

## **FIRST TERM CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES NOTE FOR SS 3**

### **THE BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST**

**(MATTHEW 3:13 – 17, MARK 1:9 – 11, LUKE 3:21 – 22)**

The synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, all have the account of baptism of Jesus Christ. The accounts are similar but with a few variations. Matthew alone reported that John did not want to baptize Jesus, rather he preferred Jesus to baptize him. In his account after Christ had been baptized and he was praying, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in a bodily form as a dove. Apart from these few variations, the narrations of the synoptic gospels are virtually the same. For this topic, we would base our discussion on the account of Matthew.

According to Matthew, Jesus Christ came from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized by John. When John saw Jesus, he hesitated to baptize him saying “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for thus it is befitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Based on these statement, John consented to baptize Jesus.

After Jesus has been baptized, he went up immediately from the water and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and a lighting on him. Immediately, a voice came from heaven saying, “This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased”.

#### **The Significance of the Baptism of Jesus**

The baptism by John the Baptist was for the forgiveness of sin. Christ was without sin, yet he went to John to be baptized to show the believers (that is the church) that baptism is necessary for the new life that we would live in Christ and that it is divinely necessary to fulfill all righteousness.

The baptism marked the call to his earthly ministry and it was equally a way of identifying with the sinners whom he came to redeem. It was also intended to show the public that John’s baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin was necessary for everybody who wished to live a new life in Christ. The essence of John’s activities was to prepare the way for Christ hence, John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus Christ.

Christ said in John 3:5 “unless a man is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”. The reason being that it is the Holy Spirit that enables a man to do the will of God which qualifies him to enter the kingdom of God.

iv. Christ, on his part, fulfilled this condition by going to John the Baptist to be baptized. Immediately after the baptism, the Holy Spirit that aided him in his earthly ministry descended upon him like a dove.

V. Christ, being in the flesh, was prone to temptation to sin, but the Holy Spirit of God that came upon him after the baptism helped him to overcome temptation and to do the will of God all through.

vi. The baptism of Jesus Christ by John marked the first public confirmation of the messiahship of Jesus Christ when a voice was heard from heaven saying, “This is my son with whom I am well pleased”.

John’s Description Of Christ As The Lamb Of God And The Significant Of This To Christians

John was baptising at the river Jordan when Jesus came to him. John identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world. John confessed that Jesus was greater than him for he (Jesus) had existed before him.

At first, John did not know Jesus, but he came baptizing with water that Jesus might be revealed. The spirit of the Lord had told John that he would identify Jesus as the man whom the spirit would descend. At the baptism of Jesus, the spirit descended as a dove from heaven and rested on him. John bore witness that Jesus is the son of God.

The Significance of Jesus’ Baptism to Christians include:

As the lamb of God, his crucifixion takes away man’s sins by faith.

ii. Having accepted this, we must turn away from our sins.

iii. We have to bear testimony, that is, spread this happy news to others who have not known him.

iv. Jesus is the final sacrifice.

## **THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS**

**(MATTHEW 4:1 – 11, MARK 1:12 – 13, LUKE 4:1 – 13)**

Temptation means to persuade or entice a person to do something wrong or unwise. Everyone on earth is constantly under temptation to do one thing or the other, depending on the circumstances one finds oneself. In most cases, people are tempted through their mind. What constitutes temptation to people, in most cases, has to do with their heart's desire. People are tempted to pursue their heart desire contrary to what they are expected to do.

The temptation of Jesus Christ is evidence that temptation is normal for every human being, but to yield to temptation is abnormal and a sin. Christ was tempted but he never yielded to temptation. Therefore, this topic is treated and considered with the view that the reader would see how Christ was able to overcome his temptation and understand that with proper discipline of mind based on the word of God, one can always overcome temptation.

