

Our goal this year is to firmly fix in our minds just how unified the Bible is. It is one story from beginning to end. The Bible is, from cover to cover, God's plan to save sinful people so that they can come and live with Him for all eternity. Yet when one opens Genesis, it is easy to get lost in the details of the grand history there and forget to watch God's plan unfold. In the same way, now that we are on the "other side" of the cross, it is easy to dive into the doctrines of Christianity or focus on the church's work and again miss the Main Thing. We can't let that happen. To help with that we will use Acts as a base, since it depicts God's work through His church, and then add in at the appropriate places the epistles as they were written. This will help us keep in view that what is in our Bibles in Acts and the epistles is not some kind of minor history and complex theology but the outworking of God's plan continuing to be made visible for us to plainly see. *And we want to keep seeing it this month!*

Week 41 - Oct 7-13 - ☐ Acts 11 ☐ Acts 12 ☐ Jam 1 ☐ Jam 2 ☐ Acts 13

SNAPSHOT - **Acts 11** retells the Cornelius story. We ought to note how important this event is, since it is covered twice in Scripture. The key here is that God's plan for "all nations" to come to Him (Isaiah 2:2-3) is finally coming to pass. This chapter is full of God "pushing" the church along to see that this must be done (verse 9, 12, 15, 21, 26, 28). **Acts 12** finds the church in trouble again. James is killed and it appears Peter will be next. But the one who attacks God's church dies instead, and "the word of God increased and multiplied" (verse 24). This occurred in AD 44. We break from Acts to read in James, a book that may have been written by the apostle we just saw put to death. **James 1** begins by using the term "twelve tribes" (verse 1) as a reference to the church, a clear tie to the Old Testament. Verse 27 reminds us of so much of the prophets' teaching: God's people help the helpless. **James 2** continues the Bible's theme of law (note verses 8-13) and obedient faith. **Acts 13** takes us back to the story of the Gospel sweeping across the Roman Empire. The strong church in Antioch that we met in chapter 11 now sends out the first missionaries. The Holy Spirit is repeatedly mentioned here (verses 2, 4, 9) as God works through His church. Paul's sermon in Antioch of Pisidia (verses 16-41) is a masterpiece, tying together the promises to Abraham and David to Jesus (note verse 23, 32). God's interest in the Gentiles is highlighted as well (verse 47).

UNDER CONSTRUCTION - **Acts 12:15** does not prove we have guardian spirits or angels. It only reflects what people commonly thought or believed in NT times.

RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD - **James 2** puts a huge emphasis on obedient faith. Who is the illustration of that? *Abraham* (verse 21-23) and *Rahab* (verse 25)! These illustrations are from the Old Testament showing that what it takes to please God hasn't changed much, has it? While the outward manifestation of that obedient faith might be different in Abraham's day (he offered animal sacrifices, for example) than in our day (we are baptized, take of the Lord's Supper, etc) the core issue of how to please God is unchanged: trust and obey!

IN THE MINIVAN - **Acts 13** needs to be read with a map in hand. Most Bibles have maps in the back. Now is the time to get them out and learn to use them. You may need to start with a globe of the world to show where the Bible lands are in relationship to where you live. Make sure you show the distances traveled, and make certain you are expressing those distances in ways children can appreciate ("this would take about as long as it takes us to drive to grandma's"). Point out most of these distances were traveled on foot!

Week 42 - Oct 14-20 - ☐ Acts 14 ☐ Acts 15 ☐ Gal 1 ☐ Gal 2 ☐ Acts 16

SNAPSHOT - The first missionary journey continues in **Acts 14**. Note the establishment of leadership in these congregations (verse 26). Sadly the pattern here is one that will be repeated again and again in Acts: the Jews are at first interested in the Gospel, but upon hearing it is for Gentiles too they turn on Paul and his companions. **Acts 15** brings this opposition to a head. Verse 1 crystallizes the discussion. This is almost twenty years after Acts 2 and yet some are still trying to keep Moses' Law and be Christians (note the Pharisee-Christians in verse 5!). The answer to the controversy is a citation from the Old Testament, Amos 9, that makes God's plan clear (verses 16-18).

Galatians 1 was written around this time, and carries the good news of the Jerusalem conference to the churches Paul had established in Acts 13-14. The churches in Galatia are being led astray by a false gospel (verses 6-10), a gospel that says one must become a Jew first to be a Christian (cf Gal 3:10ff; 4:9-10; 5:1-4). **Galatians 2** continues Paul's proofs that he didn't get his gospel from men, but God, as he recounts his visits to Jerusalem. Verse 1 seems

to be the Acts 15 conference we just read about. **Acts 16** begins Paul's second missionary journey. For the first time ever, the Gospel crosses into Europe (verse 10)!

UNDER CONSTRUCTION - What do we make of the regulations bound on Gentiles in Acts 15 (see especially verses 20 and 29)? There is much discussion about this, but the best explanation is that they are rules to make social interaction between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians possible. For Gentiles and Jews to get along they would each need to be mindful of the other, and some behaviors that would be offensive would need to be changed. In the NT church unity is always very important.

RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD - The principle in **Acts 15** and **Galatians** is that the Gospel must not be polluted by man-made rules, regulations and requirements. It's worth thinking about: am I adding to the Gospel the way the Judaizers did? Am I binding my traditions, the way I grew up, or what I have always believed on others?

