days of its founding are evidence of that. Not surprising, then, is the disruption he caused as the church spread rapidly to the Gentiles. Paul wrote Galatians to address one serious attack.

Paul expressed his surprise at how quickly the Galatians had deserted the good news for a story which was not good news at all. False teachers had corrupted the gospel by telling them they needed to add Jewish legal practice, like circumcision, to the work of Jesus to make their salvation complete. If anyone knew the Law, that was Paul. He knew firsthand how the Law was not good news. The Law displayed God`s holiness and man`s inability to achieve it.

While in Antioch, Paul had seen the hypocrisy of those Jewish believers asking Gentiles to adopt Jewish practice to participate in the gospel. Peter was an offender himself, but Paul knew salvation came by faith, not by observing the Law. He set a great example for modern believers by going to those brothers face-to-face and speaking the truth of the gospel to address the situation.

Once one says following a part of the Law is necessary, one must follow all of the Law, something no one except Jesus has ever done. No wonder Paul rallied against this bad news. Praise God for good news of faith alone.

Saturday, November 18, 2017—Galatians 4-6

Paul had preached the gospel to the churches in Galatia with great passion for the message and for their souls. Soon after he left them, false teachers crept in who began to place regulations of different kinds on these new believers. Paul was perplexed at how quickly they had been deceived, so he gave them the example of Hagar and Sarah, wives of Abraham, who produced different children. One was destined for slavery. The other was born in freedom promised by the Spirit.

Paul urged them to live in the freedom of Christ. Observing legal restriction and being zealous for rule-keeping have no benefit if Christ is not honored and the Spirit is not working. If they allowed themselves to be yoked by the slavery of rule-keeping, Christ would ultimately be of no value because He would become of lesser value than the rules they tried to keep. Jesus plus something equals nothing.

Rather than focusing on things to avoid, Paul urged them to let the Spirit produce His fruit in them (5:22-23). Against such things there was not law of restriction. He was urging them toward a life of abundance in the Spirit rather than restriction in the rules. The human spirit has a God-given longing to be free, and the Spirit of God provides the only true way.

Pray for a renewed joy and freedom in the Spirit which stirs Spirit-empowered service to others. Boast in the Lord and the joy and freedom only He can bring.

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 46

Sunday, November 12, 2017—Acts 6-9

When people spend time together, they begin to learn much about one another. This allows them to draw closer than in comparison with other relationships, but that familiarity can also breed contempt. Knowing one another well means knowing strengths and weaknesses.

The early church was growing dramatically, and God’s blessing made them the target of the enemy, who began to sow discord among some of the least of the congregation—the widows. Those who spoke Greek felt they were not as cared for as the widows who spoke Hebrew. The apostles raised up the first deacons to provide food for these widows, addressing needs not by giving themselves more work but by affirming the call of God on others. The body grows stronger when each member performs its role.

The attacks did not stop on the church. One of these deacons, Stephen, was seized by the Sanhedrin and had false charges levied against him. He stood boldly before these men and proclaimed the gospel, showing how God had worked through their entire history to bring Jesus to them, and he blistered them for resisting the Holy Spirit (7:51) and not obeying God from the beginning. In rage, they stone Stephen with Saul as a witness.

The persecution increased, scattering all except the apostles. These ordinary people began to build the Church everywhere they went. Another deacon, Philip, saw great things in large crowds (8:4-25) and in simple conversations (8:26-40). Before long, God even saved Saul, and used Barnabas to shape him and blend him into community

Thank God for the life-changing gospel and life-building church.

Monday, November 13, 2017—Acts 10-12

Cornelius had the appearance of a genuinely good, likable man. He was devout, God-fearing, generous, and prayerful (10:2). He had one major flaw, however. He was spiritually dead. To remedy this situation, God gave Peter an amazing vision on a rooftop in Joppa, and Peter traveled from there to Caesarea to tell Cornelius what he saw and learned. God intended the Kingdom for both Jews and Gentiles. What Jesus had done made possible the salvation of all who believed, and Cornelius needed to surrender to Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins (10:43). The Holy Spirit confirmed their conversion, and the Gentile mission was born.

