to the story about a man who was willing to die. See if they can determine what John Hus was willing to die for?

3. As you share the account of the life of John Hus (or as you show the video) be sure to talk about the following points.

A. A life to live – Hus believed, as Wycliffe – his predecessor, that the lives of Christians, especially leaders, ought to be characterized by piety and purity. Unfortunately, the leaders of his day were characterized by their immorality and extravagant lifestyles. This was best illustrated by the paintings that covered the walls in Bethlehem chapel. They contrasted the humble service and life of Christ with that of the pompous service and life of the pope and other leaders. Hus’ teaching often exposed the bankruptcy of these leaders and called them to a Christ-like lifestyle. Note: In 2 Tim. 3:10-12 we see how Paul’s lifestyle was worthy of following. This should be true of all leaders.

B. An authority to recognize – Hus recognized that Christ was the head of the church; that He was her ultimate authority. He also believed that Christ had ordained the Scriptures as the only rule for life and practice. Though Hus did not deny the importance and legitimacy of the church leader’s authority, he declared that it had its limits. Church

authorities could not forgive sin. They could not establish doctrine that was contrary to the Scriptures. If they in fact did this, they were not to be obeyed. Hus suggested that those who take such liberties may not themselves be members of the true church. Note: In 2 Timothy 3:14-17 we can see how Paul, too, called Timothy to the Scriptures. He, too, believed the Scriptures to be the source of wisdom leading to salvation, and equipping one for a lifetime of service to God.

C. A truth to die for – Hus was willing to die for truth. He knew the church was meant to glorify God and bring salvation to mankind. If the truth was distorted or exchanged for a lie he knew that the church could never fulfill this purpose for its existence. Thus he was willing to lay down his life for truth. When given a chance to recant, he would not unless he could be shown from the Scriptures that he was wrong. With this conviction, he bravely went to the stake, singing for the mercies of God. His blazing testimony lit a fire after his death which resulted in much reform in the church. God used his death to bring the church back toward its original purposes.

4. Application Ideas

A. Truth is worth fighting for, yes, even dying for. It is important that all of us become students of God's truth found in His Word and that we ask God for grace to stand up for the integrity of that truth.

B. Christ is Lord of the church. We must submit our lives to His rule and to the rule of those whom He has appointed so long as they are following His commands and directing us to do the same.

C. Our lives must reflect the life of Christ within us. If someone drew paintings of our life and placed them next to paintings of Christ's life, would the comparison be shocking? Let us seek God's grace to enable us to conform all our ways to His.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion Questions

A. To what ministry was John Hus called after his graduation from the university? (He was called to be rector of the University in Prague and Pastor at Bethlehem Chapel.)

B. Why was Hus ordered to stop preaching and summoned to Rome? (The Roman Church leaders felt Hus was spreading the heresies of Wycliffe. They also were being embarrassed by Hus' teaching.)

C. What is an interdict? (The Roman Church leaders basically closed down the churches. The people could not receive the sacraments nor benefit from the ministry of the church.)

D. How did the Roman authorities get Hus to the Council at Constance? (The Emperor promised safe passage and an opportunity to defend his views.)

E. Why didn't Hus recant to save his life? (He believed that that would bury the truth; and when the truth was buried, the church would continue to be corrupted. He also believed it would tarnish the name of Christ. He also said that all he did was to benefit those who might be saved.)

F. How did Hus face his fiery death? (He sang as they lit the fire. All the while he was holding to his conviction that Christ was Lord and that He was safe in His hands alone.)

Prayer

- ◆ Ask God for grace and courage to stand up for truth.
- ◆ Thank God for raising up men like Hus who risked their lives so that we might have the truth that leads to salvation.
- ◆ Pray for the leadership of this church, that they submit to Christ's leadership and seek to live in a pious and pure manner. Pray the same for all who are part of Christ's church.

Lesson 8 – Church History: Martin Luther

Theme: We are made right with God by His grace alone through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Text: Romans 1:17, articles on the life of Martin Luther, video on the life of Luther from the Vision Video series “Reformation Overview”.

Memory Verse: *Romans 1:17* *For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*

Teacher Direction:

1. Perhaps the name most associated with the Protestant Reformation is Martin Luther. Though Luther never planned to create a movement, God raised him up at just the right time to bring dramatic change in the church (and the world). God had implanted in Luther a desire to be right with his Creator, and this desire led Luther to diligently search the Scriptures until he had found peace. This desire and the convictions developed through his study of Scripture also compelled Luther to stand firm against the many forces united against him. In essence, though, Luther is evidence of God’s mercy to His church. God used this man to revive His church and to bring the truth of the gospel to light. It had for too long been veiled.

2. As you begin this lesson ask the children if they have ever tried to do something with all their might, but in the end failed. Maybe they tried to make a sports team, but did not succeed. Maybe they tried to play a musical instrument, only to see minimal progress. Maybe they tried to make friends, but were unable to gain anyone’s friendship. Allow the children to share their experiences. Then ask the children how they felt after repeated failures. Most likely the children will share their response as frustration and discouragement.

Tell the children that in today’s lesson we will be looking at the life of a man who was perhaps one of the most important men in history (especially in the last 500 years). Tell them that this man wanted something very badly, but try as he might, he failed to attain it. Encourage the children to listen well to see if they can see what this man desired and if he finally obtained it.

3. As you share the account of the life of Martin Luther (or as you show the video) be sure to talk about the following points.

A. Historical Background – The Middle Ages was a time of darkness. The Holy Roman Empire (supposed to be a Christian Empire) and the Roman Catholic Church were the two powers of the day. These two powers expected loyalty from all of their subjects claiming that God had established their authority. Sadly there was much corruption with both powers resulting in a spiritual state characterized by superstition and a focus on the judgment of God. Practically this meant that for many the gospel was veiled.

In the 14th century God raised up a number of men to begin the needed reformation. John Wycliffe and John Hus were two most notable figures who stood their ground to defend the truth against the corruption of the church. Yet their attempts at reform were squashed by the powers of the day. But in 1450 with the development of the printing press, it

press, it became much easier to disseminate ideas. Also the age's focus on reason and the recovery of learning had many people ready to question the teachings and practices of the church. It was into this environment that God had Martin Luther born.

B. Luther's desire – Perhaps because his age focused on the judgment of God, Luther had as his supreme desire to “be right with God”. After entering the monastery Luther used every means to obtain peace with his Creator. He tried fasting, endless prayers, hours of confession and penance, even flagellations (whippings), but no rest came to his soul. Finally, his superiors in the monastery encouraged him to go on a pilgrimage. They thought surely this activity would bring to Luther what he so desired. Yet in all this, Luther found only an angry, condemning God. He actually confessed, in his frustration, that he hated God because he could only see coming judgment from Him.

C. Luther's discovery – Seeking to find that elusive peace of God, Luther poured over the Scriptures. As part of his duties as a Pastor and professor he gave a series of sermons from the book of Romans. As he studied Romans 1:17 the light finally broke through. Luther saw the connection between the justice and righteousness of God and the statement that said, “the just shall live by faith”. For the first time Luther saw that, in Jesus Christ, God provided a righteousness that could be man's through faith alone. This revelation opened Luther's eyes, gave him the peace that he sought, and set the course for the rest of his life.

D. Luther's contribution – Luther is most known for nailing his “95 Theses” to the door of the Wittenburg Church. Because of the printing press and the unrest of the day, this document was duplicated and spread across Europe. Though not Luther's design, it created quite a stir and led to his excommunication. This led to trials where Luther took his stand, and led to other writings by Luther. In time these actions led to what is known as the Protestant Reformation which freed the average churchmen from the tyranny of the Roman church and brought the gospel to light again.

4. Application Ideas

A. Luther believed that the Bible alone was our rule for belief, life and practice. He was willing to stake his life on the Bible as God's Word to mankind. Since this is true we should all make it our goal to study diligently the Word of God and then let it be our guide for the way we live.

B. We must never minimize the holiness of God, nor our sinful state before Him. If we do, we will minimize our need of justification by faith. (Good people don't really need much help and can probably handle things themselves.) This will impoverish our souls and make God's peace elusive.

C. We must come to God empty-handed acknowledging our sin and our total inability to effect our salvation. We must cling to Christ in faith as the only hope of our right standing before God.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion Questions

A. In what ways were the Middle Ages dark days for the church? (The Church was united to the state and both were corrupt. Thus the church kept the gospel hidden from the people. The people lived in fear of God's judgment and were very superstitious.)

B. What invention aided the spread of new ideas? (The printing press)

C. What one thing did Luther desire above all? (He wanted to be at peace with God.)

D. How did Luther try to find peace with God? (He tried doing many good works: praying, fasting, confessing his sins to the priest, whipping himself,...)

E. How did Luther finally find peace with God? (While studying Romans 1:17 he learned that God provides righteousness to those who come to Him in faith.)

F. What is meant by justification by faith? (We do not make peace with God by trying to please Him with our good deeds. Instead we must come to Christ believing that He alone provides a righteousness for us. This is the only way we can stand acceptably before God.)

G. On what are you relying for your salvation?

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God for His mercies to the church. Thank him for raising up men like Luther who brought the church back to the truth.
- ◆ Confess your need of Christ's righteousness. Tell God you have no hope or peace apart from Christ.
- ◆ Ask God to help you know His Word, live His Word, and stand for His Word.

Lesson 9 – Church History: The Moravians

Theme: True Christianity must be of head and heart and must usher out into loving service of God and man.

Text: Matthew 19:16-22, select articles from Christian History magazine and other sources.

Memory Verse: *Titus 2:14* who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Teacher Direction:

1. The start of the modern missionary movement is often attributed to the work of William Carey. Truly Carey played a great part in that movement, but it is a little known fact that he got much of his inspiration from the Moravians. This group of believers, founded in 1722, had the distinction of sending, as missionaries, one out of every 60 of their members, in contrast to one of every 5000 which was true for Protestantism in general. This week's lesson will focus on the contribution of this ordinary group of people whom the Lord used in an extraordinary way.

2. As you begin this lesson ask the children how they would describe a true Christian. Would they say a Christian is someone who knows certain truths about Jesus? Or someone who has had a certain type of experience? Or someone who has prayed a particular prayer? Or what? After discussing this question tell the children that in today's lesson they will learn about a group of people who had a very specific way of answering this question. Encourage them to find out what ideas their answer might include.

3. Before you talk about the Moravians, take time to briefly share the story of the rich young ruler. Note how Jesus used the law (the Ten Commandments) to show this young man his need of Christ's grace. Note also how the young man walked away without that grace perhaps because he was too fond of his riches. Help the children to see what ideas this story shares about someone being a true Christian. Those ideas might include: one who has recognized his sinfulness and his need of God's grace, one who has received that grace through faith in Christ, and one who recognizes the value of that grace so much so that they are willing to abandon all and follow Christ.

4. As you share the account of the Moravians be sure to talk about the following points.

A. Historical background – The Protestant Reformation (introduced last week in our lesson about Martin Luther) created much tension in the world of that day. The Roman Church, the object of reform, sought to fight against the spread of the new ideas introduced by the reformers. Perhaps the peak of the struggle came with the 30 Year Wars where it is estimated that nearly half of Germany perished in their fight for truth. However, by 1648, with the Peace of Westphalia, the war had ended. The Reformation would have lasting impact.

Sadly, the German church, who had fought so hard for its life, declined in the years following the war. To many it became a church of form without substance. It became a church focused on doctrine, and the doctrinal debates, but lacked in vital piety. It was this sense that caused several men, specifically Jacob Spener and August Francke, to begin what would become a movement called "pietism". These men sought to bring back an

back an emphasis on the need for personal conversion, and for a life that demonstrates one is a follower of Christ.

It was this movement which greatly influenced the beliefs and practice of Count von Zinzendorf (one who could be described as a “rich young ruler”). When confronted by several refugees from Moravia, led by Christian David, the count had his opportunity to flesh out what he had been taught by his Pietist mentors. He allowed these people to develop a colony (later called Herrnhut) on his estate. In time the count, leaving his public service (and all the honor and privilege associated with it), became their leader and led them in developing a unique Christian community.

B. The Moravian vision – This new community sought to live out true and vital Christianity. The following were key to their conception of what a true Christian is.

- ◆ One who has had a personal conversion. The Moravians were not convinced that one who only gave a profession of faith, however sound, was truly a Christian. They believed that a person had to have an encounter with God, which included repentance and faith, that resulted in a dramatically changed life. (The points that follow are evidences of that changed life.)
- ◆ One committed to the Christian community. Central to the Moravian faith was their tie to the community. Individuals were placed in cells, or bands, or choirs for Bible Study and accountability. These bands were characterized by great love and served as an incubator for faith.
- ◆ One committed to prayer. It was the Moravians that committed to praying around the clock. People were assigned to pray for one hour and each hour of the day was covered. Such prayer was used by God to bring unity to the Moravians and may have resulted in their great heart for missions. This practice lasted for 100 years.
- ◆ One committed to missions. The Moravians were most known for their missionary zeal. They sent their people across the globe in greater numbers (percentage-wise) than any other group. Those sent were willing to endure dangers, hunger, thirst, adverse weather, persecution, wild animals and more. They had one motive – love – and one goal – the gain of souls. It was some of their missionaries whose consecrated lives helped John Wesley to find true repentance and faith.

5. Application

Being a Christian is not about knowing the right facts (though the right facts are important). It is not even being able to support these facts from those who would deny them. Being a Christian is about coming to Christ, in recognition of our need and helplessness in the face of sin’s penalty and power, to receive forgiveness of sin and new life. It is about Christ making us a new person and living within us so that we might work the works He has prepared for us to do. Being a Christian is truly a radical change in one’s life. Note: We are not minimizing truth here. Truth is vital but must lead into changed life.

6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion Questions

A. What did the rich young ruler need to learn about being a true follower of God? (He needed to see his neediness and come to Christ as his only source of help. He needed to see God's grace as something worth giving one's all for.)

B. How are the rich young ruler and the count similar? How are they different? (They were both rich and influential people, but the rich young ruler would not leave all to follow Christ.)

C. What concerns did some have of the German Church after the 30 Year War? (They thought that the church had form without substance; great doctrine, but no heart and life.)

D. What were some of the contributions of the Moravians? (They preached the need for true conversion. They also gave great focus to small groups, prayer and missions.)

E. Evaluate the statement: It really doesn't matter what you believe. What matters is how you live.

Prayer

- ◆ Pray that God brings His people to true faith and repentance (true conversion). Pray that His church would not settle for an empty or dead faith.
- ◆ Pray that God makes our church a missions-minded church. Pray that our faith would lead to meeting the needs of those around us, especially spiritual needs.

Lesson 10 – The incarnation provides hope for this life

Theme: The Incarnation gives hope for this life because it provided a faithful high priest in Jesus Christ.

Text: Hebrews 2:10-18, 4:14-16, 5:6-10, 7:24-28

Memory Verse: Hebrews 4:15 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*

Teacher Direction:

1. Since many 4-6th graders have heard the Christmas story for many years we want to dig deeper into the significance of the account. It is important to retell the story during this month of remembrance, but we also want to share the reason for Christ's first coming. This year the focus will be on Christ's incarnation as that which brings hope for this life. Specifically, in this lesson, we shall see how the incarnation provided for us a merciful and faithful High Priest.

2. To introduce this lesson, ask the children if they ever have problems. Ask them to describe the kind of problems children their age have. (As the children share, try to direct them to discuss problems in their spiritual lives, such as dealing with temptations or being consistent in following the Lord.) Then ask them how they seek to handle or solve their problems. Do they go to a friend and talk it over? Do they go to an adult? Do they try to ignore their problems? Do they get discouraged and quit?

Tell the children that the Jewish Christians in the first century had big problems. After coming to Christ in faith, many of them faced great persecution. Some lost their families and friends because they professed Christ. Some were excommunicated from their synagogue. Still others faced physical dangers at the hands of wicked emperors like Nero.

Continue to explain to the children that when confronted with these problems, the people didn't always respond well either. In fact, the book of Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish Christians who were ready to call it quits. Encourage the children to listen well and try and find out how the author of the book of Hebrews tried to encourage them to hang on.

3. Next, share with the children the author of Hebrew's encouragement related to Christ as our merciful and faithful High Priest.

