



IN THE MINIVAN - With our reading set firmly in the narrative of Paul's life this week, our readings will be easier for children. Talk about Paul, and his courage and concern for others.

Watch how even when being arrested (and nearly killed) he still wants to preach the Gospel. Ask your kids what they admire the most about Paul.

Week 48 - Nov 25 - Dec 1 - Acts 25 Act 26 Acts 27 Acts 28 Eph 1



SNAPSHOT - In **Acts 25** Paul languishes in prison. Finally, King Agrippa (this is the son of Agrippa I, who was struck dead by God in Acts 12) arrives and Festus seeks some help with what he views as a Jewish religious problem (verse 19). Paul's big moment comes in **Acts 26**, where he defends himself. But his defense consists of preaching the Gospel! Note the ties to the one story of the Bible in verses 6-7 and 22-23. **Acts 27** finds Paul headed to Rome, as Roman law required when a citizen exercised his right to appeal to the Caesar. The dramatic story of Paul's shipwreck is concluded in **Acts 28**. Paul finally arrives in Rome (verse 16), the fulfillment of a dream of his for years and years. Once in Rome Paul starts preaching, starting (as always) with the Jews (verse 17). Again, Paul teaches that the Old Testament points to Jesus (verse 23) and that even Jewish disbelief is prophesied in Scripture (verses 26-27). Then we turn our attention to one of the epistles Paul wrote while in prison in Rome, Ephesians. Paul is writing to a church that he knew well and had spent several years with (Acts 19:8-10). This is not a church with huge problems, like Corinth, but a church that needed to deepen its walk with God in Christ (1:17-19). Much of the book urges unity between Jew and Gentile, discussing how this has always been God's plan. In **Ephesians 1** Paul gives thanks for the spiritual blessings these brethren have in Christ, and exalts Jesus as the head of the church (verses 3-23). Seeing Jesus in the right light and position is the key to understanding who we are and where we fit in Christ's church.



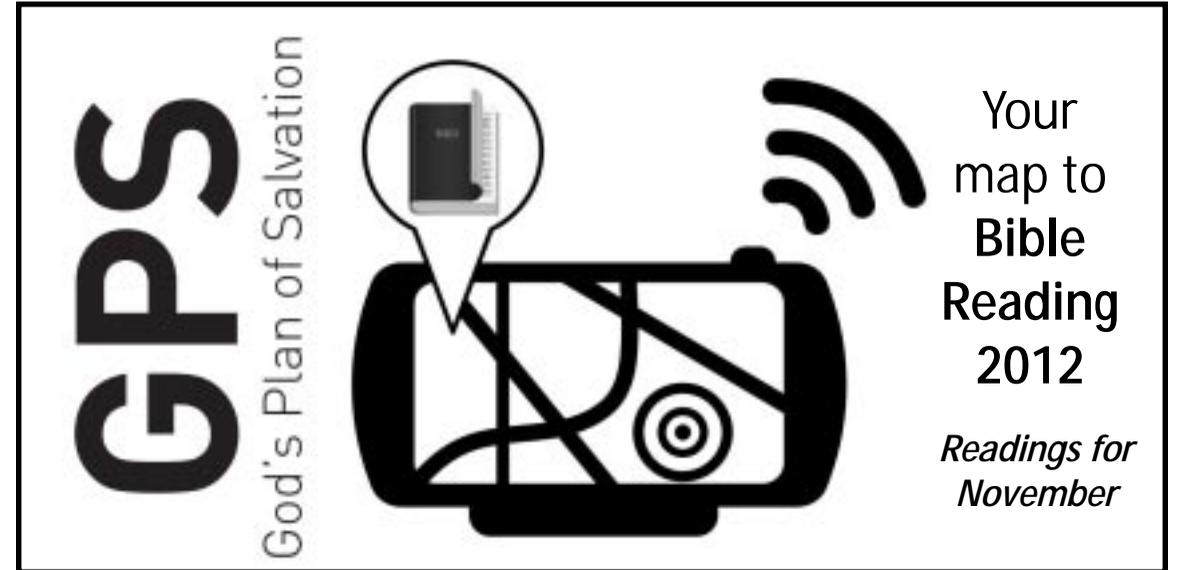
UNDER CONSTRUCTION - Some might be troubled by **Ephesians 1:5 and 11**'s mention of "predestination." Yes, the Bible does teach predestination, here and in other places (see Rom 8:29-30). Yet while certainly teaching predestination, what the Scriptures do not teach, in any form, is *Calvinistic* predestination. John Calvin taught that certain individuals are, regardless of what they do, chosen by God to be saved or lost. That is simply not so (note Acts 2:40). The Bible does teach that God has predestined a group, or class, of people to be saved. In His grace, He allows us to decide if we want to be in that group.



RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD - We may wish Luke had written a few more chapters to Acts. What happened to Paul? Was he ever released from Roman imprisonment? Did he get to go to Spain as he dreamed? We don't know and we don't know largely because Acts isn't a biography of Paul. It is a book to help us see the inexorable power of the Gospel as it takes over the Roman empire (Acts 1:8). It shows us how the work of Jesus continues in God's people and that work is the saving of sinful humanity. What each of us needs to ask ourselves after concluding such an evangelistic book is "What am I doing to continue Jesus' work of saving sinful people?" How evangelistic are you? Who could you point to Jesus, in even a small way, this week?