The account of the temptation of Jesus was recorded by the three synoptic gospel writers: Matthew, Mark and Luke. They all recorded that after baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness where he fasted for 40 days. There he was tempted by the devil. However, Mark did not give detailed account of the temptation. Matthew and Luke were more detailed in their accounts but the sequence of the temptation, as they presented it, differs. However, Matthew's account of the temptation is much more detailed than all the other synoptic gospels; therefore, we shall take the account of Matthew as our narrative framework.

#### Matthew's Account

Matthew recorded that immediately after the baptism of Jesus Christ, he was led into the wilderness where he fasted forty days and forty nights and afterwards when he was hungry, Satan came to tempt him. First Satan said to him: "if you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." To this, Christ replied Satan that it is written: "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God".

In the second temptation, Satan took Jesus to the Holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, "if you are the son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will give his angels charge over you and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone". Jesus replied Satan: "you shall not tempt the Lord your God".

In the third temptation, Satan took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of this world and their glory and said he would give all these to Jesus Christ if he could fall down and worship him (Satan). Jesus said to Satan, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” Then the devil left Jesus and the angels of the Lord came and ministered to him.

### The Reasons For The Temptation Of Jesus

- i. The temptation of Jesus Christ in the wilderness was to make him lose focus of his messiahship and follow the wrong ideas of the Jews about the expected messiah. The first temptation was aimed at making Jesus give more attention to physical needs (food) rather than spiritual needs (the word of God).
- ii. The second temptation was to make Jesus appear like a magician with spiritual skills like jumping from great height of the temple. This would have amounted to cheap popularity that would only draw attention to him rather than the heavenly home of God which was the main purpose of his earthly ministry.
- iii. The third temptation was to divert Jesus from his ministerial and spiritual assignment, change his focus which was the heavenly kingdom of God and make him pursue political kingdom and acquire political power. Although, this was the desire of the Jews at that time, because they wanted a political messiah who would liberate them from Roman domination, Christ did not come for that purpose. He was a spiritual messiah. Therefore, he did not succumb to the temptation.

### Significance of Jesus Temptation on His ministry

- i. The temptation confirmed the divinity of Christ.
- ii. Through the temptation, Jesus accepted suffering as means of achieving God’s purpose which was the redemption of man.
- iii. With His victory over Satan, Jesus assured His followers that with the word of God they too can overcome the wiles of the devil.
- iv. The temptation signaled the preparation of Jesus for the ministry.
- v. The way Jesus handled the temptation showed that Jesus is not a political or economic messiah.

### Lessons To Learn

- i. The fact that Jesus was tempted is an evidence that no man is above temptation. Temptation is normal and is not a sin but yielding to temptation is evil and a sin. As Christ overcame his

temptation, every man should endeavour to overcome temptation.

ii. In the book of Zachariah 4:6, it is written: “it is not by might nor by power but by the spirit says the Lord. Christ was able to overcome his temptations because the Holy Spirit was with him. It is only the Holy Spirit that can help a person overcome temptations but the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in a person living in sin. Therefore, Christians should endeavour to live a holy and righteous life in order to attract the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life.

iii. Christians should try as much as possible not to be self-centered and overambitious. They should emulate Jesus Christ as he did not surrender himself to Satan’s offer which should have shown Jesus as a self-centered and overambitious person.

iv. Christ’s temptation was based on material needs, self-glorification and power but he overcame them all. Here on earth, all the temptation of man should have its root in these three things. Therefore like Christ, Christians should endeavour to overcome temptation when they are tempted.

### **CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP**

**(MATTHEW 4:18 – 25, 9:9 – 13, MARK 1:16 – 20, 2:13 – 17, LUKE 5:1 – 11, 27 – 32)**

Disciples mean follower, one who takes another as teacher and model. The synoptic gospel writers agreed that James and John the sons of Zebedee. Andrew and his brother Peter were the first four disciples to be called by Jesus Christ. Matthew, the tax collector became the fifth disciple that was called. Jesus selected the rest of the seven disciples from the multitude of people that later followed him.