A. Christ has become our High Priest – The Jewish Christians were well informed about their system of sacrifices and priesthood. Especially impressive in the whole system was the Day of Atonement when the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies to offer atonement and prayers for the people. This ceremony offered the people great hope that their God had accepted this covering for sin and would continue to bless them with His presence.

The author of Hebrews offered something even more comforting to his troubled audience. He declared that Christ had been called by God to be High Priest forever, and that Christ had heeded that call. He came down to earth and took on flesh and blood. (This would be a good place to share the account of Christ's birth from one of the Gospels.) He lived a

Gospels.) He lived a perfect life, then gave Himself up to the cruelties of the cross. The Father showed His acceptance of this sacrifice by rising Christ from the dead and then “passing Him into heaven” to sit at His right hand. From heaven, according to Hebrews, Christ now sits as High Priest, never in need of a replacement (as was true of the priests in the O.T.).

B. Christ’s role as High Priest – As High Priest Christ has performed and is performing numerous roles.

- ◆ He has made atonement for His people. Unlike the priests of old who offered animal sacrifices, Christ offered His own self as a sacrifice. He offered His own blood on the altar. The blood of bulls and goats never did take away sin, but Christ’s sacrifice, because He was God, was powerful enough to remove sin once for all. This message was to be of great comfort to Christians of all ages.
- ◆ He continues to make intercession for His people. After Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice, His Father seated Him on a throne at His right hand. From there, Christ daily lives to make intercession for God’s people. He continually claims the power of His sacrifice for the sake of His brothers. With such an advocate how can the people of God be discouraged!
- ◆ He offers help to those being tempted. Christ in every way was tempted, yet without sin. In fact, because Christ did not give-in to temptation, he felt the full force of those temptations. Since this is true He is well able to help His brothers when they are tempted providing for them mercy when they have fallen, and grace when they are in the midst of the trial.
- ◆ He offers help to those who are suffering. Christ in every way experienced what all humans face. He felt all the consequences of a world shattered by sin. He experienced incredible pain, rejection, betrayal, ridicule, mistreatment, and beyond all that, the wrath of God for sins. Again such a one is well able to help us in our time of sin. Since Christ became flesh and blood, since He shared in the human experience, He is able to give us whatever grace is needed to help us in our trial.
- ◆ He is leading us on to glory. Christ, our High Priest, is our captain. He has led the way to glory, having suffered and then being translated unto glory. As our Captain who has gone before, He is well able to guide His brothers (those given to Him by the Father) to the glory God has in store for them.

4. Application

A. Hebrews 4:16 encourages us all to go boldly to the throne of grace in order to receive mercy and grace in our time of need. Since Christ became flesh and blood at His incarnation, we know He is well able to help us in our trial. Let us all, as we claim the blood of Christ, go before God and receive the resources that are ours in Christ.

B. God’s desire is to bring us to glory. What was destroyed in the Fall, God wants to build back up. Since we have a High Priest and Captain of our Salvation, we need only trust God that He is able to do what He has set out to do. When discouraged and ready to quit we must remember our High Priest who has led the way and stands ready to assist us along the way.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. What was the role of the high priest in the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement? (He was to bring a sacrifice into the Holy of Holies and intercede for the people.)

B. How was this an encouragement to the people of Israel? (They felt that this ceremony provided an acceptable covering for their sins and insured God's continued presence.)

C. What was necessary for Jesus to become our High Priest? (He had to become human, live a perfect life, and then submit to death.)

D. How did God show His approval of Christ's sacrifice? (He raised Him from the dead and then seated Him at His right hand as our faithful High Priest.)

E. What roles does Christ serve as our High Priest? (He has offered atonement for our sins. He continues to make intercession for us and to provide grace and mercy to sustain us in our troubles.)

F. Why should the incarnation be an encouragement to Christians today? (Because Christ became human, He is able to serve as our High Priest. That means that great mercy and grace are available to us.)

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God for sending His Son and providing for us a High Priest. Rejoice in the resources that we have because Jesus became flesh and blood.
- ◆ Ask God for mercy when you have failed to walk in His path, and for grace when you are in the midst of a trial.

Lesson 11 – The incarnation provides hope for this life

Theme: The incarnation gives hope for this life because it provided an example (in Christ) of what it means to be fully human. In following this example we will experience fullness of life.

Text: Philippians 2:5-11, John 13:1-17, Assorted Scriptures

Memory Verse: *1 Peter 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. Or Ephesians 5:1-2 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Teacher Direction:

1. When sin entered the world, much of God's creation received a devastating wound. Shock waves must have been sent out throughout the universe, declaring that something catastrophic had happened. At the center of this event was man, the only creature said to be made "in the image of God". His entry into sin marred that image and left man to live life in a less than fully human way.

Yet, at God's perfect time, He sent forth His Son, to be born a human. Christ was sent to turn around the effects of the Fall. This He did, and in the process provided us with an example of what it means to live in a fully human way (the way God originally intended). Today's study will focus on that example and how it brings hope to us who live in a fallen world.

Note: It is true that Christ's coming to earth provides an example for us, but it would be false to say that that is all it does. Christ's coming was to bear the sins of many, to provide an atonement for sin, to lead us to glory, and far more. Our emphasis of His example should, in no way, slight these monumental works of Christ.

2. To introduce this lesson, ask the children which of the following ways would be the easiest way to learn a new skill (i.e. swimming the backstroke, shooting an arrow, doing a tumbling routine). Would they find it easiest to learn about this skill in a book without pictures, a book with pictures, or from a live demonstration from a skilled athlete? Chances are the children will agree that having a living example helps a great deal in learning a new skill. Sometimes we don't know how to do something until we have seen someone show us how.

Tell children that this is similar to learning how to live. Many of us wonder what it means to live in a fully human way, the way God created us to live. Due to sin we all have an imperfect idea of what that is all about. Yet God has provided for us the perfect example for us to follow so that we might know God's design and live according to it. Encourage the children to listen well to find out what example God gave to us and how that example should affect the way we live.

3. Next, share with the children the following ideas related to Christ being our example.

A. Christ becomes our example – As Philippians 2:5-11 suggests, before coming to earth Jesus was in every way like God. He was, in essence, God, possessing all the attributes of God and having complete equality with God. Yet Christ did not cling to His status as something to be used for Himself. Instead He humbled himself by becoming human, by

human, by taking on human flesh (incarnation). From His birth to His death, He then lived, as a human, in perfect obedience to the Father. His life shows us how God intended for His highest creation to live. Christ is our example of what it means to be fully human.

B. Christ's example to follow – What do we learn from the example of Christ about how God has designed us to live? Simply put, we learn that God intends for us to give ourselves up to serve Him by serving others. Perhaps one of the best stories to illustrate this is found in John 13:1-17.

Jesus knew He had all authority. He also knew His coming destination – the right hand of God. Yet, in obedience to God, He was willing to humble Himself and take on the role of a servant. He did the most menial task, washing the dirty feet of his disciples, in order to show His disciples how they were to live with His help. Jesus' life was characterized by such self-giving acts and now serves as the pattern for all humans who desire to fulfill their Creator's design.

4. Application

A. Christ's life serves as a pattern by which we come to understand our own lives. We should make it a lifetime pursuit to study the example of Christ, and by His grace, to follow that example.

B. Though this world is full of trials and struggles, we ought never lose hope. Christ coming in the flesh shows us what is possible in a life that is totally under God's rule. We must trust in the promises that tell us that Christ wants to live in and through us, and help us be what God has always intended us to be. We must trust that God, through Christ, is able to recreate us in His image.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. What do we mean by "incarnation"? (It is God taking on flesh. This happened when Jesus Christ was born.)

B. Why was it incredible that Christ became human? (He was in every way like God, yet He did not cling to this.)

C. How do we know what it is like to be fully human, that is, fully what God created man to be? (By looking at the example of Jesus, who was fully human and who followed His Father without sin.)

D. What did Jesus' life show us about living as God designed? (His life showed us that God desires that we give up our life to serve Him by serving others.)

E. How did Jesus show this to His disciples? (He washed their feet even though He knew He was the ultimate authority and was destined to sit at His Father's right hand.)

F. How does Jesus coming in flesh give us hope? (It shows us what is possible with a human life that is being controlled by God.)

Prayer

◆ Thank God for sending His Son to provide for us an example.

- ◆ Ask God to help you to live following the example of Jesus.

Activity

As part of the lesson or in small groups you may wish to have the children look up the following verses and tell in what way we are to follow Jesus' example.

- Holiness. 1Pe 1:15,16; Ro 1:6.
- Righteousness. 1Jo 2:6.
- Purity. 1Jo 3:3.
- Love. Joh 13:34; Eph 5:2; 1Jo 3:16.
- Humility. Lu 22:27; Php 2:5,7.
- Meekness. Mt 11:29.
- Obedience. Joh 15:10.
- Self-denial. Mt 16:24; Ro 15:3.
- Ministering to others. Mt 20:28; Joh 13:14,15.
- Benevolence. Ac 20:35; 2Co 8:7,9.
- Forgiving injuries. Col 3:13.
- Overcoming the world. Joh 16:33; 1Jo 5:4.
- Being not of the world. Joh 17:16.
- Being guileless. 1Pe 2:21-22.
- Suffering wrongfully. 1Pe 2:21-23.
- Suffering for righteousness. Heb 12:3,4.

Lesson 12 – The incarnation provides hope for this life

Theme: The incarnation gives hope for this life because it prepares the way for and points to the second coming of Christ when He shall bring the fullness of our salvation.

Text: Hebrews 9:23-28 (also see Titus 2:11-14, Romans 8:18-25)

Memory Verse: *Hebrews 9:28* so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Teacher Direction:

1. In this group of lessons (#10-12) we have been talking about how the coming of Christ (incarnation) provides hope for this life. In the first lesson we noted that the incarnation provided for us a High Priest, Jesus Christ, to whom we can come in our time of need and receive grace and mercy. Truly a knowledge of this High Priest provides hope and comfort in this life which has its share of difficulties. In the second lesson we noted that Christ's coming in flesh provided us with an example. In a world marred by sin, we were in need of a living example of what it means to be fully human. God, in Christ, gave us this example.

In this final lesson we shall focus on Christ's first coming as a preparation for His second coming, when He shall bring into fullness the salvation He won for us at the cross. Surely knowing that Christ will bring to us full deliverance, even from the very presence of sin, should encourage us as we daily struggle with our own flesh and weakness.

2. To introduce this lesson, ask the children if they know what the concept of "firstfruits" is? After gaining some of their insights, inform the children that firstfruits was an Old Testament concept whereby the people of God would set aside the first and best part of the harvest for God. They did this to show their respect for God. Firstfruits also served as a hope for a full harvest. As the people gave their first to God, they expected more to come, presumably a full harvest.

Tell the children that in our lesson today the idea of firstfruits plays an important part, but that we are not talking about a harvest of fruit or grain, but a different sort of harvest. Encourage them to listen well to see how this concept is significant for their life today.

3. Next, share the following ideas as they relate to Christ's incarnation as a preparing of the way for the fullness of our salvation at His second coming.

A. The First Coming of Christ – According to Hebrews 9 Christ appeared, that is, became flesh or human (incarnation), in order to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Jesus came as a little baby, born in a manger, taking on everything human (except sin) so that He could die, and through death, do away with sin. (Note: since God cannot die, being Spirit, He had to become human so that He could die.) This is precisely what Jesus did, doing it only once because His sacrifice was complete and all that was necessary. The acceptability of this sacrifice can be seen in the resurrection and ascension of Christ to the right hand of God.

B. The Firstfruits of Our Salvation – What exactly did Christ accomplish at His first coming? His sacrifice was indeed accepted by the Father, but what did it accomplish for us?

- ◆ Christ's death did do away with the penalty of our sin. Those who trust in Christ will not face judgment for their sins, since Christ took their judgment on the cross. The guilt of sin is also gone. Our sins have been covered by the blood of Christ. We stand acceptable before God, clothed in Christ's righteousness.
- ◆ Christ's death is also doing away with the dominion of sin in our lives. Christ not only came to bring us forgiveness, but He also came to rescue us from the domination and slavery of sin. Note, however, that this rescue is still in process. Every Christian still struggles against the flesh and has to live in a body that is subject to corruption (Romans 8:23) and is groaning for its full redemption.

In light of the above points, it can be seen that what we have today is the firstfruits of our salvation. Our position is secured before God in Christ, but our practice is being transformed by the power of Christ within us. We are experiencing "a little bit of heaven" but we know there is more to come.

C. The Second Coming of Christ – As Christ came once, He shall come again. This time He will not be coming to do away with sin, but to bring in the fullness of our salvation. When He comes, His followers will finally be removed from the very presence of sin. Redemption will be full and complete. All the curse which sin brought will be removed and God's people will be able to experience the fullness of the blessing of God's presence. In essence Christ's first coming paved the way for (made possible) His second coming and all the blessing associated with it.

4. Application

A. Knowing that Christ's work is complete, but also knowing that we only have the firstfruits of the Spirit, should encourage us to look forward to the return of Christ. A day is coming when all that Christ accomplished on the cross will be ours. Our deliverance will be complete and our experience of God's blessed presence will be full. In our struggles with sin, these truths should bring great hope.

B. When Christ comes He will not only bring fullness of salvation to His people, but He will also come as judge. Those who do not know the Lord, or those who have neglected the Lord, will stand before Him and receive the penalty of their neglect. Such a prospect should cause us all to consider whether we are truly found in Christ.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. Why did Christ come to earth the first time? (To do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself.)

B. Why was it necessary for Christ to become human in order to do away with sin? (God, a Spirit, could not die. He needed to take on flesh to be able to die.)

C. What did Christ accomplish on the cross? (He paid the penalty for our sin, removed our guilt, brought us forgiveness, and delivered us from the dominion of sin.)

D. Is it true that we are only experiencing the firstfruits of our salvation? Why or why not? (Yes, because we still struggle with sin and our body does groan awaiting its deliverance from corruption.)

E. Why does the second coming of Christ bring us hope? (When Christ comes we will receive the fullness of our salvation, including a redeemed body.)

Prayer

- ◆ Thank Jesus for coming to earth to die and to bring salvation from sin's penalty, power, and presence.
- ◆ Ask God for His help to live in the present in a godly manner, eagerly awaiting the second coming.

Lesson 13 – Purpose of the Church

Theme: One of the main purposes of the Church is to witness to Christ until He returns.

Text: Acts 1:1-11

Memory Verse: Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Teacher Direction:

1. For the remainder of this year we shall be studying the book of Acts. We want to explore what it has to say about "the Church". What is the church? What is its purpose? How should it be organized? What dangers must the church be protected against? The answer to these questions and others should help children understand the value God places on the church and what being part of the church requires of them.

2. As you begin this lesson help children understand how this event fits in the history of redemption. In the O.T. God chose Abraham who would be a blessing to all nations. Through Abraham a people arose who were to be a light to all the nations. The greatest expression of that light would be the birth of a child who was the Son of God.

The Son of God lived His life as the living Word. He was the fullest expression we have of the knowledge of God. He witnessed to the truth and character of God wherever He went. In time He developed a following who in time would learn for what purpose they had been gathered.

3. Share with children the drama of this event. The followers of Christ had witnessed the incredible life of their Lord, but also the gruesome death. Recently though they had witnessed His resurrection. All of this must have been terribly confusing. What was the Lord up to anyway? How did they fit in to His plan? Help children understand the highs and lows of the people's emotions as well as their confusion.

4. As you relate the story help children see the purpose Christ had and has for His church. When Christ ascended they were to gather together and wait for the promised power from on high. This power would be given in order to enable them to be witnesses throughout the whole world. The people had a mission and that was to be a witness to Jesus Christ until he returned. (Note: It is important that children realize that Jesus is to be the focus of our witness.) Just like the people of Israel and just like their Lord, this newly forming church was to be a witness to the world. It was for this purpose that they existed.

5. Application ideas

A. Those who are part of the church must take the church's purpose as their own. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ must be His witnesses until He returns.