IN THE MINIVAN - Let's use a dramatic story to make a key point. Talk about the shipwreck story in **Acts 27-28**. Kids will be mesmerized by it (especially the snake bite story of Acts 28!). Then ask, "Why is this in the Bible?" It's extremely important that children learn the Bible is not a book of tales that make for entertaining reading and provide a little moral (like Aesop's Fables). **Acts 27 and 28** show the power of God, they show how God keeps His promises, and they show how the Gospel went all over the world. Let us make sure little ones are keeping their eyes on the big picture, just like we are!



One of the barriers that people have to overcome so they can be comfortable with the Scriptures is all the segmenting of the Bible. God's Word is broken down into Old and New Testaments, then we divide the books into their various kinds (Law, Gospels, Poetry, etc) and, finally, the books themselves are divided into chapters and verses. Some of that is clearly very helpful but sometimes it can get in the way. If we are to understand the Bible as a whole we have to see the letters as connected to and part of the Gospel story. They grow out of what happened in Genesis 3 and God's answer to it, Jesus the Christ. This month we have a lot of reading before us in the Epistles but we don't ever want to lose sight of God's plan of salvation. That's what the entire Bible is about, even the letters to churches that make up so much of the New Testament!

Week 45 - Nov 4-10 - 1 Cor 11 1 Cor 13 1 Cor 15 2 Cor 3 2 Cor 6



SNAPSHOT - In Acts 18 Paul established the church in Corinth. It was a congregation that he dearly loved but that had all kinds of problems that tried his patience dearly. In **1 Corinthians 11** Paul addresses problems with women who have decided they no longer need to respect their role as women (verses 1-16) and problems with the Lord's Supper becoming a party (verses 17-34). See "Under Construction" below for more on the woman's head covering issue. **1 Cor 13** is very famous but few know its context: troubles in the Corinthian church over spiritual gifts. Some were all excited about tongue speaking and were using that to boost themselves over others. Others weren't tongue speakers and were envious. Paul assures the brethren that spiritual gifts won't last (verses 8-10) and that love, which is far more important, always will. **1 Cor 15** answers the errors of some in Corinth who were teaching there is no resurrection (verse 12). Note how Paul's answer depends on the historical facts of the Gospel being accepted as that: fact (verses 1-11). This is a very long chapter, full of Old Testament references (verses 45, 54-55) and showing how God's plan to raise people to a new, resurrected body triumphing over sin has been God's plan all along. Even creation "prefigures" what God is doing (verses 37-42). **2 Cor 3** is a powerful reminder of how the Old and New are forever linked. This is a difficult issue for Paul because he is facing false teachers in Corinth who are trying to force the Christians there to keep the Old Law as part of their Christianity. Paul has to tread a fine line, pointing to the necessity of the Old Law in its time but the

superiority of the new covenant, written on “tablets of the human heart” (verse 3). Part of the problem, Paul writes, is that when some read the Old Law, their minds are prejudiced so that they cannot see what the Old Law pointed to, Jesus (verse 14). Paul is warning us that if we don’t look at Scripture through the lens of Christ none of it will make sense. **2 Cor 6** closes our reading for the week. Paul must defend himself against people who slander him and are jealous of his success and influence. He points out his life is not much to be envious of (verses 4-10). He begs the Corinthians to receive him (verses 11-13) and live righteous, godly lives (verse 14 picks up the thought of verse 1). There is a long quotation from the Old Testament (Leviticus and Isaiah) pressing the point that Christians can’t form alliances because we belong to God alone. The promise of “being their God, they will be My people” is frequent throughout the Old Testament (Exo. 6:7; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27) and is excellent way to summarize the Bible’s story. Here Paul uses that as motivation to godly living.

 **UNDER CONSTRUCTION** - Does **1 Cor 11:1-16** mean a woman today must wear a veil when praying? Some do believe so, but in this writer’s estimation Paul is concerned with women abandoning the local custom of wearing a veil in a kind of first century feminism. That would mean the principle of subjection would apply but not the specifics of veil wearing. Note how verses 13-14 and 16 appeal to human judgment and custom, not divine law. Let the reader study this matter carefully and not violate his or her conscience while respecting that others may arrive at a different conclusion on this difficult question.

 **RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD** - Both **1 and 2 Cor** shows how there has always been a battle for Christianity. As fast as Paul established congregations, false teachers came along with their error. Why are we surprised to have e to battle for the purity and simplicity of Christianity?

 **IN THE MINIVAN** - This is a great week to talk about the importance of the Lord’s Supper. From **1 Cor 11** the point needs to be made that the church is not to get involved in social activities and parties. That needs to be taken care of at home (verse 22). What the church does do is provide a place to focus on God and to partake of the Lord’s Supper in an orderly, reverent way. Talk about what you do during the Supper to keep your mind focused and what children should be doing. Obviously children cannot take the emblems but that doesn’t mean they shouldn’t think about Jesus or read Scripture. Help them develop their own “routine” during the Supper. Remember, the goal is not for our kids to simply sit still and be quiet. That’s a start but we want much more: we want them to learn how to worship. Begin that training now!