#### **Matthew’s And Mark’s Account**

Matthew’s account of the call of the first four disciples has it that as Jesus was walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers – Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother – casting their net into the sea, he said to them, “Follow me I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately, they left their nets and followed him. Going a little bit further from there, he saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee mending their nets with their father in the boat. He called them and they followed him.

As Jesus passed on after healing the paralytic man, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office and he said to him, “follow me” and he rose and followed him. Mark, in his own

account, called this tax collector Levi, the son of Aphaeus.

Note: Matthew and Mark reported similar accounts except that Mark gave the name tax collector as Levi.

### Luke's Account

According to Luke, Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret when he saw two boats by the lake. The fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting to one of the boats which was Simon's he asked him to put out a little from the land. Jesus sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he stopped speaking, he said to Simon:

“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets. (Luke 5:4 – 5).

When they tried again, they had a big catch that their net nearly broke by the weight of the fish. They could not even pull it out of the water. They called on their friends to help them. The two boats were filled with fishes and started sinking. When Simon Peter saw this miracle, he was astonished. He fell down at Jesus knees and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man”. All the people who were with him, including James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were astonished at what happened. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men”. When they brought their boat on land, they left everything and followed Christ.

As Jesus went further, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office. He called him and the man followed him. Later the man made a feast in his house and Christ was there with many other tax collection sitting at the table with him. This made the Pharisees murmur against Christ that he was eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. To this allegation, Christ replied:

“Those who are well have no need of physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31 – 32).

As stated above, Levi, also called Matthew was the fifth disciple to be called and the three synoptic gospels gave the account.

### Reasons Why Jesus Required Disciples

- i. Jesus needed disciples to continue His work after His ascension.
- ii. Jesus needed them to firmly plant the seed of Christianity.
- iii. He needed them as witnesses to the word.

## Lessons To Learn And Significance

- i. The immediate response of the first four disciples – Andrew, Peter, James and John – to the call of Jesus provides a model of what Christians' attitude should be whenever and wherever God calls them for service. Everybody may not receive call as pastors or ministers but there are some areas of service in the church where God may want them to function. They should be willing to answer God's call and serve in whatever area of life He wants them to serve.
- ii. Like Jesus, Christians should not discriminate against those they consider as sinners. They should interact with them in order to call them to repentance. At the same time, they should be careful not to allow their sinful life to influence others.
- iii. Christ has to choose and train his disciples who were to carry on his work because he was aware that he had a very short time to stay on earth.
- iv. As the disciples followed Christ obediently, present day Christians should endeavour to follow leaders obediently.

## **MISSION OF THE TWELVE**

**(MATTHEW 10:1 – 15, MARK 6:7 – 13, LUKE 9: 1- 16)**

Jesus, having trained his disciples by teaching them both privately and publicly felt that they learnt enough about his ministry. He therefore, decided to send them out to practice what they had learnt. The mission of the twelve disciples is recorded in the three synoptic gospels.

The general outline of the story is the same as presented by the three synoptic gospels, but there are few areas of differences. Matthew stated that the mission of the twelve was limited to the Jews, but there was no such detail in Luke and Mark. It was Matthew that stated the names of the disciples that were sent out while Luke and Mark did not state this but gave the details elsewhere. Mark stated that the disciples were sent out in pairs, that is two by two, but other synoptic writers did not state this. Mark stated also that they were allowed to take their sandals. According to Matthew, Jesus called the twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits; to cast them out and heal every disease and every infirmity. They were charged to: "Go nowhere among the gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 10:5 – 7).

He charged them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons and not collect money for their services. The disciples were also charged not to take anything with them and that in any town they entered they should find out who was worthy and stay with such until they departed. As they entered the house, they were expected to greet it and if the house was worthy, then their peace would come upon it, but if it was not worthy, their peace would return to them. If anyone would not receive or listen to them, they should shake off the dust from their feet as they left the house or town and would stand in judgement against such people.

The important fact about the mission of the twelve is that it enables Christians to understand the preparations which they must take in terms of sound teaching and practical experience before becoming a priest, evangelist, minister of God and before undertaking other ministerial assignments.