B. Are you a witness to Jesus Christ in your words, attitudes and behavior?

6. Suggestion for group time

Discussion Questions

A. What does it mean to be a witness? (A witness is one who gives evidence to the reality of something.)

B. To what were the people of Israel a witness? (Their great God) To what was Christ a witness? (The character of God) To what are Christians to be witnesses? (Their Lord Jesus Christ)

C. What is the purpose of the Church? (To witness to Christ until He returns)

D. How can the Church be a witness to Christ? (Their words, attitudes, actions can show that Christ is true)

E. In what ways can young people like yourself be a witness to Christ?

Activity

As a follow up to the last question, a few case studies (situations) could be presented to the children. They could be asked to offer ways they can be witnesses to Christ in each of the situations. Situations should be chosen which would be common to the age of children you are working with.

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God for giving you a purpose and the power to accomplish the purpose
- ◆ Pray that God makes you submissive and sensitive to the Spirit
- ◆ Pray for opportunities to give witness of your Lord

Lesson 14 – The Spirit Empowers the Church

Theme: The Spirit of God is the one who empowers the Church for its work of witness

Text: Acts 2:1-13

Memory Verse: Acts 5:32 *We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.*”

Teacher Direction:

1. In lesson 10 we established that the God-given purpose of the Church is to witness to Christ until He returns. This lesson seeks to show how God has equipped the Church to do the task He has given. It has to do with where our power comes from to do our God-given work.
2. It might be good to introduce this lesson by recounting how God, in the OT, would have His chosen kings, priests and others anointed with oil (the outward symbol) before service. Accompanying this ritual would be the Spirit of God's enabling that person for ministry. The oil often symbolizing the Spirit of God. Later even the ministry of Christ commenced with an anointing by God's Spirit at Jesus' baptism. Through these examples and others, help children see that it was not uncommon for God to especially empower His servants before they began their ministry.
3. Help children also see the early churches' need for a special empowering. The disciples walked with Christ, but when He told them of His departure, they were very afraid. How could they carry on the work? Jesus had amazing power. Who were they even in mass compared to Christ? Develop this need for power from on high, yet remind children that Christ told the disciples that it was better for them if He left so that He could send them the Comforter.
4. As you relate the story to the children relate the following truths:
 - ◆ The job the Lord left with the disciples was to be His witnesses. Help the children understand that throughout the Bible the Spirit is connected to the Word of God which witnesses to God's reality.
 - ◆ The Spirit enabled their verbal witness but also enabled their witness of life. From the Spirit comes the “fruit of the Spirit”.
 - ◆ The Bible often demonstrates the presence of the Lord with wind, fire and voice (i.e. at Sinai and the giving of the law, in Elijah's ministry, Ezekiel and the dry bones,...).
5. Application Ideas
 - A. In order for us to fulfill the work God has given to us, the church must be filled with and led by God's Spirit. Apart from the Spirit we will fail as a church.
 - B. Submit to the Spirit's work in our lives. Walk by the Spirit allowing it to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to create new life in us.
 - C. Pray for the Spirit's enablement to be His witnesses. Seek God as to how and where God might want you to be a witness.
6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion Questions

1. What was the mission God left for the Church to do? (Be a witness to Christ in all the world)
2. Can the Church fulfill its mission apart from God? Without God's help? Why or why not? (The work God has given us is spiritual in nature and demands a working of God's Spirit. By natural means alone the Church will never accomplish its task. Man's fallen nature keeps him from fulfilling the will and mission of God.)
3. How has God equipped the Church for its mission? (He fills every Christian with His Spirit.) How does the Spirit help believers? (Among other things the Spirit enables Christians to give verbal witness to Christ.)
4. How good a witness for Christ have you been? What keeps you from being an effective witness? (You may not be a Christian, thus you do not have God's Spirit. You may fear rejection of others, or fear failing at being a witness,...)
5. How can you become a greater part of the Church's witness to our Lord? (Realize that as part of the church this is your mission, begin praying that God leads you to someone who needs Him, seek by God's grace to be more loving, thus a witness to Christ's love, learn how to share Christ with others, ...)

Special Activity

1. Children might be encouraged to make a list of those at school or in their neighborhood whom they could begin praying for. They can be encouraged as well to list several ways they could love these people. Periodic check-up or sharing can be an encouragement to the children who participate in this activity.
 - ◆ Prayer
 - ◆ Pray for a true knowledge of and relationship with God which includes the empowering of the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ Pray that God helps you to be sensitive and obedient to the Spirit within you.
 - ◆ Pray that God enables you to be His witness in word and deed.
 - ◆ Pray that the Church is faithful to its mission.

Lesson 15 – The Message of the Church

Theme: The message of the Church centers in the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Text: Acts 2:14-41

Memory Verse: Acts 2:36b,38... *God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

..., "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Teacher Direction:

1. Briefly review the first two lessons from Acts. Remind students that Christ left the church a purpose: to witness to Christ until He comes. To fulfill that purpose Christ sent the Holy Spirit to empower them to be witnesses. God had indeed enabled His Church to do the task He left them to do. But what would that witness be like? What would the content of their message be? The content of their witness? This lesson focuses on that message as related to us by Peter.

2. Help students understand the context of Peter's sermon. He speaks to a Jewish audience who has been gathered primarily for the festival surrounding Pentecost. They have heard a sound that captures their attention and causes them to congregate probably near the outer court of their temple. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, seizes this opportunity to proclaim the gospel message.

3. Walk through the three main sections of Peter's sermon, but do not get bogged down with all the interpretive details.

A. Peter first gives an explanation for the phenomenon they are experiencing. What they observe is no less than the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. This is the pouring out of the Spirit of God which every Jew knew to be associated with the Messianic age. The last days of God's redemptive plan were now upon them. (Verse 14-21)

B. In verses 22-36 Peter shares the message of the Church. It might be good to have students read these verses in pairs and have them list the main points of Peter's proclamation. Focus on helping the students see what the Christian message is. Main points should include:

1. All that has occurred is fulfillment of what was prophesied in the OT.
2. God pointed to Christ's deity through the miracles He performed through Him.
3. Christ was crucified according to God's plan.
4. God raised Christ from the dead.
5. After the resurrection, Christ was exalted to the right hand of God from which He poured out the Holy Spirit as had been promised.
6. All of this shows that Christ is indeed the Lord of all and the promised Messiah.

C. In the final section (verses 37-41) Peter applies the message to his hearers. How should they respond to the message? Guide children to see that Peter called them to repentance and baptism (the symbol of inward change and identification with Christ). These Jews had placed their Messiah on a cross. What were they to do? Peter tells them to repent, that is to turn from their sin to God in obedience.

4. Application

A. Every member of the church must learn the church's message in order to proclaim it as the Spirit directs.

B. Have you come to Christ, the Lord, confessing your sin, to receive forgiveness of sin and the Holy Spirit?

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion questions

A. To what audience did Peter present his sermon? (He spoke to Jews gathered for the festival associated with Pentecost)

B. How did Peter explain all the people speaking in different languages? (He said that this was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy concerning the pouring out of the Holy Spirit)

C. What is the gospel? What is the message of the Church? (Help children get a handle on the basic elements of the message. Look at Peter's sermon and the points listed under #3b above.) Do you know this message well enough to share it with a friend? How can you come to understand the church's message more fully?

D. To what response does the church call hearers of their message? (We call all men to repent - that is turn from sin - self willed, self-centeredness - to God in obedience. We call men to place their faith and trust in Christ alone for forgiveness and new life. We call men to lay their life before their Creator.)

Optional Activity

Children could be encouraged to outline what they might say in a presentation of the Gospel to a friend at school. Perhaps various scripture passages could be suggested to include in their outline

Prayer

- ◆ Pray for an understanding of the gospel and opportunities to share it with others.
- ◆ Pray for the Church that it will be faithful to its mission and its message.
- ◆ Pray that God brings true repentance and faith to all of us.

Lesson 16 – Essential Elements of Church Life

Theme: To be faithful to God the church must center its work in the apostle's teaching, promoting the fellowship, breaking of bread (worship), and prayer.

Text: Acts 2:42-47

Memory Verse: Acts 2:42 *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

Teacher Direction:

1. Take time to review with children where we have come thus far in the book of Acts. Christ has ascended into heaven leaving His followers a charge to wait for the coming of Holy Spirit. When the Spirit comes, Christ's followers are filled with the Holy Spirit and they begin witnessing. Peter proclaims the good news and many come to repentance and faith. A community of believers is formed.

Help children see what effect the Holy Spirit had on the people upon His arrival. The people began proclaiming Christ, and communities or churches began to form.

2. You might consider transitioning into the text by asking the question, "If you were the apostles and experienced the Spirit's coming and saw churches begin to form, what would you do to promote continued growth?" Then lead children in discussing the 4 main activities to which the early church devoted themselves.

3. As you walk through the text take note of the following points:

A. Do not overlook the words "devoted to". This does not denote a casual relationship, but rather something to which you have given yourself. The early church devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

B. They were devoted to the apostle's teaching because they knew it was the truth that transforms lives. Early Christians believed that there was a core of belief that all followers of Christ needed to be grounded in. They knew the survival of their churches and families, and their future destinies depended on it.

C. The early church was devoted to **the** fellowship. They were devoted to the people that God was calling together to be His people. They showed this devotion by being together much, selling their possessions to care for the needy, sharing meals together, and more.

D. The breaking of bread was a fellowship meal which came to be associated with the Lord's table (communion). This table focused on the work and person of Christ. In essence this activity showed the church's devotion to the worship of Christ - to placing Him at the center of their lives.

E. The early church was devoted to prayer because they knew they could never fulfill the mission God had given them without His grace. They knew they could never withstand persecution nor change the human heart unless the Lord was with them. Thus, sensing their great need, they devoted themselves to prayer.

4. Show children that God honored their devotion to these four activities by bringing great increase. Many were being saved.

5. Application ideas

A. How devoted is our church, your family, you personally to the four activities we studied today? Which of these areas need more attention from you?

B. How do you show your devotion to the apostle's teaching? To the fellowship? To worship? To prayer?

C. Make a commitment that by God's grace you shall devote yourself more to these activities.

6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion questions

A. What two things occurred when the Spirit came upon the followers of Christ? (The people began proclaiming Christ and as people responded to the message communities of believers began to form)

B. What activities were important to the survival of the early church? (Devotion to the apostle's teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.)

C. Why is it important for the church to be devoted to the Apostle's teaching? (It is our life, our source of truth) To the fellowship? (Promotes the unity and growth of the body of Christ which honors God) To the breaking of bread? (Our focus must always be Christ. This activity gave focus to Christ in the community setting) To prayer? (They knew they needed God to complete their mission)

4. Is our church devoted to these activities? How do we show our devotion to these activities? Look at a copy of the In-Touch and note which activities show devotion to the kinds of things we spoke of today.

5. In what area do you need to be more devoted? How can you grow in devotion? How can our Children's Church group show our devotion to these things? To one another?

Prayer

- ◆ Pray that God increases our church's devotion and our individual devotion to the things that really matter
- ◆ Pray that our church would be a true church devoted to the right things and growing in strength and number.
- ◆ Pray that God shows us all ways to show our devotion to one another.
- ◆ Pray for all our teachers who instruct us in the apostle's teaching.

Lesson 17 – The Message of the Church

Theme: The message of the early church (the gospel) was a message attested to by the prophets, centered in Christ (especially His death and resurrection), calling for a response of repentance and faith, declaring a present salvation to be fully realized later.

Text: Acts 3:1-26

Memory Verse: *Acts 3:19* Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ...

Teacher Direction:

1. It would be good to continually review previous lessons. Remind students that in the past few lessons we have seen God form His church by imparting the Holy Spirit. We have also seen the church grow through the proclamation of the gospel and the careful attention to its main activities: learning the word, worship, prayer, and loving the fellowship. Help children see that God is at work growing His church in marvelous ways.
2. This lesson focuses on the message of the church. This is the second exposure the children will have to this theme. Our goal is to have children know the message so well that they can articulate it themselves. More important, we want them to respond to a clear understanding of this message.
3. Begin by relating the opening narrative in 3:1-11. Help children see the following:
 - A. The lame man is needy and he knows it. He is totally unable to change his broken condition. All he can do is reach out and receive the gifts of others. In a sense this is a picture of those without Christ. By God's grace they must come to the point of recognizing their neediness and reach out to receive help.
 - B. The healing comes through the name (power) of Jesus Christ. The focus of the message is Christ. There is no wholeness, no delivery from sin apart from Christ. This must be at the center of the Christian message.
 - C. The miracle was a means to an end. The healing of the man was only a means to the proclamation of the gospel. The healing focused attention on the name of Jesus Christ and His power to bring wholeness.
4. As you begin to relate the sermon of Peter in 3:12-26 it might be good to put the verses on an overhead. Ask children to point out what the message was. The following points might be helpful to discuss.
 - A. Peter emphasized the person of Jesus. He said Jesus was God's servant, the Holy and Righteous one, and the Prince of life. With these titles He identified Jesus with God and the promised Messiah. Our gospel presentations must establish the person of Christ.
 - B. Peter also emphasized the death and resurrection of Christ. The Jews and their leaders disowned the Righteous one and had Him put on a cross, but God raised Him from the dead proving He was the life giving Son of God. Our culpability for the death of Christ as well as God's resurrecting Christ are essential elements in a gospel presentation.

C. All of this message is fulfillment of the prophets. Moses, Samuel and the prophets, even Abraham all predicted this. This is not a new religion, it is the same religion held by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They are just experiencing the fulfillment of its message.

D. Verses 16,19,26 offer the necessary response. Repentance (turning from sin to God) and faith in Christ bringing healing (cleansing from sin). This response brings the first fruits of the salvation that will later be fully realized when Christ returns.

5. Application ideas

A. Like the lame man we must recognize our neediness and reach out to Jesus Christ for healing from sin. This is not just forgiveness of sin but deliverance from it in our daily life.

B. We must know our message and be able to present it to others. Think about memorizing a basic gospel outline along with some key verses.

6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. How are we all like the lame man? (We are all in great need because of our sin. We need to recognize this and reach out to the only One who can truly help us)

B. What truths did Peter emphasize in his message? (Refer to #4 above)

C. How would you define repentance? (Turning from sin to God in obedience) What is true faith? (It is a trusting in Christ alone for forgiveness of and deliverance from sin. It is a submission to His Lordship in our life)

D. How would you present the “good news” (the Christian message) to a friend at school or in your neighborhood? What points would you be sure to emphasize? What ideas do you think your friend might have a hard time understanding? What verses could be used to explain the message?

Prayer

- ◆ Pray that God brings you to recognize your great need of Him and His salvation in Christ.
- ◆ If you are aware of your need, pray that God will bring salvation to your soul. Ask him to give you His new life and to deliver you from a self-centered life.
- ◆ Pray that God will help you understand the gospel to the point that you can share it with others.
- ◆ Pray that God will lead you to someone who needs to hear the good news. Pray that He will show you ways you can start loving that person.
- ◆ Pray that our church will be true to this message.

Lesson 18 – Persecution and the Growing Church

Theme: God uses persecution to cause His church to grow strong in its faith and proclamation.

Text: Acts 4:1-31

Memory Verse: *John 15:20 Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*

Teacher Direction:

1. At the beginning of this lesson it would be good to discuss the definition of the word “persecution”. Perhaps children could formulate a definition together and give any examples they might be aware of. They might recall some examples from both scripture and church history.
2. Review with students the previous lesson. Peter and John have just healed a lame man and have used the opportunity to proclaim Christ. The religious rulers observed this and became very concerned. The Sadducees, especially, were interested in the status quo and were anti-supernatural. This new talk was disconcerting to them. During the course of the lesson it might be good to try to determine other reasons why these rulers persecuted the church.
3. As you relate the story also remind children of the context of the book of Acts. God is building His church. The Holy Spirit has been given to believers who are forming communities dedicated to growth and proclamation. God at no time loses control. It is His plan to use persecution to further their proclamation and to strengthen them. Highlight the following points as you share the story.
 - ◆ Note how the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is resulting in a growing church. The 3000 initial believers (2:41) are now 5000 (4:4). The Spirit of God is using the Word of God to build His church.
 - ◆ When brought to trial (that is when confronted with persecution) Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit. That means he was especially strengthened by God’s Spirit to speak the word of truth needed at this occasion.
 - ◆ Briefly note the content of Peter’s mini-sermon (4:8-12). He mentions Christ crucified, but resurrected by God the Father. He proclaims that only through Christ is salvation to be found.
 - ◆ Note how God’s Spirit has empowered them in the midst of persecution. Though “uneducated”, God has made them confident teachers. Though weak in status, God enabled them to be able to stand strong and speak regardless of the consequences.
 - ◆ Note the effect that persecution had on the church. It caused them to praise their sovereign God. It caused them to pray for boldness amidst the persecution. It caused them to cling to the Lord all the more. When their prayer was answered they became Spirit-filled, bold witnesses. God had indeed used persecution for His good purposes.