Week 46 - Nov 11-17 - 2 Cor 8 2 Cor 9 Romans 1 Rom 2 Rom 3

 **SNAPSHOT** - The money Paul planned to bring to Jerusalem as a sign of Gentile disciples’ concern for their Jewish brethren (see Acts 24:17) is at the center of **2 Corinthians 8**’s admonitions. The brethren in Macedonia have their funds together, while the Corinthians - after making grand plans and big promises - are lagging behind (verse 11). **2 Corinthians 9** continues the discussion of the collection for the saints (verse 1) and gives needed admonition on how and why to give. Note the quotation from the Psalms (verse 9). Giving is not something new in the Bible. The book of Romans comes from the same time period as 2 Corinthians. **Romans 1** lays the groundwork for a book that urges a quarreling and divided church to come together in unity. Note the tie to the promises of 2 Samuel 7 in verse 3. This chapter sets forth the clear message that Gentiles are sinners. They have suppressed the knowledge of God and lived wickedly (verses 18-32). **Romans 2** makes certain no Jewish disciple thinks he is somehow superior to the Gentile brother who has just heard the condemnation of chapter 1. No, indeed not! Jews have failed just as miserably as Gentiles (verses 17-25). Paul begins to talk about the true Israel of God here - a very Old

Testament concept - as he discusses who is a true Jew (verses 28-29). **Romans 3** summarizes Paul’s argument: all are sinners. All need God. Note how the “Law and the Prophets” (a Jewish expression meaning “the Scriptures”) all point to Jesus Christ as the Savior of man’s sin (verses 21-23).

 **RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD** - While much can be learned and taught from **Romans 1-3** the point in this context is “You are all sinners, and you were all saved by grace so you all need to get along.” There is a huge emphasis on “all” and “every” and “everyone” in the early part of Romans. This terminology is designed to make them see what they have in common so as to come together, instead of dividing. Practice thinking this way as you view the world this week. Try to think of how you are like others, instead of unlike them. “He is a sinner, like me.” “She needs a Savior, just like I do.” “He is saved, as I am, by God’s grace.” This kind of thinking binds us to others and defeats spiritual pride.

 **IN THE MINIVAN** - Last week we talked about the Lord’s Supper. This week we can talk about giving. Use **2 Corinthians 8 and 9** to teach key lessons about the contribution we see taken up each Sunday. For children, this is the act of worship they actually get to “do” so we want to encourage their enthusiasm and interest. But giving is much more than putting some money in the plate as it comes by. It involves planning, praise, gratitude and cheerfulness. Make sure your children’s hearts are prepared to give this Sunday!

Week 47 - Nov 18-24 - Rom 15 Acts 21 Acts 22 Acts 23 Acts 24

 **SNAPSHOT** - **Romans 15** concludes our stay in this great epistle. Here Paul urges the “strong” (the brethren who know that eating meat sacrificed to an idol is okay) to bear with the “weak” (those who wouldn’t eat such meat, probably because they were Jewish and never had). The goal of the church is to help each other, not yourself (verses 2-3). Paul says the Old Testament teaches us these kinds of lessons so we can persevere and do right (verse 4). He closes the chapter by showing how the Gentiles have always been part of God’s plan by quoting the Old Testament (verses 8-13) and then discussing the visit to Rome he hopes to make soon (verses 22-33). We resume Paul’s story in **Acts 21**. Paul is headed to Jerusalem with the money for the needy saints there, even as he hears foreboding news about what will happen to him there (verse 11). What happens next is a disaster. While Paul is trying to show that he is still a Jew and still honors Jewish ways and customs, he is false charged and nearly killed by a mob (verses 27-36). Roman soldiers arrest Paul and drag him away. From this point forward, Paul will spend most, if not all, of his life in Roman custody of some sort. In **Acts 22** the mob listens as Paul retells his conversion story. Watch the emphasis on how good, true Jews become Christians. The idea that Christianity is for renegade, breakaway Jews is thoroughly defused by Luke in these chapters. **Acts 23** sees Paul getting more and more tangled up in the Roman judicial system, as a threat on his life necessitates a change of venue. **Acts 24** records Paul’s defense before Felix. Note again how Paul believes the Old Testament supports and points to Jesus and Christianity (verse 14). The events of verse 27 would be about AD 60.

 **UNDER CONSTRUCTION** - What exactly does **Acts 21:21ff** mean? To show his respect for his national customs, Paul takes care of the expenses associated with a Jewish vow. This is Paul simply becoming all things to all men so he can reach more.

 **RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD** - **Romans 15** challenges us. In matters of opinion (not matters of faith as revealed in Scripture) we often want to make everyone line up and do as we do or have always done. Paul puts unity ahead of our private opinions and scruples. He wants brethren to work together and bear with one another. Pray, think carefully and then search your heart for any human traditions or opinions you might be holding that could hurt church unity.