### **MISSION OF THE SEVENTY**

#### **(LUKE 10:1 – 24)**

Only the book of Luke gave an account of the mission of the seventy. According to Luke, Jesus appointed seventy others and sent them ahead of him in every pair to every town and place where he himself was about to go. He said to them:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest. Go your way; behold I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves”. (Luke 10:2 – 3).

He charged them not to carry purse, bags, sandals and to greet no one on the road. Whatever house they entered they should first say: “Peace be upon this house”. If a son of peace was there, their peace would rest upon the house. He charged them not to go from house to house.

Whenever they entered a town and they were received, they should eat and heal the sick in the town and say to them, “The Kingdom of God had come near to you”. If they entered a town and the people failed to receive them, they should go into the streets and proclaim that even the dust of the town that clinged to their feet was wiped off against them. Jesus condemned cities such as Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum where he did a lot of mighty work, yet they did not repent or believe him. Jesus concluded his charge to the seventy by saying:

“He who hears you hears me and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects Him who sent me”.

The seventy returned to Jesus with joy saying “Lord, even the demons are subjects to us in your



name.” Jesus answered them and said:

“I saw Satan fall like a lightening from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:18 – 20)

After this, Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. He thanked God for hiding these things from the wise and revealing them to the babes. He revealed that all things that had been delivered to him by his father and no one knows who the son is, except the father, and who the father is, except the son and anyone whom the son chooses to reveal the father to. Jesus further told the disciple that they were blessed for seeing what they had seen and hearing what they had heard. This was because many prophets and Kings desired to hear it but they were not privileged.

#### Significance And Lessons To Learn

Jesus warned his disciples that he was sending them as lambs in the mist of wolves. This was an indication that they were going to encounter dangers and persecution but they should be very careful to ensure success in their mission. In the same way, present day Christians should know that the task of being real Christians is not easy; but they should be very careful in order to have success in their ways.

ii. It should be recalled that the twelve sent out only to the house of Israel. Twelve symbolically represents the twelve tribes of Israel. From this, one can infer that the mission of the twelve represented Jesus’ mission to the Israelites. The seventy disciples were sent to Gentiles and seventy, in the Jewish tradition, represents the rest of the nations of the world.

### **THE TRIAL OF JESUS**

#### **(MATTHEW 26:57 – 68)**

There were basically two separate trials of Jesus Christ – the Jewish trial and the Roman trial. After Judas had betrayed Jesus Christ, he was arrested and taken to Caiaphad, the high priest where the members of Sanhedrin – the highest Jewish council gathered. There, Jesus was tried and found guilty of blasphemy for claiming to be the son of God. The punishment for this offence by the Jewish is the death penalty, but being a colony with the Roman Empire, they did not have the power to pass the death sentence. For this reason, they had to take Jesus to the Roman representative, Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem where he was tried the second time and found

guilty, although he was innocent. This was to fulfill the scripture, for it has been destined that he would die for the forgiveness of the sins committed by man.

### Christ Before The High Priest

Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane where he told his disciples to wait for him while he went up to pray. He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee. He began to be sorrowful and troubled. He told them that his soul was sorrowful even to death and that they should remain and watch with him. Going a little further, Jesus prayed, “My father if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will but as thou will”. He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he asked Peter:

“So could you not watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:40 – 41)

For the second time he prayed, repeating the same words. Again he came back and discovered that the disciples eyes were heavy with sleep. He left them and went away to pray again with the same words for the third time. After this, he came back to the disciples and said to them:

“Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold the hour is at hand and the son of man is betrayed into the hands of the sinners. Rise; let us be going; see my betrayer is at hand.” (Matthew 26:44 – 46)

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of his disciples came with a great crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priest and the elders of the people. The betrayer (Judas) had given them a sign saying, “The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him.” Judas came up to Jesus and said, “Hail master”. Immediately, they came up, laid hand on him and seized him. One of the disciples of Jesus stretched out his hands, drew his sword and cut off the ear of the slave of the priest. Jesus was against this and he said “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my father; and he will once send more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?.