- ◆ Note that they did not pray to be delivered from persecution, but rather be victory in and through it.

4. Application ideas

- A. Recognize that if Christ was persecuted so His followers will be.
- B. When being persecuted, don't seek deliverance from it, but instead use the opportunity to boldly witness for Christ. View persecution as God's way of growing His church.
- C. Pray for wisdom and boldness to be God's witness.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

- A. What is persecution? (It is ill treatment, oppression, harassment, troubling another person for his beliefs,...)
- B. Why did the Sadducees persecute the early church? (They were anti-supernatural and wanted to maintain things as they were. Their position and status was also being threatened)
- C. How did God use persecution to accomplish His purposes? (Persecution led to the people's praising God, to praying for boldness, and eventually to a greater witness)
- D. It has been observed that the church often grows strongest during persecution. Why do you think that is true? (During persecution God's people are pressed to Him and take their eyes off life's more trivial concerns)
- E. Why should Christians expect to be persecuted? (If we walk in the light, our words and acts will expose the darkness. Most people find this threatening and will lash out.)
- F. What might be the reasons if a Christian is not experiencing persecution? (Answer will vary.... not living for Christ, not truly a Christian, always surrounded by Christians,..)

Prayer

- ◆ Pray for boldness to be God's witness
- ◆ Pray that God's church continues to grow in number and strength
- ◆ Pray for Christians around the world who right now are being persecuted for their faith (if the teacher could highlight examples this would help)

Lesson 19 – Enemies of the Church

Theme: Deceit and hypocrisy are great enemies to the unity and witness of the Church.

Text: Acts 4:32-5:11

Memory Verse: ***Ephesians 4:3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Teacher Direction:

1. This lesson can be set up in contrast to the previous lesson on persecution. Whereas persecution is used by God to build His church, deceit and hypocrisy are used by Satan to destroy the witness and unity of the church.

2. As you begin the lesson, focus on the two results that accompany the coming of the Holy Spirit, namely, the proclamation of the gospel and the demonstration of the gospel. Whenever the Holy Spirit is at work, the gospel will be proclaimed **and** lived out. Share how the early church demonstrated the gospel by “sharing everything they had” even to the point of selling land and houses to meet pressing needs within the church body. Barnabas was a very positive example of this. Help children see that the reason these believers cared for each other in this way was that God had changed their hearts and given them a sense of their oneness. True Christians understand their oneness with other Christians and are ready to love them in tangible ways.

3. Next introduce the foil of Ananias and Sapphira. Into the context of the unified and loving church, Ananias and Sapphira interject deceit. Their actions parallel Barnabas’, but their motive instead of being love is deceit. Their hearts, instead of being controlled by the Spirit of God, are controlled by Satan. They were more interested in being admired by others for their generosity (self-love) than they were interested in sacrificially meeting the needs of others (true love). (Incidentally, whenever the Spirit of God has greatly moved among the people of God, there has often been a counterfeit movement going on as well. This is the way Satan works.)

4. Discuss with children why the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira was so severe. The church was just beginning and growing. Persecution would be no long term deterrent to its growth. In fact, it often aided its growth and strength. But deceit and hypocrisy kill a church. There can be no trust and thus no unity in a church where deceit reigns; where there is no unity the church loses its witness. Since the church moves forward on the wheels of truth and trust, God severely punished this couple to teach this fledgling church an important lesson.

5. Application ideas

A. Protect the unity and witness of the church by fighting deceit and hypocrisy in your own life. Don’t pretend to be someone or something you really aren’t.

B. Examine your own faith. Evidence that God has given you a new heart will be seen in your proclamation **and** demonstration of the gospel. Is the gospel seen in your speech and actions?

6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. How did the early church show its unity with and love for other believers? (They freely shared their possessions with the needy even to the point of selling houses and land.)

B. What are two evidences that the Spirit of God is at work in a person or in a church? (The Word of God will be carefully proclaimed and the gospel will be demonstrated in the lives of the people, primarily by their sacrificial love.)

C. What was the major difference between Barnabas' gift and the gift of Ananias and Sapphira? (Barnabas gave as he was filled with the Spirit of God and with love for the body of Christ. The couple was filled with Satan and a desire for recognition.)

D. Why did God punish Ananias and Sapphira so severely? (This young church needed a strong message that the church cannot grow when it is filled with deceit and hypocrisy. It is only the truth that causes the church to grow up in love.)

E. How can children your age show a loving unity with the church? (Answers vary)(

F. In what ways are children your age tempted to be hypocrites within the church? How do you try to show yourself to be something you aren't?

Prayer

- ◆ Pray that God protects the church from deceit and hypocrisy.
- ◆ Pray that God shows you deceit and hypocrisy in your own life. Repent of it.
- ◆ Pray that CBC becomes a church that shows great unity and love for one another. Pray that God would be glorified in our community as this becomes a greater reality.
- ◆ Pray how God might want you to show love to someone in our body: (needy friend, elderly, widow,...)

Lesson 20 – How God Builds His Church

Theme: God will build His church through the witness of His people and His Spirit.

Text: Acts 5:12-42

Memory Verse:

Acts 5:32 *We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” OR*

Acts 5:39 *But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”*

Teacher Direction:

1. It must be remembered that the book of Acts is Luke’s chronicle of God’s work in building His church. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Acts shows how it is really God who is building His church. It would be good in this lesson to show the many ways Luke points this out.

2. As you begin the lesson (especially verses 12-16) help children see how God has grown His church. Through the purging of the deceiver’s, Ananias and Sapphira, the church has come to greater reverence for God and greater unity with one another. God is accompanying the witness of the apostles with the witness of the Spirit as He works signs and wonders. These things conspiring together result in multitudes believing on the Lord. (Note: the main purpose of the signs and wonders was to give credence to the message of the apostles. People were to listen to what they had to say.)

3. Help children see that with the “success” of the church comes increased persecution. The truth will always threaten those in darkness, especially those who are parading as sons of light. When the religious leaders find out about the growth of the church they are filled with jealousy and they throw the apostles in jail. This, however, is no deterrent to God. He will build His church.

At night the angel of the Lord comes and sets them free. God commissions them to continue their proclamation of the Gospel. This they faithfully do, much to the dismay of the religious leaders. When challenged by the religious leaders, the apostles firmly declare that they must obey God rather than men. Help children see what an amazing transformation has taken place. Those who scattered at the arrest of Jesus, now under the influence of God’s Spirit, are standing firm in their proclamation of the gospel. (If time permits it might be good to examine that gospel again in light of previous lessons)

4. As you share the final section (verses 33-42) show how God used the Pharisee, Gamaliel, to keep His church moving ahead. The Sadducees, the more radical group in the Sanhedrin, were burning with anger at the Apostle’s boldness. They were ready to take drastic action. Gamaliel, a very respected man, was, on the other hand, wanting to wait and see. In fact, he gave very wise counsel when he said that if this movement is of God they could not stand against it, lest they fight against God. He probably didn’t know how true his words were. His advice carried the day. Our chapter ends with the apostles rejoicing and continuing their proclamation of the gospel. God was indeed building His church. In every situation God was giving His called ones success.

5. Application Ideas

A. Trust God to enable you to be His witnesses, believing that it is He who is building His church.

B. Be sensitive to the Spirit of God within you as you seek to fulfill your part in building God's Kingdom.

C. Seek God in every difficult situation you encounter, expecting Him to show you the way.

6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. What kind of success was the church having as described in this lesson? (The people of God were growing in reverence and unity, multitudes were coming to believe in Christ, ...)

B. Why were the Sadducees upset with the apostles? (They were filled with jealousy, they were being accused of putting the Messiah to death, the apostles were growing in popularity) How should Christians respond to persecution from others? (Trust wholly in God believing He is able to protect them. Continue to faithfully proclaim the message.)

C. In what ways was God involved in building His church? (He used the death of Ananias and Sapphira to bring fear and unity to His church. He validated the message of the apostles by performing signs and wonders. He set free the apostles from their prison cell. He used the counsel of an unbeliever to allow the apostles to continue their mission.)

D. When is it right to obey God rather than men? (When the honor of God and obedience to Him is at stake.) How should a Christian view the government? (Compare Romans 13:1-7 with Peter's statement in this chapter) Are there ways that our government is hindering the proclamation of the message? (Supreme court laws and other legislation are impeding some ways of acknowledging God in our nation)

Prayer

- ◆ Continue to pray for boldness in witness
- ◆ Pray for our country which has turned it back on God in many ways.
- ◆ Thank God that He is in control of building His church. Ask Him to show you what part you are to play.

Lesson 21 – Leadership in the Church

Theme: Well organized leadership is God-ordained to promote the growth and unity of the church.

Text: Acts 6:1-7

Memory Verse: *Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Teacher Direction:

1. Share with children the background of this text. The church is growing. God has been working mightily by the Holy Spirit to bring many to Himself. But as is often the case with a growing church there are problems associated with growth. The problem in this case had to do with caring for the widows within the church.

The problem was more than just the number of widows, it had to do with who the widows were. In Jerusalem there were Hellenistic Jews (those who spoke only Greek and came from outside of Jerusalem to live) and Hebraic Jews (those who spoke Hebrew and Greek and were natives of Jerusalem). It seems that the Hellenistic Jews felt their widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food. (It should be noted that the Hellenistic widows probably had the greatest need because they wouldn't have had relatives nearby, since they had migrated to Jerusalem. It must also be noted that among many Hebraic Jews, the Hellenists were looked upon as second class citizens. Certainly this may have made the problem worse). It was this problem the church leaders, the Apostles, inherited.

2. Next share the solution the apostles proposed and how it was worked out. As you develop this section share the following points with the children.

- ◆ Jesus Christ is the ultimate head of the church, but He conferred some of His authority to the apostles. At this time (Acts 6) the apostles are the leaders of Christ's church, but as the church grows, this leadership base will grow as well.
- ◆ The leaders of the church must deal with problems (opportunities) within the church. They must not ignore them and hope they go away.
- ◆ The leaders of the church deal with both the spiritual and material needs of the people but with differing levels of direct involvement.
- ◆ The apostles (and later the elders) are to devote themselves to the Word of God and prayer. This is to be their priority. They are then to delegate their authority to others (eventually called deacons) in order to meet the other needs within the church. These may be more physical in nature, but not exclusively.
- ◆ The apostles conferred their authority to these servants (deacons) through the laying-on of hands. This was a visible symbol of their commissioning this group to this important work.

- ◆ Note the qualifications for these deacons. They were to be full of the Holy Spirit (godly individuals) and full of wisdom (one facet of this wisdom is skill in performing their duties).

3. Finally share with children the result of God's leaders caring for this problem in the way they did. The Word of God kept spreading and the church kept growing. God does use well organized godly leadership to promote growth and unity in His church.

4. Application ideas

A. Thank God for the leaders (elders and deacons) which He has given to this church. Pray that they continue to be godly in all their decision making and problem solving.

B. Cultivate an attitude of respect for and obedience to your leaders. God has given them to you to watch over your soul.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. What was the problem facing the Jerusalem church? (Some of the widows were being neglected as the food was being distributed to them.)

B. Why didn't the Apostles take care of the problem themselves? (They believed they must devote themselves to the study and proclamation of the Word and to prayer.)

C. How did the Apostles solve the problem? (They had the people choose other godly men who would serve these widows in their need. The Apostles later conferred their authority on those chosen.)

D. How would you describe the type of leadership that is needed in the church? (There need to be those who are given greatest authority who will oversee the church and devote themselves to the Word and prayer. There need to be others, under the authority of the first group who will serve the other needs within the body.)

E. How have you seen this sort of leadership apparent in this church?

Activity

A. It might be good to have an elder and \ or a deacon come in and talk about His ministry to the church. Have them share how they believe church leadership should be organized. Ask them what role they serve, what kind of problems they deal with, ... Try to give children a fuller understanding of the role of leaders within the church.

Prayer

- ◆ Pray for your leaders. Pray that they have wisdom in decision making and that they will continue to walk humbly before God.
- ◆ Pray for any problems you are aware of that the elders are currently dealing with.
- ◆ Pray for those under church leadership that they would follow the direction from Hebrews 13:17.

Lesson 22 – Leadership in the Church

Theme: Church leaders must shepherd God's church with godliness and skill.

Text: Acts 20:17-38 with 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Memory Verse: *Acts 20:28* Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Teacher Direction:

1. This lesson is out of sequence as far as the chronology of Acts is concerned, but it follows on the leadership theme established in the last lesson. Take time to review what was taught from Acts 6 and then use this lesson to build the student's understanding of God's view and desire for church leadership.

2. Give students some background for this story. Remind them that the book of Acts is Luke's accounting of the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, focusing on two main characters: Peter and Paul. This story occurs during Paul's third and final missionary journey.

3. First develop the text taken from Acts 20. Help children understand that Paul is near the end of his travels and has some important principles to share with the leadership he knows will be guiding this church in Ephesus. As you relate the story, focus not only on the specific instruction of Paul to the leaders, but also on the example of Paul before the leaders. Try to come up with a characterization for church leaders from this. The following are some of the key points to bring out:

- ◆ Paul begins his account (vr. 17-21) by reminding these leaders of his past behavior. His service was to the Lord and was full of humility and self-sacrifice. He preached a faithful message of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus despite the persecution he had to endure.
- ◆ Paul continues his account (vr. 22-24) by telling of his present circumstance. He is headed for difficulty, but He does not care about anything but being faithful to the calling God has given him which is to proclaim the grace of God in Christ.
- ◆ In the next section (vr. 25-27) Paul gives a look into the future. He says that since they will not see his face again, he felt it necessary to faithfully declare the whole purpose of God to them regardless of the cost. (Note: In all the above explanation, Paul demonstrates the behavior of a faithful shepherd.)
- ◆ In verses 28-35 Paul finally comes to specific instruction for the Ephesian elders. He tells them to be on their guard for themselves and the church, remembering that God has placed them to rule the church that He died for. He encourages them to be on the alert to protect the flock from savage wolves who would bring in false teaching. Finally he commends them to be men of the Word of God whose lives are characterized by self-sacrifice.
- ◆ Note the mutual affection these men had for each other. Such is the shepherd's heart.

4. After sharing the above it might be good to have students make a portrait of the character and role of the elder. Once they have done this ask them what other

characteristics they think a church leader should have. Follow up this discussion with a brief explanation of Paul's criteria found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The following are some simple definitions for some of the more elusive concepts.

- ◆ beyond reproach - one whom others would not accuse of spotty character
- ◆ husband of one wife - one who has always been faithful to the one wife God has given him.
- ◆ temperate - one who is balanced, not impulsive nor indulgent
- ◆ prudent - one with the ability to discern right and wrong and to ward off danger
- ◆ respectable - one who is disciplined and orderly
- ◆ not pugnacious - one who is not a brawler
- ◆ uncontentious - one who is not an arguer

5. Application ideas

A. Since our leaders have such an important role it is important they we obey them and pray for them.

B. Children are the future church. They should begin today to prepare themselves for whatever role the Lord might have for them. The future church will only flourish under godly leadership.

6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. What did you learn about leadership from Paul's speech in Acts 20? (Leaders are to serve Christ, be humble, live self-sacrificially, fulfill their ministry of proclaiming the gospel, care enough for the people that they will do anything to see that they receive the truth,...)

B. What did you learn about a leader's role from Paul's instruction to the elders of Ephesus? (They are to oversee the church like a shepherd would his sheep. This includes guarding, feeding - the Word, loving, giving, ...)

C. What kind of person did Paul say should be chosen as an elder according to 1 Timothy 3? (Answers should resemble Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 3:1-7)

D. Why is it important that the church carefully choose their leaders? (Since leaders guide, protect, feed and care for the church it is important that they be men called of God who have lives characterized by godliness. To cheat in this area is to hurt God's church which He purchased with His blood. There is no more important work than being used by God to grow His church.)