IN THE MINIVAN - This is a good week to discuss false teaching among God's people. It has happened in the past and children need to be prepared for it to occur again. Use Acts 15 to show how an appeal to Scripture is how to meet error. Make certain your children see that those who care about God and His way will listen *and even change* when the Bible is explained to them. We want to be right with God and please Him. That is more important than being popular!

Week 43 - Oct 21-27 - ☐ Acts 17 ☐ Acts 18 ☐ 1 Thess 1 ☐ 1 Th 4 ☐ 1 Th 5

SNAPSHOT - **Acts 17** is the first record we have of the Gospel being preached without reference to the Old Testament. The people in Athens didn't know the Jewish Scriptures so Paul doesn't cite them. He does, however, discuss God the Creator, which is what the Bible begins with. **Acts 18** mentions an edict of Claudius (verse 2) that is reliably dated as 49 AD. Some time has passed since that edict, allowing Aquila and Priscilla to make their way to Corinth, where Paul is now preaching. In verse 5 Paul receives word from Thessalonica and writes 1 and 2 Thessalonians back to that church. The date is 51 AD. Verse 18 would be the spring of AD 52. It's easy to miss the beginning of the Third Missionary journey in verse 23. **1 Thessalonians 1** gives us a good look at first century Christianity. Themes of affliction and persecution (verse 6) are intertwined with faith and bravery (verses 7-8). **1 Thessalonians 4** gives practical admonitions about how Christians should live (note verses 11-12 especially), and then concludes with a famous passage about the Lord's coming. **1 Thessalonians 5** reminds the Thessalonians not to get caught up in date setting for Jesus' return (verses 1-11).

UNDER CONSTRUCTION - Paul's vow in **Acts 18:18** is controversial. Why did Paul do this? Probably because Paul was raised as a Jew, and continued some of the practices of Judaism all his life. It wasn't wrong to vow like this, but it is important to note that Paul did not bind these practices on others.

RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD - Apollos shows "by the Scriptures" (18:28) that Jesus is the Messiah. What does that mean? Today we would get out the Gospels to do that, but Apollos is doing that from the Old Testament alone! Undoubtedly he is using Isaiah and other prophets to prove Jesus is the Christ. Think about how you would show "by the Scriptures" that Jesus is the Christ. Can you do what Apollos did?

IN THE MINIVAN - Our reading this week exposes children to the reality of persecution. Paul is attacked, and the Thessalonian church also was the focus of persecution. We don't want to hide this from our children, but instead we want to talk about doing right under fire, how to muster courage, and especially the valued role of prayer. This may be a place to point out that when we are ridiculed for our Christianity that is certainly a form of persecution, but it doesn't compare with what others have known. Instead of feeling sorry for ourselves let us be as devout and bold as these first century Christians were!

Week 44 - Oct 28-Nov 3 - ☐ Act 19 ☐ Act 20 ☐ 1 Cor 1 ☐ 1 Co 5 ☐ 1 Co 10

SNAPSHOT - We rejoin Paul, now in Ephesus in **Acts 19**. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians during the time described in verse 10. The rest of Acts' main purpose is embodied in verse 21: "I must also see Rome." Paul is determined to preach the Gospel in the capital city. **Acts 20** is a travel narrative, as Paul is hurrying to Jerusalem. Paul goes to Macedonia (verse 1) because he is so concerned about the brethren in Corinth (see 2 Cor 2:12-13). Verse 2 puts Paul in Philippi, where he wrote 2 Corinthians, as well as Romans (Rom 15:25-32). Paul's admonition to the elders of the Ephesian church (verses 17-38) provides some of the best material in Scripture on the work of elders. We will leave Luke's narrative of Paul's travels in Acts for a while to sample from the letters Paul was writing at this time. **1 Corinthians 1** gets right to the heart of Corinth's problems: division (verses 10-17). Paul cites Isaiah (verse 19) then to talk about God's plan from the beginning to show His wisdom. **1 Corinthians 5** deals with church discipline, citing Christ as the Passover Lamb as an illustration of a time to "clean out the old leaven" (verse 7). In **1 Corinthians 10** Paul deals with the volatile issue of eating food that had been sacrificed to an idol. Jews didn't like the practice, of course, and even some Gentiles were uncertain about it, since eating that meat used to be part of idol worship. But much of the meat sold in NT times came from idol temples. What should Christians do? Paul has previously argued that Christians must be ready to give up their rights to help others (1 Cor 9). Now he leans heavily on the Old Testament to show how easy it is for God's people to get caught up in wrongdoing, and so we must not become arrogant and think we cannot fall (verse 12). The answer is to "flee from idolatry" (verse 14). Paul concludes with some final directives about what to do when served this meat (verse 23-33) but his directions are clear: the soul is worth more than steak!

UNDER CONSTRUCTION - Paul's statement in **1 Corinthians 1:17** about not baptizing has been used as ammo by those who want to deny baptism's importance. Yet all it means is that Paul's work was teaching, not baptizing. He always let God give the increase (see 1 Cor 3:6-7).

RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD - Today it is quite popular to believe the church is unnecessary or even a barrier between the disciple and the Lord. One cannot find that idea in Scripture, especially in these chapters where Paul expends so much of himself to establish and help congregations serve Christ. Look carefully at this week's reading and think about your attitude to the local church. Do you want to build it up, guard it, and protect it like Paul did?

IN THE MINIVAN - Reading epistles with small children is a challenge. We can make that more interesting by reminding our kids that these first Christians didn't have the Bible. How exciting it must have been when a letter from an apostle arrived, answering their questions, correcting mistakes and encouraging them in what was right. Talk about what a letter from an apostle to our congregation would sound like today.