Not everyone celebrated these conversions. Many of the Jewish Christians who converged on Jerusalem questioned Peter and what had happened in Caesarea (11:2-3), so he recounted his vision, his visit, and the move of the Spirit to confirm their belief. “So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think I could oppose God?” Peter concluded (11:17). These Gentile believers would soon grow in number and be able to send help to the Jerusalem church as a famine put them in great need (11:27-30).

About this time, King Herod imprisoned Peter (12:1), but God sent an angel to bring Peter out of prison at night. A chapter that begins with Herod’s threats ends with Herod’s death. The hand of God always provides for and protects His church.

Praise God for the message which saves and sustains believers.

Tuesday, November 14, 2017—Acts 13-14

When President John F. Kennedy gave his speech calling for sending a man to the moon, he stirred people to do what they believed impossible. By the end of the decade, countless men and women had worked together so that Neil Armstrong rested the soles of his feet in the fine powder of the lunar surface. A commission is powerful.

In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), Jesus told His disciples they were to go into all the world and make disciples. He had set the example through ministering, teaching, and reaching in His own ministry. They were to take His name to the nations. Was that possible?

The early church began to expand beyond Jerusalem, and one of the most vibrant of these congregations was in Antioch. That body of believers ministered to the Lord Himself through their worship (13:2), and the Holy Spirit stirred them to send out Barnabas, the encourager, and Saul, the former persecutor, for the work to which He called them. In praying over them and sending them out, Antioch began the worldwide mission Jesus had called for not many months earlier.

Usually beginning in the Jewish synagogue and community, these two proclaimed the truth about Jesus. Their message was accompanied by powerful signs, so people were astounded at the truth of their words and the power of their works, and many placed their faith in Jesus. Despite opposition, the disciples were filled with joy and the Spirit (13:52).

Pray for a willingness to endure hardship (14:22) in order to be obedient to Jesus and see the impossible come to reality.

Wednesday, November 15, 2017—James 1-2

James was the brother of Jesus and the leader of the church in Jerusalem. They had seen much in a short period of time-- the resurrection and ascension, the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the birth of the church, and the expansion of God’s Kingdom to the Gentiles. Add to that radical upheaval the famine in Jerusalem and the persecution that scattered many of them, and one would not be surprised if James wrote a letter to all those Jewish believers offering comfort and encouragement.

Instead, he writes one of the most practical letters of the New Testament, urging believers to live an authentic faith no matter the circumstances or consequences. “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (1:12). These trials had the

potential to make them more like Christ and more prepared for God’s blessing. James called them to put the word into practice—getting rid of old habits, controlling the tongue, and caring for the poor and the weak. He wasn’t calling for sin management but character formation.

James knew simply claiming belief in Christ was not legitimate. The demons believe in Jesus, and they tremble (2:19). What Jesus demands and deserves is a faith which combines belief and action into a lifestyle. The Bible is full of examples of people who acted courageously on their faith. Put your faith into action.

Thursday, November 16, 2017-- James 3-5

Like Proverbs, James is full of wisdom for living each day in a way which honors God. To read the words is one thing, but to put them into practice is the true reason for their existence. The wisdom of God produces humility in the possessor and harmony in the community. Where envy and selfish ambition abound, the individual and community will suffer.

James says the tongue is a powerful part which each person must handle carefully. A spring cannot produce both salt and fresh water, so one inhabited by the Holy Spirit should have speech which evidently comes from Him. Added to this idea is that of the role of a teacher. What one says is important. In addition, not many should seek to stand in front of others as a spokesperson for God. His standards are incredibly high.

How does one go about living by His expectations? “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (4:7). Making space for Him each day gives Him more power and gives

Satan less opportunity. Wisdom comes from choosing Him, and He enlightens and empowers the life of wisdom from that. The person and his people are blessed by that choice.

The life James sees God prescribing is one of patience and humility. Being patient while God works and being humble about His work allow the believer to experience the richness of knowing Him and the blessing of being used by Him to minister to others.

Pray for wisdom and humility.

Friday, November 17, 2017—Galatians 1-3

When God begins to work, Satan takes notice. He will do whatever he can to disrupt what God is doing and claim souls and spaces for himself that belong to God alone. The hardships in the Jerusalem church within