Activity

A. It might be good to have a Pastor or Elder come in and explain how this church chooses its eldership.

B. You might ask children to compose a ministry description for an elder in the church, including the responsibilities and the character qualifications.

C. You might have children write a letter of thanks to an elder thanking him for his important ministry.

Prayer

- ◆ Again pray for your leaders that they would shepherd the church in a way that would honor God and accomplish good for the people.
- ◆ Pray for the elder selection process which takes place each year. Pray that God will raise up men who will lead this church in godliness.
- ◆ Thank God for the leaders we have.

Lesson 23 – Persecution and a Growing Church

Theme: Though those in darkness hate the light, God's kingdom will move forward.

Text: Acts 6:8 - 8:4

Memory: *John 3:20-21* *Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."*

Teacher Direction:

1. This passage provides one of the first transitions in the book of Acts. When Christ ascended, He told His followers that they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth. To this point in the book of Acts the gospel has only penetrated Jerusalem. How would the gospel reach beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem? This section offers that transition. Again it is important that you help children see that this is God's plan and that He is working it out perfectly.

2. Set up the conflict by relating the material in 6:8 - 7:1. Stephen is confronted by Jewish Freedmen. These Freedmen came from lands outside Jerusalem. Their return to Jerusalem may have been suspect to some. To avoid problems, they sought to minimize deviations from the commonly held beliefs. It may be that the ministry and message of Stephen was a threat to them. Thus they sought to incite others against Stephen claiming that he spoke against the temple and the law (vr. 11,13-14).

3. Next relate Stephen's response found in 7:2-53. Note that Stephen does not try to defend himself, but rather uses this as an opportunity to proclaim the gospel of Christ. In his accounting of the history of Israel he makes two major points: A. The Law and the temple which they place so much emphasis on are imperfect. The lawgiver, Moses, said himself that they should look forward to another prophet (vr. 37, Deut 18:15). Stephen also argued that the temple cannot contain the Almighty. Stephen pointed them to a greater prophet and a greater temple centered in Christ. B. These people, though they gave lip service to the law and temple, were disobedient and hard-hearted since before the time of Moses. The current generation was no exception. In fact, they were culpable for the death of the Righteous One.

4. In the final section 7:54 - 8:4 focus on the response of Stephen's auditors as well as the true result of the conflict. Help children see that when men in darkness are confronted with light, they get very disturbed by it. The light will either humble a man or anger him. In the case of those who listened to Stephen it angered them to the point of putting Stephen to death. Stephen became the first martyr of the church. This sort of response should not surprise the one who desires to proclaim the light of the gospel.

Was God's plan thwarted by this response to Stephen's proclamation? Absolutely not. Though Stephen gave his life, it was this event that moved the gospel into Judea and Samaria (8:1). A great persecution arose after Stephen's death driving Christians outside of Jerusalem. But this relocation only gave them a fresh opportunity to proclaim the gospel with a passion kindled by the death of one of God's saints.

5. Application ideas

A. Evil men will try to thwart God's plan. God's servants must be willing to trust God completely for the accomplishment of His plan.

B. Be faithful, like Stephen, to proclaim the good news in Jesus Christ. Be willing to give your life for Christ no matter what the cost.

6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. What accusations did the Freedman raise against Stephen? (He spoke against Moses and God, the law and the temple) How did Stephen deal with these accusations? (He tried to show that Moses pointed to another prophet - Christ, and that the temple is best represented by the presence of Christ among his people.)

B. How was the character of Stephen like that of Christ? (He did not try to defend himself, he cared only to do the will of his Father, he forgave the terrible cruelties of the men who stoned him, he truly cared only for the souls of those around him,...)

C. When Stephen shared the truth with his listeners how did they react? (They hated what he had to say. They rushed on him to kill him.) Why did they react in this way? (Stephen shed light on their dark behavior. Our memory verse says men hate to come to the light.)

D. How does this story show that God rules over man and works out His purposes in a perfect way? (Though the men put to death God's servant, the end result was that the gospel spread to Judea and Samaria. This is the very thing God intended.)

E. What part are you playing in seeing God's Kingdom spread to "the uttermost parts"?

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God for ruling over the events of mankind and for bringing His blessed gospel.
- ◆ Pray for those in darkness, that they might come to know the light.
- ◆ Pray for courage to live and teach the gospel no matter the consequences.

Lesson 24 – True Conversion

Theme: True conversion is a work of God that results in a life given to the purposes of God.

Text: Acts 9:1-31

Memory Verse: *Ephesians 2:10* *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Teacher Direction:

1. The final four lessons of this year's curriculum will focus on the gospel worked out in the lives of Saul (Acts 9) and Cornelius (Acts 10) and seen through the ordinances of baptism and communion. This lesson will focus on the conversion of Saul which offers much to our understanding of the gospel.

2. As you begin this lesson focus on Saul's life prior to his conversion (9:1-2). Do this in such a way as to offer a stark contrast with his life after his conversion. The following ideas can be brought out:

- ◆ Saul persecuted Christians, the followers of Christ and thus was persecuting Christ.
- ◆ Saul was doing the exact opposite of what God desired. He was tearing down God's Kingdom, not building it up.
- ◆ Saul was more interested in personal glory, fame, and self promotion (this can be seen in Philippians 3:4-6) than in the glory of God. The cross was also a stumbling block to him.

3. After you establish Saul's life before he met Christ, develop how he came to Christ. The following points should be emphasized as you share the details of 9:3-19a.

- ◆ Saul was not seeking God. It was God who sought out Saul and got His attention through the bright light and voice from heaven.
- ◆ God immediately convicted Saul of his sin - he was persecuting Christ. When God calls us to Himself He often will begin our journey to Him by convicting us of sin. He humbles a man before He lifts him up.
- ◆ God also opened Saul's understanding of who Jesus was. God convinced Saul that Jesus was the Lord and Messiah. To come to God one must properly acknowledge Jesus for who he is.
- ◆ Saul was saved by God not to go on living the same way. He was saved for a purpose. He was a chosen instrument of God.
- ◆ The coming of the Holy Spirit (the new nature, the new heart) was signaled by Saul's sight being restored. We all live in darkness until God brings light into our soul.

4. Having discussed Saul's conversion, focus finally on what difference that conversion made in his life as seen in 9:19b-31.

- ◆ Saul immediately went out and proclaimed Christ

- ◆ Christ, the cross, and suffering for His name became the focus of Saul's ministry. Saul had new desires and interests.
- ◆ Saul gave himself to the work that God had ordained for him to do regardless of the cost.

5. Application

A. Encourage children to respond in repentance and faith to the call of God on their life.

B. Encourage children who may believe they are Christians to examine their lives. Is there evidence in their lives that God has changed them, that He has given them new life? Do they have new desires? New interests? A new focus in their life?

6. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. What was Saul's life like prior to meeting Jesus on the Damascus road? (He persecuted Christians and lived for his own glory and honor.)

B. How did God get Saul's attention? (He came to him with a bright light and a voice from heaven)

C. What did God convince Saul of before changing his life? (He showed Saul his sinfulness and showed him the truth about Jesus Christ.)

D. What does one have to believe about Jesus in order to have eternal life? (One must believe that Jesus is the one sent from heaven, the Lord, who is due our fullest love and devotion.)

E. For what purpose was Saul saved? (He was God's chosen instrument to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.) For what purpose are we saved? (We are saved to join the work began at Pentecost; taking the gospel to the remotest parts of the earth.)

F. How did people know Saul had been changed by God? (He became a proclaimer of Jesus Christ. The whole direction of his life changed.) What would you expect to be different about the life of someone who is truly a Christian?

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God for His great gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Ask God for power to do the work He has saved you to do.
- ◆ Continue to respond to God in repentance and faith.

Lesson 25 – Faith and the Ordinances: Faith to all nations

Theme: God desires that the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Lord, be preached to all men in all nations.

Text: Acts 10:1-48

Memory Verse: Acts 10:36 *You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of **all**.*

Teacher Direction:

1. Background: Remind the children of the background of the book of Acts. When Christ rose to be seated at the right hand of God, He commissioned His followers to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest parts of the earth. Thus far the witness has been made to Jews in Jerusalem and traveled to “half -Jews” in Samaria. It had not yet traveled to Judea and had not yet been applied to Gentiles (non - Jews). God, however, was apparently up to something, having recently called His apostle to the Gentiles, Saul (Acts 9).

2. Children should have some idea what division existed between Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles were not allowed in the temple of the Jews. They were warned to keep out. If a Jew had business dealings with a Gentile, the Jew was considered unclean for a period of time. A Jew was not permitted to accept the hospitality of a Gentile. Eating meals with a Gentile would defile the Jew. Finally, a Gentile could only commune with the Jewish God if they became a proselyte to the Jewish faith. They had no direct access to this God. All of these examples should show the rift between these peoples.

3. As you walk through the account in Acts 10, share the following with the children:

A. Note the sovereign hand of God in opening the gospel to the Gentiles. God utilized all His forces (angels, visions, the Spirit) to make the impossible happen. There was a lot of prejudice against the gospel being opened to the Gentiles. Peter, for one, had to be convinced that God was doing something revolutionary. God, however, would perfectly prevail. His well designed plan would squelch any opposition.

B. Focus again on the message Peter gave to Cornelius and those he gathered together. Note how similar it is to previous messages in Acts: Jesus Christ, baptized by John the Baptist, anointed by the Holy Spirit, living a perfect life filled with miracles attesting to His person and message, crucified but raised from the dead by God the Father, the only one in whose name there is forgiveness of sins.

C. Help children understand that God uses the message preached to turn the hearts of men to Himself. The Spirit of God applies the word of God to hearts, and men are changed. That change is a new life: the Holy Spirit comes in to reside in the believer's heart. Baptism is the outward sign of the inward change of life.

D. Note that the speaking in tongues was used to validate the conversion of the Gentiles before the Jews. How would the Jew know for certain that the Gentile now had direct access to God? God provided the same sign utilized at Pentecost. This confirmed in their minds that God indeed was opening the door to the Gentiles.

4. Application

A. Praise God for working His plan of salvation in a powerful way.

B. Praise God for making salvation available to all men. Develop a burden to share the good news with all men.

C. Give attention to the Word of God which has power to transform your life.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. Why is this story of Cornelius' conversion an important one in the book of Acts? (It shows that the gospel was opened to the Gentiles. It also shows the further progress of the gospel to Judea.)

B. Why did Peter (and others) need convincing that God was interested in the Gentiles? (The Jews believed the Gentiles were unclean and could not have direct access to God and His salvation)

C. How is the hand of God seen in this story? (We see God's hand through the visions, the Spirit speaking to Peter, the timing of the events,...) Why is it important to know that God is involved in working out His plan? (It should give us confidence, knowing that God is able to accomplish His plan)

D. What did God use to bring Cornelius to salvation? (He used the preaching of the gospel) How important is the Word of God in accomplishing the mission God has given to us? (It is absolutely vital. God uses His Word to change men's hearts and to grow His children)

E. In what ways was Peter's sermon to Cornelius similar to his earlier sermons? (Peter focused on Christ, His life, death and resurrection. He also called men to believe for the forgiveness of sins.)

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God for His salvation that is open to all men
- ◆ Ask God to show you where He wants you to share His good news.
- ◆ Ask God to continue to bring His gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Lesson 26 – Faith and the Ordinances: Baptism

Theme: Baptism is an important response of obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Text: Acts 8:26-40

Memory Verse: Acts 8:36-37 *As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. **Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”** 37 **Phillip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”** The eunuch answered, **“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”***

Teacher Direction:

1. In these final lessons we are focusing on the gospel and the twin ordinances associated with it: baptism and communion. The previous two lessons focused on the conversions of Saul and Cornelius. This lesson will focus on Christian baptism.
2. Again it is important to remember the context of the book of Acts. God is at work building His church. The gospel has had an impact in Jerusalem and is now spreading to the surrounding area of Samaria and Judea. This story picks up after the gospel’s entrance into Samaria and will conclude with its proclamation along the coast from Gaza to Caesarea.
3. Help children to see the sovereign hand of God at work again. Note how God directs Phillip to take the road south from Jerusalem to Gaza; how God has prepared the Ethiopian minister of finance, placing him on the road, reading from the book of Isaiah; how the Spirit directs Phillip to speak to this man; how the Spirit snatches away Phillip after the baptism. This is all clearly God’s dealing. He is bringing His good news in widening circles.
4. Share with children about the conversation Phillip had with the Ethiopian. It might be good to look at parts of Isaiah 53 with the children, for certainly Phillip would have explained not only verses 7-8 but also much of this chapter. Help them see that Phillip’s focus was Jesus and how He is the Messiah, the one come from God to take away the sin of the world. Help them see that our Old Testament in many places points to Jesus’ ministry. Phillip would have taken the Ethiopian to many of these passages as well.
5. Finally share the place of baptism in this account. Having been confronted with the gospel, the Ethiopian was ready to respond. From his Jewish understandings, he knew that baptism was an important rite, for in baptism one identified himself with the people of God and declared that they were passing from death to life. With his new understanding of Jesus Christ, the Ethiopian was ready to do this. He wanted to identify himself not only with the true people of God, but also with the true Messiah. He also wanted to acknowledge that he, in faith, had passed out of death (due to the bondage of sin) into life. Note that verse 37 does not appear in many manuscripts. Nonetheless it offers the sound teaching that only those who believe with all their heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God can be baptized. Thus though the N.I.V. omits this verse it would be good to share it with the children.

6. Application

A. Baptism is an important response of obedience for those who have passed out of death into life. Every child of God must consider this carefully.

B. Look for God to lead you in your efforts to share the good news with others. Remember that this is His work after all.

C. Jesus is the focus of our faith. All our worship and praise should be centered in Him.

7. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. How did God show his sovereignty in bringing salvation to the Ethiopian? (He led Phillip right to the man God had prepared for salvation - see points under #3)

B. What was the message Phillip shared with the Ethiopian? Look at Isaiah 53 for help. (He shared that Christ willingly took our sins upon Himself so that we might pass from death to life.)

C. Why did the Ethiopian want to be baptized? (He wanted to identify himself with the people of God, show that He was a follower of Christ, and that he had passed out of death into life.)

D. What was required before the Ethiopian could be baptized? (He must believe with all his heart that Jesus was the Son of God) Tell what it means to believe with all your heart. (If you truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God you are saying that you believe Him to be your sovereign and that you not only receive Him as your only payment for sin but also willingly commit your life to His purposes.)

E. Is it important for a Christian to be baptized? Why or why not? (Christ commanded His disciples to teach and baptize. Many of the early sermons called people to be baptized. This must be an important act of obedience for the Christian.)

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God that Jesus took our sins upon Himself.
- ◆ Pray that God leads you as He did Phillip to those who need to hear the good news.

Lesson 27 – Faith and the Ordinances: Lord’s Supper

Theme: The Lord’s Supper is a time of remembrance of Christ’s death and of the bright hope that it brings to us both now and to eternity.

Text: Matthew 26:17-30

Memory Verse: *Matthew 26:28* “for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”

Teacher Direction:

1. These last lessons have focused on our salvation. We have looked at the examples of salvation coming to both Paul and Cornelius and have looked at one of the pictures or dramas of salvation, namely baptism. In this lesson we shall look at the second drama which is the Lord’s Supper.

2. It is important to remember that the Passover was a foreshadowing of Christ’s death on the cross and our subsequent deliverance from bondage. Remind the children that the Passover was a remembrance of (A.) The people of Israel’s bitter bondage in Egypt from which, in themselves, they had no power to escape. (B.) Their deliverance from that bondage through the application of the blood of a lamb. When the death angel saw the blood he did not bring judgment to that household.

Help children to see the foreshadowing here. We all are in bondage to sin from which we are powerless to free ourselves. But God provided a Lamb, Jesus Christ, whose blood, when applied by faith, frees us from the wrath and judgment of God.

3. Notice the links between the Passover, the actual death of Christ, and the Lord’s Supper. The Passover foreshadowed the death of Christ; Christ’s death was the reality—the substance of things; and the Lord’s Supper is now a remembrance of the reality. This may well be why Christ chose to institute the Lord’s Supper in the midst of the Passover celebration. He was tying them all together and transitioning from the shadow to the remembrance.

4. The center section of this passage (26:20-25) provides an important point of instruction for the children when linked with John 13:21-30. Before Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He spoke of His betrayal. The Matthew passage clearly shows that Judas is that betrayer. The passage in John offers an important additional insight. John tells us that after this revelation Judas leaves the group. Thus Judas did not participate in the the Lord’s Supper. The key point here is that unbelievers should not participate in this rite. It is only for the believer. That is why this rite should only be administered to those who have been baptized; baptism being the initiation rite into the community of believers.

5. Finally share with the children the details and symbolism of the Lord’s Supper. Include the following ideas:

A. The bread is broken and distributed to each participant. The bread symbolizes the body of Christ which was broken at the cross. Each person must personally take in Christ through faith. In taking Him in we are participating in His death (death to sin and selfishness) and in His life.

B. The cup is partaken by each. The wine represents the blood of Christ which was shed for the forgiveness of sins. In the Old Testament, blood was used to ratify a covenant (see Exodus 24:8). When Christ shed His blood He was establishing a New Covenant with the people of God. Those who are cleansed by Christ's blood are freed from the wrath of God and enter into His joy.

C. There is a future focus to the Lord's Supper. Just as the Passover celebrated the escape from Egypt and entrance into the promised land, so the Lord's Table celebrates escape from the bondage of sin and wrath, and anticipates the coming Kingdom which we experience in part now but shall fully experience it when Christ returns. Verse 29 alludes to this.

6. Application

A. Only those who are true believers should partake in the Lord's Supper.

B. As you partake, remember and rejoice in Christ's death for you, and rejoice in the hope of life you have and which you experience in part now, but fully, later.

7. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. In what ways does the Passover foreshadow the death of Christ? (The death of the lamb and the blood applied brought escape from the judgment of God and freedom from bondage)

B. Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper? (To celebrate our deliverance from the bondage of sin and death by the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ)

C. Who should partake of the Lord's Supper? (As Judas was excluded from the first celebration, all unbelievers should be excluded as well. The Lord's Supper is only for the true believer in Christ.)'

D. What does the bread symbolize? (The bread represents the body of Christ which was broken for us) What is the importance of each person partaking of the bread? (This act shows that each person must individually partake of Christ through faith. We participate in Christ's death and His life.)

E. What does the cup or wine symbolize? (The wine represents the blood of Christ which was shed for the forgiveness of sins, ratifying the New Covenant)

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God for His incredible gift of salvation through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank God for His immeasurable love.
- ◆ Pray that God continues to work His death in your life (making you less and less selfish) and to work His life in you (filling you with Christ-like love).

Lesson 28 – Paul: Called to bring the gospel to the Gentiles

Theme: The Holy Spirit sovereignly worked to send the gospel to the Gentiles through His chosen messengers.

Text: Acts 13:1-52

Memory Verse: *Ephesians 3:6* *This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

Teacher Direction:

1. In the lessons that remain this year we shall look at the second half of the book of Acts. It has been said that the first half of Acts focuses primarily (but not exclusively) on the ministry of Peter to the Jews, while the second half peers into Paul's special ministry to the Gentiles. In the lessons that follow we shall focus on Paul's ministry and show how God's Spirit directed Paul and his companions to open up the gospel to the Gentiles apart from any association to Judaism.

Note: It would be good to refer to Acts 9:15-16 which describes Paul specific calling from God. During the lessons seek to show how God directed Paul to fulfill this calling.

2. To introduce this lesson, ask the children if they have ever been excluded from a group. Perhaps there was a group of "cool" boys or girls who would not let them "hang" around with them. Or perhaps there was an exclusive club that only certain people could be members of, like those who live in a certain neighborhood, or those who wear the "right" kind of clothes,... Ask the children how they might feel if they were excluded from a group.

After some discussion tell the children that in Bible days there was a group of people called Gentiles who in many ways were excluded from the Jews. Though later they were able to learn about and worship the God of Israel (provided they connected themselves to the Jews), for a long time the Jews would have nothing to do with the Gentiles. They were considered as second class citizens. Tell the children that in today's lesson something really exciting happens for the Gentiles.

3. At this time relate the story from Acts 13. As you do so be sure to emphasize the following ideas.

A. The Call of Paul and Barnabas (vs. 1-3) – As we see so often in the book of Acts, it is the Holy Spirit who is working out His plan to bring the good news to the world. Very often God's people are unsure of what to do, but God, through the Holy Spirit, makes His will known. In this section it is the Holy Spirit who makes known His intention to use Barnabas and Paul for a very special work. (Note: though the special mission is not mentioned, it can be ascertained from 9:15-16 and the context that follows.) The church, as it should, listens to the Spirit's instruction and obeys by sending out these two.

B. Paul's direct message to a gentile (vs. 4-12) – A gentile rarely received direct instruction about the faith unless it was presented in a Jewish context (usually the synagogue). The Gentile needed to identify himself with the Jewish way of life and practices. But the Holy Spirit determined to show Paul that this was to be no longer the case. The Spirit ordered events so that Paul and Barnabas were called before Sergius

Paulus, the Roman proconsul. This may have been part of the proconsul's way of learning about Paul's business in his jurisdiction, but the Holy Spirit used the incident to show Paul that he could preach directly to the Gentiles and that God would use His word, even in this context, to convert souls. God certainly used this incident to help Paul develop his mission strategy. (Note the presence of opposition all along the way as Paul fulfills his mission. There is a lesson for all of God's servants in this.)

C. Paul's message at the synagogue (vs. 13-43) – It became Paul's mission strategy to preach in the synagogue first and then to go out to the Gentiles. Paul preached in the synagogue first, perhaps, because there he spoke to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who were theologically prepared to hear his message. As you look at Paul's sermon in this chapter, you can see its Jewish flavor, which could only be related to by those instructed in Israel's history of redemption. After gaining their attention with this history, Paul then showed how the coming of Christ was really the continuation and fulfillment of God's redemptive dealings with His people. Paul ends with a call to believe in Jesus, who is the Christ. Note: If time permits it would be good to have the children examine Paul's sermon to determine what he felt was essential to communicate when sharing the gospel.

D. Paul turns to the Gentiles (vs. 44-52) – After being rejected by the Jews and their leaders, Paul declares his purpose to go directly to the Gentiles. He states that this is exactly what he was commanded (even from the Scriptures). Upon hearing this, the Gentiles rejoice and those appointed to eternal life came to believe. The Jews, on the other hand, accelerate their opposition to Paul and his message. All in all, a new day for the Gentiles has come to blossom.

4. Application

A. God is sovereign and is working out His plan to bring salvation to His people. Each of us must daily ask God to enable us to fulfill our part in the outworking of God's plan.

B. As God's servants who proclaim God's word, we must expect persecution and trust God to protect us and bless the work to which He has called us.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. What is the difference between a Gentile and a Jew? (A Jew is a descendant of Abraham and an heir to the covenant promises. A Gentile is anyone who is not a Jew.)

B. In what way was a Gentile like a second-class citizen? (For many years Jews had nothing to do with Gentiles. Even in improved conditions the Gentile had to adopt Jewish practices in order to be acknowledged.)

C. Whose idea was it for Paul and Barnabas to preach to the Gentiles? (The Holy Spirit who commanded that they be set apart for this ministry.)

D. When did Paul first learn that he could preach directly to the Gentiles apart from the synagogue or any other Jewish trappings? (When he was called in by Sergius Paulus, Paul proclaimed the gospel to him, and saw his response.)

E. Why did Paul talk about the history of Israel when addressing the synagogue audience? (They all would have been familiar with this history. Paul started his sermon by speaking of things known to them.)

F. What did Paul call his listeners to do? (To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, as the promised deliverer for the people of God.)

G. Why did Paul say he was going to preach to the Gentiles? (Because the Jews rejected his message, and he felt called to this by God.)

H. How did the Gentiles respond to Paul's message? (Those who were appointed to eternal life believed. They rejoiced in being included as "the people of God".)

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God that He opened up salvation to all men, Jew and Gentile alike.
- ◆ Pray that God helps you to know and then to fulfill your role in the outworking of His great plan.
- ◆ Ask God for courage to share Christ even amidst persecution.

Lesson 29 – Paul: Establishing Churches among the Gentiles

Theme: God's servants are called to establish His church among all the peoples of the world.

Text: Acts 14:1-28

Memory Verse: Acts 14:23 *They appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*

Teacher Direction:

1. In our last lesson we saw how Paul, called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, was chosen by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the church in Antioch. On his first journey he learned that the Gentiles could come to faith in Christ apart from any linkage to the Jewish church. Toward the end of the lesson we saw how the Jews rejected Paul's message and how Paul subsequently declared his intent to go out to the Gentiles. This lesson (and its events) follows Paul's declaration and traces the early development, among other things, of a Gentile church.

2. To introduce this lesson take some time to review last week's lesson. Remind children that God's intent was to open up the gospel beyond the Jews to the Gentiles. After reviewing, ask the children how they might proceed if they were a missionary sent to open up the gospel to a new group of people. What would they do to try to make sure that their work among this people lasted? Encourage the children to follow today's account to see if they can pick up any pointers on a strategy for establishing God's church in the world.

3. As you share the account found in Acts 14 be sure to emphasize the following points.

A. The Struggle of the Mission – It seemed that wherever Paul and company went and faithfully preached the gospel, there was opposition. Quite often that opposition came from the Jews (as in this case) who frequently recruited others, even Gentiles, to aid their fight against the spread of this message. During this first missionary journey the Jews seemed intent on stoning Paul and his associates, which was the usual penalty for blasphemy. Yet the sovereign God would not be hindered from fulfilling His plan. In this account God provided numerous miracles, the most notable being the healing of the lame men, in order to validate the message of the apostles. This seems to be the most important function of miracles - that of validating the message and messenger as being from God.

B. The Message of the Mission – In Lystra Paul and Barnabas encounter a people steeped in idolatry. They worshipped a plethora of gods and subjected themselves to a number of superstitious practices. There may have been very little Jewish influence in this town. After the miraculous healing of the lame man and the attempted worship of Barnabas and Paul by these people, Paul addresses the crowd. Since this was a crowd unfamiliar with Jewish redemptive history, Paul begins by speaking of the Creator God. He acknowledges God's forbearance with their useless worship and then focuses on God's goodness to them witnessed by His providential care of them. It seems that Paul's sermon may have been cut short at this time by the mob who eventually stoned him.

Note: It might be good to examine Paul's sermon with the children. Why does he begin

begin talking about God as Creator? Why does He mention God's forbearance and providential care? Did Paul give this group of people enough information to become part of God's people? What else should Paul have included if he had had time to do so?

C. The Strategy of the Mission – It seems that everywhere Paul went he usually tried to speak with those who had some knowledge of God. That most often meant going to the synagogue where he would find Jews and God-fearing Gentiles very familiar with the flow of redemptive history. From there, often because the Jews stirred up trouble, Paul would go directly to the Gentiles, many of whom had little or no knowledge of the true God of the Bible.

As Paul spoke, numbers of people came to believe the message. It appears that Paul sought to gather these folks together (thus forming a church) and give them more teaching and encouragement. In time, he would seek to appoint elders so that this community would have leadership that would provide stability and encourage growth in the Lord. Often Paul would return to these newly formed communities to encourage their growth and help them deal with the problems they faced. This seems to be Paul's strategy for establishing churches among the Gentiles.

4. Application

A. As we give our lives to teach others about Jesus, know that we will be troubled by those who do not love our Lord. Though persecuted, however, we should not lose hope because God is able to work miraculously in us and through us.

B. Since God's design is to establish His church throughout the world, we should do all we can to see local churches get started and then established. We should be faithful to support the work of our local church making sure we use our gifts to build others up around us.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. Where did Paul usually go first when he entered a city? Why? (Paul usually went first to the synagogue because there he found people knowledgeable with the true God.)

B. When we are faithful to teach others God's truth, what difficulty are we likely to face as a consequence? Why? (We are likely to face persecution because the forces of evil do not want to see the Kingdom of God grow.)

C. Why did God perform miracles through Paul and the other apostles? What was the purpose of those miracles? (God performed miracles to validate the message and the messenger. The miracles showed that God was behind the proclamation, not withstanding the Jews accusations to the contrary.)

D. What did Paul talk about in his message to the people at Lystra? Was his message complete? (Paul spoke of God as Creator, Judge and Sustainer. It seems his message was incomplete because he was ushered off to be stoned.)

E. What was included in Paul's strategy to establish churches amongst the Gentiles? (He preached the Word, gathered those who believed into communities, provided continued teaching and support, appointed leaders, and kept in touch personally as often as

often as possible.)

F. If you were a missionary sent to preach the gospel to a new people group, how might you try to go about your mission? (Answers vary. Hopefully students will utilize something of what they heard in the lesson.)

Prayer

- ◆ Continue to pray that God's Kingdom comes to more and more people.
- ◆ Pray that God shows you your part in His plan, and then pray for faithfulness to fulfill it.
- ◆ Pray for a willingness to endure whatever God determines as you go out and share Christ with others.
- ◆ Pray that God shows you one or two others with whom you can share the good news.

Lesson 30 – Paul: Clarifying the Gospel

Theme: The Gospel (good news) proclaims that salvation comes to all men through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Text: Acts 15:1-35

Memory Verse: *Acts 15:11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."*

Teacher Direction:

1. In the past two lessons we have seen the glorious events that accompanied the opening of the gospel to the Gentiles. We have seen, even perhaps to the surprise of Paul, that God was ready to deal directly with the Gentiles apart from the Jewish milieu. We also saw, however, that wherever God is at work there is sure to be obstacles.

Obstacles to the advance of the gospel often take two forms. One is persecution from without; the other is heresy from within. The situation from Acts 15 deals with the latter obstacle. Nothing could be more detrimental to the advancement of God's Kingdom than a veiled gospel. This account shows how the early church dealt with this potentially dangerous situation.

2. To introduce this lesson, ask children if they ever get into an argument or a disagreement. Allow children to share their experiences. Then ask children how they sought to handle their problem. Did they get into a fistfight or yell at each other, or did they go to their parents for some help? Share with the children that in today's story there is a sharp disagreement between some people in the church. Encourage the children to listen well to see what the disagreement was, how they handled it, and how it affected the growth of God's Kingdom.

3. As you share the account found in Acts 15 be sure to emphasize the following points:

A. The Essence of the Dispute – Paul had been sent out by the Holy Spirit and the church of Antioch to minister especially to the Gentiles. This in many ways was new territory for both Paul and the church. There were many unanswered questions. What would this ministry look like? How would the Gentiles relate to the Jewish Christians?

Fortunately for Paul, he only needed to depend on God and let Him answer those questions. Shortly after departing on his first missionary journey God showed Paul that the Gentiles could come to Christ apart from the necessity of becoming Jewish in lifestyle and practice. Salvation was by the grace of God through faith.

When word got out to certain Jewish circles that the Gentiles were coming to faith and were not encouraged to become "Jewish", great concern arose. Certain Jews took it upon themselves to proclaim the necessity of Gentiles being circumcised and following the laws of Moses in order to be saved. When Paul heard this, however, he strongly disputed with these men because God had shown him differently.

Note: Paul disputed with these men because he saw the theological implications of what they were saying. In essence they were adding to the Gospel of God's grace. They were saying, perhaps unintentionally, that salvation was by God's grace and circumcision and by living a Jewish lifestyle. Paul knew such a gospel would have tragic effects on the life

effects on the life of the church.

B. The Handling of the Dispute – How should such a dispute be handled in this fledgling church? The unity of the church, which is so essential, could be shattered by a disagreement of this sort. In wisdom the church in Antioch chose to send Paul and others to the Jerusalem church, where the apostles and the elders of the church in Jerusalem could seek God's direction in this matter. This demonstrated their submission especially to the leadership of the apostles.

When the two sides came together, they presented their cases before the church leaders. Peter spoke of what God had clearly shown him to be His will concerning the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas also shared what God had most clearly shown them, even what God showed them through miraculous happenings. When James heard these words he affirmed them showing how they, too, were consistent with God's revealed will in the Scriptures.

Note: To settle this dispute, James looked at what God seemed to be doing among them, and at the Scriptures. Once convinced by both of these witnesses, he urged his auditors to not go against what God was doing. This may serve as an excellent pattern for settling disputes in God's church.

C. The Conclusion of the Dispute – On the surface it may appear that James and the council caved in to the pressure of the Judaizers (those who wanted Gentiles to become Jews to be saved). Their recommendations seem to add to the gospel of God's grace. But really James and the council handed down a decision on two levels. The first level was theological. The Gentiles would not have to be circumcised nor become Jewish in order to be saved. This preserved the grace of God. Nothing needs to be added by man in order to be saved. The second level was more sociological. The Gentiles, in deference to their Jewish Christian brothers, needed to abstain from a few things that were very offensive to them. Thus, James and the council were able to proclaim the grace of God in salvation, while promoting the unity of the church. When this word was received by the Gentiles, it was received with great joy.

4. Application

- A. When we come to God we must come empty-handed. We can add nothing to the grace of God. He has done all concerning our salvation.
- B. It is important that we add nothing to our presentation of the gospel. It is not by works that we are saved, but according to God's mercy.
- C. In settling disputes among God's people we must seek wisdom from the Scriptures, and also observe the confirming hand of God.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

- A. What had God shown Paul on his first missionary journey? (He showed Paul that the Gentiles can come to be His people apart from becoming Jewish.)
- B. What were some Jews saying that disturbed Paul? (They said that the Gentiles had to become circumcised and follow the law of Moses to be saved.)

C. Why did this bother Paul? (These Jews were adding to the grace of God. The Jews could not keep the law themselves, it only condemned them. Jew and Greek alike could only come to God by His grace.)

D. How did the church in Antioch decide to settle this dispute? (They decided to take their case before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. They submitted themselves to these men.)

E. What influenced James most in settling the dispute? (He saw what God was apparently doing and saw that this was attested to by the Scriptures.)

F. Did James and the council give in to the Judaizers? (No. They affirmed that salvation is by grace alone and then sought to preserve the unity of this newly forming church.)

G. What is meant by “being saved by the grace of God”? (We come to God because He draws us to Himself. When we come we offer nothing to warrant our salvation. We lean wholly upon His mercy found in Jesus Christ.)

Prayer

- ◆ Pray that God's church grows in unity.
- ◆ Pray that the gospel message is proclaimed in truth and that God will protect it from any and every perversion.
- ◆ Thank God that we can come to Him and receive salvation by His grace.

Lesson 31 – Paul: The Expansion of the Gospel to the Gentiles

Theme: God uses the obedient trust of His people to grow His Kingdom.

Text: Acts 16:6-40

Memory Verse: *Psalm 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:*

Teacher Direction:

1. In our last lesson we observed how the early church handled a potentially divisive dispute. Paul and friends were sent by their church to the leaders in Jerusalem to present their case and to seek God's guidance. The final outcome of the event must have pleased Paul since it affirmed what he knew the Lord had miraculously shown him.

Having received this affirmation, Paul must have been energized to diligently continue the mission God had given to him. As we continue his travels in this lesson, we will see how God directed his every step. We will also see what implicit trust Paul had in God especially in difficult times. Hopefully the children will learn that following the Lord may not be an easy road, but that trust in God will not fail them.

2. As you begin this lesson ask children how they react when things are difficult for them. Maybe, as part of a sports team, they are required to do enormous amounts of exercise. Maybe, as part of a class in school, they are required to memorize an enormous amount of information. Maybe, as part of their chores at home, they are required to perform some very arduous tasks. After some discussion and sharing, point out to the children that people faced with difficulty often want to quit or at least get out of the difficulty as soon as possible.

Tell the children that in today's story, two of God's servants get into a very difficult situation. Encourage them to listen and see what this situation was, how they reacted to it, and why.

3. As you share the account in Acts 16 be sure to emphasize the following concepts:

A. The Call to Macedonia (vs. 6-12) – After the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) Paul followed up on several of the churches he had established on his first missionary journey. From there he purposed to spread further west before heading south toward Ephesus. God, however, intervened. Twice He forbid Paul's entrance into a new territory, and finally, through a vision, expressed His will that Paul bring the gospel to Macedonia.

This call to Macedonia was significant for several reasons. First, it opened up the gospel to this important city (Philippi) situated on key land and sea routes. From there the gospel would invade Europe and eventually the West. Secondly, it showed that God was in control. This was His program for the expansion of the gospel. His servants only needed to follow where He directed. Finally, this call gave Paul a confidence that he was where God wanted him. This confidence was extremely helpful as Paul encountered difficulty in Philippi.

B. The First Converts in Macedonia (vs. 13-15) – According to Paul's usual strategy he sought to find a Jewish synagogue in which to begin his proclamation. The fact was,

however, that Philippi most likely did not have a synagogue. In order to have a synagogue, a city needed ten male heads of household. Where ten could not be found it was permissible to establish a place of prayer, often near a river, where the Scriptures could be read and where prayers could be made. Not finding a synagogue, Paul then proceeded to the place of prayer.

Paul's arrival at this place of prayer, as a Jewish teacher, would have been a blessing to those gathered. For this reason, Paul was given opportunity to teach. While Paul was preaching, God opened the heart of Lydia, and presumably others, and a church was formed. Surely this would have been confirmation again that Paul was where God wanted him to be. God seemed to be opening a door for the gospel in this region.

C. A Struggle in Macedonia (vs. 16-40) – As Paul continued his ministry he was followed by a slave girl possessed by a demon. When Paul saw that more attention might be given to the words of this girl's demon than to the gospel, he expelled the demon in the name of Christ. This caused the girl's owners to stir up some anti-Semitic sentiment and resulted in Paul and Silas being severely mistreated and then jailed.

Such a situation may have discouraged many a missionary, but not Paul and Silas. They were found that night praying and singing praises. How could such things be? Most likely Paul and Silas were convinced of their call. They knew God wanted them in Philippi. They had already seen fruit. This difficulty was only an opportunity to trust God and watch Him work. This is exactly what happened. That night God used an earthquake to release Paul and Silas, and more importantly, the jailer and his household came to believe in Christ. Paul left Philippi with the beginnings of a new church which, in time, became a great influence for Christ.

4. Application

God has a plan for the expansion of His Kingdom. His servants only need to submit to that plan. When difficulties come, God's servants must trust God to take care of them, knowing that He will be glorified and His Kingdom expanded as they remain in a posture of obedient trust.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. How did Paul learn that God was in charge of the expansion of His Kingdom? (Twice He did not permit Paul to enter a territory Paul intended to go, and finally God gave specific direction through a vision.)

B. Why did Paul go to a place of prayer instead of a synagogue as he usually did? (Most likely there was not a synagogue in Philippi because there were not ten male Jewish heads of household. Thus, the next best thing was a place of prayer.)

C. What kind of reception did Paul receive at this place of prayer? (They were glad to hear him speak. Also, God used Paul to bring Lydia and several others to faith in Christ.)

D. What kind of reception did Paul receive later on in Philippi? Why? (He was mistreated and jailed because several men lost a source of income and probably were prejudiced.)

E. Why weren't Paul and Silas discouraged and ready to quit after being jailed? (They knew they were called to Philippi and trusted God to take care of them. They knew they were still in God's care.)

F. What did Paul and Silas leave behind as a result of their faithful service to their God? (A new church had formed.)

G. How should Christians view difficulty in their life? (They should trust God to care for them expecting God to use this to expand His Kingdom.)

H. Are you being used of God to expand His Kingdom? If so, how?

Prayer

- ◆ Ask God to cultivate in you an obedient trust, especially in the midst of difficulty.
- ◆ Thank God for an opportunity to serve Him in bringing His Kingdom to earth.
- ◆ Ask God for guidance as to how He desires you to serve Him in the expansion of His Kingdom.

Lesson 32 – Paul: A Gospel Presentation to the Gentiles

Theme: A presentation of the gospel should begin where listeners have some understanding, and must end with Christ and the need to respond in repentance.

Text: Acts 17:16-34

Memory Verse: *Acts 17:30* *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.*

Teacher Direction:

1. In our last lesson we saw how God directed Paul to preach the gospel in Macedonia, especially Philippi. We also saw how Paul endured great suffering, but kept on preaching because of his sure sense of call. That sense of call led him to preach again in Thessalonika, as well as Berea, though both stays were probably brief because of persecution from the Jews. These circumstances led Paul to Athens where today's story takes place.

In Athens Paul is confronted with rampant paganism, to such an extent that he cannot constrain himself to keep quiet. After talking in the marketplace, he is asked to present his "message" in the Areopagus. It is this message that we would like to look at to see if we can learn anything about sharing the gospel with the many in our society today who know little about our Bible.

2. As you begin, ask the children how they might try to describe something they had seen to a person who had never seen it. As children discuss their ideas, help them understand that the best way to describe this "unknown" thing would be to try and describe its similarities or differences to something their listeners already know. For example, in the Bible some of the authors speak about heaven, and in order to communicate what God has shown them about heaven, they sought to use words and ideas that their readers might understand.

Tell the children that in today's story the Apostle Paul is going to try and tell a group of people in Athens about their need for Jesus Christ. But because what he is talking about is so foreign to them, Paul has to use words and ideas that are familiar to them. Encourage the children to listen and try to learn how Paul sought to share the good news with people who had little idea about which he was talking.

3. As you share the account in Acts 17 be sure to emphasize the following ideas:

A. Some background on Athens – Athens was a city with a great history. Historically once a political power, it had been reduced to submit to Roman rule, but even in doing so, it retained its great cultural and intellectual heritage and influence. It was a city of many temples and their associated gods. The people were a worshipping people. There were also many philosophies that contended for the minds of the people. The people were known for their desire to debate about ideas and their fondness for new ideas.

In Athens a place called the Areopagus existed. There the Athenian Council of Ares, the chief judicial body of the city, exercised its jurisdiction over religious and educational matters. Those brought before this council were given opportunity to express their views and then would either be allowed to continue their proclamation or would be censored. Presumably, as recorded in Acts 17, Paul was brought before this body.

B. The use of the known – In Athens, among the crowds in the marketplace or at the Areopagus, Paul couldn't begin his proclamation by referring to Jewish history. These people were not familiar with Jewish history, nor were they interested in hearing about Jewish prophecy. They were also not convinced of the authority of the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament). Paul needed to find another approach to gain his listeners' interest and attention.

Paul chose to focus on the altar of "the unknown god" which was certainly an object with which they were at least familiar. Paul claimed to declare to them the God that they did not know.

In his proclamation Paul focused on God as Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth, who owes nothing to man for His existence. He focused on God as the source of all life, and the One who determines the existence of nations and their boundaries. He also spoke of God as judge. These would have been ideas that the Athenians had previously wrestled. Paul also took on the ignorance of the Athenians, expressed in their thoughts about the gods living in temples, about man's ability somehow to sustain the gods, about the uniqueness of the people of Athens, and expressed in their worship of man-made idols.

C. The core of the gospel – Paul used the above to lead his listeners to Christ and their needed response to Him. These were the non-negotiables of his message. After having declared God's patience with man's ignorance, Paul called his listeners to repentance. He said that God would be entering into judgment with them by One whom He raised from the dead, Jesus Christ. This One they must receive in faith or face certain judgment.

Sadly, many mocked at Paul's message. Some put off a response saying they wanted to hear more. Only a few placed their trust in Christ and joined Paul for a time. This city, so steeped in its paganism, turned away the only message that could have brought them true life and hope. It is said that no church was established in Athens during the Apostolic Age.

4. Application

A. When we share Christ with others we must work hard to explain things in terms that they will understand, but we must never compromise the centrality of Christ and the need to respond in repentance and faith.

B. When we share Christ we must expose the foolishness and emptiness of the idols that our listeners are worshipping and point them to the only true object of worship, Jesus Christ.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. What was different about Paul's audience at the Areopagus? (They had no Jewish background, thus were not necessarily swayed by arguments about Jewish history and prophecy from a Jewish text.)

B. What was the Areopagus? (It was the place where city officials would hear the ideas of others and determine if they were worthy of dissemination in their city.)

C. What did Paul say about God in his proclamation at the Areopagus? (He focused on God being Creator and Lord, not deriving any of His existence from man, being the source of all life, and being the One who will one day judge all men.)

D. What did Paul say specifically about Jesus Christ? (He is the One God has appointed to judge the earth. He proved this by raising Christ from the dead.)

E. To what response was Paul trying to lead his listeners? (He called all men to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.)

F. If you were going to share Christ with someone in your school or neighborhood who is unaware of what the Bible says, where would you begin? What could you talk about that is known to your listener?

Prayer

- ◆ Pray that God directs you to those He has prepared to receive His Word.
- ◆ Pray that God helps you be ready to share the gospel in a way that is understandable.
- ◆ Pray that God opens your eyes to see the idols you may be serving and to repent.

Lesson 33 – Paul: Suffering as God’s called one

Theme: Those who bear the name of Christ are called to suffer as their Lord suffered.

Text: Acts 21:1 – 22:29

Memory Verse: *Acts 20:24* However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. **OR 1 Peter 2:21** To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Teacher Direction:

1. In the past four lessons we have been looking at the apostle Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. We saw how he was called by God to preach the gospel among the Gentiles. We also saw how that ministry developed and what kind of response it had among Jewish Christians.

In the remaining four lessons we shall focus on Paul’s journey to Jerusalem and then eventually to Rome. We shall follow along with Paul seeing how he fulfilled everything predicted of him by God (9:15-16). This lesson shall highlight especially the predicted suffering that Paul endured, which mirrors the lot of everyone who desires to follow the Lord’s example.

2. To introduce this lesson, ask the children if they would be likely to take a job where they knew they would have to suffer greatly. For example, would they take a job as the Diamondbacks’ bat boy knowing that the players would kick them around, spit their tobacco wads at them, hit them with their bats, and generally abuse them with their words? Or would they take a job as a paper boy knowing that street gangs were going to try to make the job impossible, that ungrateful customers would continually be complaining, and that they had to deliver the papers during the hottest parts of the day? Hopefully, after discussion, the children will see that knowing such difficulties awaited them might really discourage them from wanting to do the job at all.

Remind the children that the apostle Paul was called by God to preach to the Gentiles and knew ahead of time that he would suffer greatly. Encourage them to listen to today’s story and see not only how Paul suffered, but also how he responded to that suffering.

3. As you share the account in Acts 21-22 be sure to emphasize the following points:

A. The call to suffer – After Paul was transformed by a miracle of God’s grace on the road to Damascus, he was called by God into His service. That service was to stand before Gentiles, kings, and the house of Israel and proclaim the grace of God. It also would involve much suffering for the name of Christ.

Paul did not shrink away from his calling because of the inevitability of suffering. In fact, he purposed to go wherever God wanted him to go, knowing that suffering awaited him. (Note: In 19:21 Paul purposes to go to Jerusalem and then on to Rome. In 20:22-24 Paul declares that he knew chains and tribulations awaited him.) Even when his beloved brethren sought to keep him from going to Jerusalem, Paul was unmoved because he

desired above all to fulfill the ministry the Lord had given to him. He already knew suffering would be part of it because the Lord informed him of this from day one.

B. The experience of suffering – It should be noted that the apostle Paul did not bring unnecessary suffering upon himself. He did not go out of his way looking for suffering because the Lord had said He would suffer. The opposite is, in fact, true. When warned by church leaders in Jerusalem of hostile sentiment against him, Paul was willing to pay expenses related to four men taking a Nazarite vow. This was meant to appease the Jews, but in no way compromise his message. Later, when the commander was about to have Paul examined by flogging, Paul claimed his Roman citizenship to avoid such torture. Paul was definitely not out looking for suffering.

On the other hand, though, Paul was willing to endure the suffering the Lord laid out for him. After paying for the expenses of the four men mentioned earlier, the Jews still excited the crowd against Paul. They took Paul and dragged him out of the temple and began beating him. They falsely accused him and yelled out “away with him” to demonstrate their desire to see Paul executed. Yet, if we believe Paul’s words, none of these things moved him. This was part of his calling from God.

C. The example of suffering – It is amazing how closely this account of Paul’s suffering parallels our Lord’s. As Paul purposed to make his way to Jerusalem knowing suffering awaited him, so had our Lord done the same. As Paul was mistreated by the Jews and Gentile leaders, so had they treated our Lord. As Paul was abused physically and verbally, so had our Lord endured the same. Yet no suffering surprised Paul because he knew what it cost His Lord to fulfill His ministry. He knew that if the Christ, who was his life, had suffered greatly, so would he suffer. This is a lesson all followers of Jesus Christ need to learn and embrace.

4. Application

A. God has called all of His children to suffer for the name of Christ. Such suffering is to be expected, for the one who has Jesus living in them, will provoke the hostility of men who do not desire to come to the light of the gospel.

B. Do not shrink back from suffering for the name of Christ, but also do not rush into suffering created by your own folly.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. Was suffering part of the call of God for Paul’s life? How do you know? (Yes. After bringing Paul to faith, God declared that Paul must suffer as he fulfills his ministry.)

B. How had God prepared Paul for the suffering he received in Jerusalem? (In every city Paul visited he was warned that chains and tribulations awaited him.)

C. How did Paul suffer in Jerusalem? (He was dragged out of the temple and beaten. He was falsely accused by the Jews who desired his execution.)

D. How did Paul respond to the prospect of suffering as well as the reality of suffering? (He said, “None of these things move me.” Paul only wanted to faithfully fulfill the ministry to which God had called him.)

E. Did Paul take any measures to avoid suffering? (Yes, he sought to appease the Jews without compromising his message, and he claimed his Roman citizenship to avoid a flogging.)

F. Are all Christians called to suffer? Why or why not? (Jesus said all His followers would suffer persecution. It makes sense that if Christ suffered when He walked the earth, that we, in whom He dwells now, will experience the same suffering as He did.)

Prayer

- ◆ Pray that God gives you courage to face the suffering that God calls you to endure for His name's sake.
- ◆ Pray that God gives you the grace and passion to desire, above all, to faithfully fulfill the ministry to which God has called you.

Lesson 34 – Paul: A Faithful Witness

Theme: All Christians must be ready to bear faithful witness in whatever situation the Lord has called them.

Text: Acts 25:1 – 26:32

Memory Verse: *Acts 26:22* But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— **OR 1 Peter 3:15** But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

Teacher Direction:

1. In the book of Acts we see outward movement in the proclamation of the gospel. First, it is proclaimed in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and finally toward the uttermost parts. Even in Paul's ministry we see the expansion of the gospel. With each missionary trip Paul reaches further and further with his message of the crucified and risen Jesus. Note: It seems that Rome is the final destination as far as Paul's ministry is concerned. Luke seems to be chronicling, in these final chapters of Acts, Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome.

In this lesson we will see the events that led to Paul's eventual voyage to and arrival in Rome. As important as it is to describe the circumstances that led to Paul reaching Rome, Luke's purpose here far exceeds this. His reason for including this account also involves showing how God's call upon Paul was fulfilled. In Acts 9:15-16 we see that God's plan and purpose for Paul included proclaiming Christ to "kings". In this account we see that plan fulfilled as Paul stands before a king, a governor, and a host of other dignitaries, and faithfully shares the message that transformed his life.

2. To introduce this lesson, ask the children what they might say if they were given the chance to speak to the President, the governor of the state, and a number of other important government officials. Ask them to tell you what they might say if they wanted to make sure they shared about Jesus Christ. Note: You may want each child to write down a few ideas on paper first to ensure that each gives real thought to the question. When each has written something, then have them share their ideas.

Tell the children that in today's lesson, the Apostle Paul has just such an opportunity. Standing before a king, a governor and a host of other important people, Paul boldly shares about his faith in Jesus Christ. Encourage the children to listen well to see what Paul shared so that when God gives them opportunities to talk to others, they will be ready.

3. As you share the account from Acts 25-26 be sure to cover the concepts that follow:

A. Called to Witness – As we have seen throughout the book of Acts, Paul was called by God with a purpose. In Acts 9:15-16 we saw that that purpose was to bear the name of Christ before kings, the house of Israel, and the Gentiles. In this passage (26:15-18) we again clearly see that Paul was called to be a minister and a witness. He was to proclaim the message of Christ, especially to the Gentiles, in order to "open their eyes, ...to turn them from darkness to light, ...from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive

receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance” Note: Help the children see that when God calls us to be His own, He does so, so that we might be his ministers (servants) and witnesses.

B. Faithful to Witness – Paul was indeed faithful to his calling. When summoned before King Agrippa, Festus and the others, he must have thought about God’s earlier words to him (9:15-16). He must have thought that now God was giving him opportunity to bear His name. This is exactly what Paul did. Knowing Agrippa’s familiarity with the Jewish faith (he had to be familiar since it was his job to appoint the high priest), Paul presented his message in terms a man of Agrippa’s background and standing would understand. Then he did the unthinkable – he asked Agrippa if he believed the prophets. This would have been somewhat embarrassing to the king. After the king suggested the unlikelihood of his coming to Christ with so few words, Paul then declared his desire that all who were in attendance would come to be as he was, presumably a follower of Christ. It appears from Luke’s account that Paul took full advantage of this situation into which God had placed him.

C. The Content of Paul’s Witness – What did Paul share with this important group? Generally, Paul shared his life. He began with his life before Christ, especially how in his zeal for the Jewish faith he persecuted Christians and even caused them to blaspheme. He then shared how he came to faith in Christ when the Lord met him on the road to Damascus. This event obviously had a lasting and profound impact on Paul’s life. Finally, Paul shared his new life after he found Christ, especially how he was obedient to the “heavenly vision” and faithfully stood before great and small alike proclaiming the gospel.

More specifically, Paul shared what Moses and the prophets had proclaimed before. He shared that Christ must suffer and die, and then be raised from the dead. Once raised He must be proclaimed to all people so that they will “repent, come to God, and do works befitting repentance”. Those who come to Christ will “receive the forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith”.

4. Application

Those whom God calls, He commissions to be His ministers and witnesses where He places them. Though most people will not be placed before kings and governors, it is still essential to bear the name of Christ faithfully. Part of being faithful is being ready at all times to share the essentials of the gospel and how they have had impact in one’s own life.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion

A. Why didn’t Paul want to go down to Jerusalem to stand trial? (Paul knew he was headed for Rome. Secondly, he knew he would not get a fair trial in Jerusalem.)

B. Why did Festus want Paul to defend himself before Agrippa? Why did Paul really get this opportunity? (He said that he needed a solid reason for sending Paul to Caesar. God, however, was giving Paul an opportunity to bear His name before kings.)

C. How was Paul's life different after he found Christ? (Prior to coming to Christ Paul persecuted Christians. After coming to Christ he proclaimed Christ to Jew and Gentile alike.)

D. How did Paul show his faithfulness to his calling to be a witness? (He boldly shared Christ, even asking the king if he believed.)

E. What important elements of the gospel did Paul share with this audience? (He shared Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. He called men to repent and bear fruit worthy of repentance. He proclaimed the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ.)

F. What is your story? If given the opportunity how would you share what Christ has done for you? (Note: It might be good to have the children write out a personal testimony. Be sure they include the essential elements of the gospel and how these truths have impacted their lives.)

Prayer

- ◆ Pray that God enables you to be faithful to His calling.
- ◆ Pray for opportunities to be a witness for Christ. Ask God for sensitivity to His Spirit.
- ◆ Pray for courage to stand before men and bear the name of Christ.

Lesson 35 – Paul: God provides for His servant

Theme: Where God leads His servant, He is sure to provide and protect.

Text: Acts 27

Memory Verse: *Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.* Note: You may want to challenge the children to memorize verses 2-3 as well.

Teacher Direction:

1. As we said in earlier lessons, Luke seems to be chronicling the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome in the book of Acts. Central to this expansion is God's chosen servant, Paul, to whose life Luke gives much attention. As we look at the 27th chapter of the book in this lesson, we can see the final destination is very near. Though fraught with obstacles, there is an underlining confidence that God will bring His servant safely to Rome in order to proclaim the name of Christ. It is hoped that the children will grow in their confidence in God as they see His powerful hand in this account.

2. As you begin this lesson ask the children if any of them have ever lived through a tornado or a hurricane, or even an earthquake. If any of the children have experienced one of these phenomenon, allow them to share how they felt and what they did during this scary time. If none of the children have experienced any of these perils, simply ask them to tell how they think people feel during those times. Hopefully, the children will suggest that such times are very frightening.

Next, tell the children that in today's story, some people on a ship are confronted with a very frightening storm. Encourage them to listen well and to try to find out how they reacted. Also encourage them to see what kept one man from becoming frightened like the rest.

3. As you share the account from Acts 27 be sure to cover the concepts that follow:

A. The Providence of God – God had called Paul to bear witness before the house of Israel, kings, and the gentiles. God also made it clear that Paul would suffer in Jerusalem (which had happened) and then travel on to Rome. Thus when Paul was boarding a ship that would eventually bring him to Rome, he had no reason to doubt that he would soon be in Rome.

The voyage, however, proved perilous. Caught in hurricane-type weather for 14 days, it seemed as if there was no reason to hope. Yet the apostle Paul seemed to be confident that he and others would make their journey safely. How could he have such confidence in the midst of overwhelming odds?

Two things must have contributed to Paul's confidence. One obviously was the message he received from the angel. Through the angel God communicated His plan for Paul to stand trial before Caesar. But Paul's confidence must also have stemmed from his prior experience of God. God had miraculously converted Paul and then commissioned him. Paul had seen God's hand and faithfulness every step of the way. He knew even a huge storm could not interrupt God's plan for his life and ministry. God truly cares for those whom He has called. In the worst of times His servants can be sure that God's purposes will be accomplished.

B. The Salvation of God – In the midst of this account we see a beautiful picture of the salvation of God. The men in the ship were in an impossible situation. They were controlled by a force (hurricane winds) from which they could not escape. They were helpless before this force and they had come to believe they were without hope. Some men tried to rescue themselves by getting into a boat, but such self-rescue would have only led to certain death. Where could these men turn? They could turn only in one direction and that is to God. He alone could be trusted to deliver them from certain death and destruction. By trusting God and following His word through His servant, these men were able to be brought to safety.

In like manner, all men are confronted with a force (sin) from which they cannot escape. Before this force they stand helpless and without hope. Any human effort to try to escape from or master this force would be futile and only lead to certain death and destruction. Again, however, there is a way of escape. That way is to look to God alone and trust Him for deliverance. He is able to bring those who look solely to Him safely to their desired haven.

4. Application

Those who know Christ, who are called to be His servants, can be confident in the midst of any trouble. Their lives are in God's hands and He is able and willing to care for them and to protect them. When trouble comes, as it most certainly will, the Christian servant must keep his confidence in God who will bring to pass all that He has willed concerning this person.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion questions

A. To where was Paul headed? (Rome)

B. Did Paul have any reason to be confident that he would arrive there? (Yes, God had told him he would suffer in Jerusalem and then make his way to Rome.)

C. What circumstances might have made Paul doubt that he would make it safely to Rome? (The ship was confronted with hurricane winds.)

D. What kept Paul's spirits up in the midst of such perilous conditions? (God had assured him of his safe arrival in Rome through an angel. Paul had seen God's powerful and faithful hand in his life previously.)

E. In what way does this story show the salvation of God? (Men, helplessly and hopelessly led on by sin, are rescued, not by self-effort, but by obediently trusting in the grace and mercy of God.)

F. In what way did Paul give witness for Christ in this situation? (Paul proclaimed his confidence in God to accomplish what He had said. He acknowledged God by giving thanks to Him for the provision of food.)

G. Do you have confidence in God to believe that whatever happens in your life is ordained by Him? Will your confidence sustain you in the dark hours of your life? How can you better prepare for those difficult times that will come?

Prayer

- ◆ Pray for faith to stand firm in the midst of trouble
- ◆ Thank God that He is a faithful provider and protector.
- ◆ Thank God for His salvation in Jesus Christ; for His deliverance when we were without hope and helpless to save ourselves.

Lesson 36 – Paul: Arrival in Rome

Theme: The gospel's arrival in Rome with Paul marks the end of Luke's chronicling of the early church, but also marks the beginning of the continued mission of the church even until today.

Text: Acts 28

Memory Verse: *Mark 16:15* He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

Teacher Direction:

1. In the past eight lessons we have chronicled together the ministry of the apostle Paul. We have seen that Luke, the author of Acts, has taken us on a journey with Paul that was continually pointing towards Rome. This gospel message, which had so transformed this chosen servant of God, needed to be proclaimed in the Roman Empire starting in Rome. Though the journey was fraught with obstacles there was always a great sense of confidence that God was bringing all this to pass.

In this final lesson we see the culmination of the journey. After nearly perishing in a terrible storm, God provides hospitality and eventual safe passage for Paul to Rome. In Rome Paul is able to present his case before the Jewish authorities though their response is mixed. The book ends with Paul preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus without hindrance. One finishes a reading of the book sensing, on one hand, that the mission is complete (the gospel came to Rome with Paul), but on the other hand, that the work was now only beginning (bringing the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.) Hopefully the children will be encouraged to take up the mantle and, by God's grace, spread the gospel to all creatures.

2. As you begin this lesson ask the children if they have ever gone on a long trip or vacation. Assuming quite a few have, encourage them to share what kind of preparation goes into a trip like that. Look for responses like: one has to gather food and clothing, one has to map out a route, one has to plan for emergencies, one has to prepare the car for the trip,

Next ask the children how they would feel if while on the journey they got a flat tire or they took an incorrect route, or they were detoured. Hopefully children will suggest that they might be a bit discouraged. Also ask the children how they would feel, having met a number of obstacles, to finally arrive at their desired destination. Again it is hoped the children will suggest that they would be delighted.

Finally, tell the children that in today's story we will learn of the end of Paul's journey. Encourage them to listen for what obstacles he had to overcome and for how he was able to overcome them. Urge them to enter into this exciting story which has a joyous ending.

3. As you share the account from Acts 27 be sure to cover the concepts that follow:

A. Numerous obstacles – From the time Paul joined the ranks of believers in Jesus Christ his life was filled with obstacles. The Jews continually persecuted him and made his way more difficult. This voyage to Rome was no exception. He experienced a terrible storm, hunger and shipwreck. On the island he was bitten by a snake. Very likely Paul, as a prisoner, was being watched continually and his activity was certainly limited by this. Even in Rome, though his situation could have been worse, his life was restricted. Yet this kind of obstacles should not be surprising to a believer. When the Lord called Paul, He told him that he must suffer for the sake of the gospel. This is to be expected by all of God's chosen ones.

B. Sufficient Provision – Though obstacles are normal for God's servant, so is the provision of God. With every obstacle God showed Himself to Paul and others that He was more than able to provide. When the Jews persecuted and sought to kill Paul, God protected him. When the storm raged, God kept His servant safe. When Paul was bitten by a snake, God intervened and the bite had no effect. When all provision was destroyed through shipwreck God put it on the hearts of the islanders to provide for them, and He provided another vessel to lead them to Rome as well. Over and over again God showed Himself able to care for His servants who have given themselves completely to His purpose and plan.

C. Successful Mission – Paul's arrival in Rome marks a great moment for the early church. Luke seems to be focusing on this. The gospel needed to be preached in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth. Perhaps Rome symbolized that final arena where the good news had to be proclaimed. Through every obstacle God delivered His servant and finally brought him to the destination that accorded with God's purposes. Note the fitting ending – Paul is in Rome preaching the Kingdom and teaching about the Lord Jesus **unhindered**. The gospel will triumph in God's time.

4. Application

The message we should all receive from this is that God is working out His plan, and just as He was able to get His servant, Paul, to the desired destination, so will He be able to direct His servants in this age. With our eyes upon God, we can confidently go forward knowing that God is able to prosper our way. Let us all join the ranks of those like Paul and seek, by God's grace, to fulfill our mission.

5. Suggestions for group time

Discussion questions

A. What unusual happened to Paul while at Malta? (He was bitten by a snake, but was unaffected by it.)

B. How else did God provide for Paul in his journey to Rome? (He saved him from death at sea; He provided food and other necessities through the hospitality of the islanders; He kept Paul from harm which many sought to inflict upon him.)

C. How did the Jews respond to Paul in Rome? (Some came to believe, others were not moved.)

D. What did Paul proclaim to the Jews in Rome? (He preached the kingdom of God and tried to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah.)

E. What did you learn about God and His plan through this story? (God has a plan to advance His kingdom and it will be accomplished.)

F. How are you involved in bringing the good news to all creation?

Prayer

- ◆ Thank God for His amazing provision.
- ◆ Ask God to direct you as to how you should be involved in furthering His kingdom.
- ◆ Ask God for grace and faith to bear whatever obstacle He allows along the way.