And turning to the crowd Jesus said: “Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place that the scripture of the prophets might be fulfilled.”

It was at this juncture that the disciples fled.

Those who seized him led him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. Peter followed him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest. He went inside and sat with the guards to see the end. The chief priest and the whole council (the Sanhedrin) sought false testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they found none. At last, two people came forward and said, “This fellow said I am able to destroy the temple of God and build it in three days.”

The high priest stood up and asked Jesus to give an answer to the testimony against, but Jesus kept quiet. The chief priest persuaded him to make a reply, but Jesus answered him: “You have said so but I tell you here after you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:64)

The high priest tore his robes and said: “He has uttered blasphemy; why shall we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgement?”

The people answered, “He deserves death.” They spat on his face and struck him; some slapped him saying, “Prophecy to us you Christ! Who is it that struck you?”

Peter was sitting outside the courtyard and a maid came and asked him, “were you not with Jesus the Galilean.” He denied this before them saying, “I do not know what you mean”.

When he came out to porch, another maid saw him and said to the bystander, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” Peter denied this again, this time with an oath. After a little while, the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “certainly you are also one of them for your accent betrays you.” Peter began to invoke a curse on himself and swear, “I do not know the man”. Immediately the cock crowed and Peter remembered that Jesus had said that before the cock crowed he, Peter, would deny him three times. He went out and wept bitterly.

Christ Before The Pilate And The Roman Authorities (Matthew 27:11 – 31)

After the trial by the Sanhedrin, Jesus was bound and arranged before Pilate. Pilate asked Jesus whether he was the king of the Jews according to the allegation brought against him by the chief priest, scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus replied that Pilate had said so. Pilate asked Jesus to defend

himself. In view of numerous allegations levelled against him, but Jesus made no reply and this made Pilate wonder greatly.

At the feast of the Passover celebrations, it was custom of the governor to release a prisoner whom the people wanted. The notorious criminal called Barabbas. When the people gathered; Pilate asked them to take the decision on the person they wanted him to release to them – Barabbas or Jesus who is also called Christ. Pilate knew it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Moreover, his wife had sent a message to him, saying, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man for I have suffered much over him today in a dream.” The governor repeated his question. The chief priests and the elders persuaded the people to opt for Barabbas and they did instead of Jesus. Pilate asked them what they wanted to do with Jesus and they shouted, “Let him be crucified”. Pilate asked them if Jesus committed any offence, but they shouted all the more that he should be crucified.

He took water and washed his hand publicly and said, “I am innocent in this man’s blood; see it to yourselves”. All the people answered, “His blood should be on us and our children”. Then he released them Barabbas and they scourged Jesus. The soldiers of the governors took Jesus into the auditorium and they gathered the whole battalion before him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him and planted a crown of thorns upon his head. They also put reed in his right hand and kneeling before him, they mocked him saying, “Hail the king of the Jews.” They spat on him and took the reed and strucked him on the head. After they had finished mocking him, they stripped him off the robe and put his clothes on him and led him away to be crucified.

#### Ways In Which People Are Denied Justice In The Society

1. Hiring of false witness
2. Adjournment: delay of trial and judgement
3. Bribery: some judges demand and take bribes
4. Falsification of evidence
5. Failure to deliver judgement as at when due
6. Rigging of elections
7. Nepotism and tribalism

## Christ Before Herod (Luke 23:6 – 12)

The trial of Jesus before Herod was only recorded in the gospel according to Luke. When Pilate learnt that Jesus was a Galilean which was within Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod who was himself in Jerusalem. When Herod saw Jesus, he was glad, for he longed desired to see him. He heard about Jesus and he was anxious to see some signs performed by him.

Herod questioned Jesus at length but Jesus did not reply him, not minding that the chief priest and the Pharisees were accusing vehemently. However, Herod and his soldiers treated Christ with contempt and mockery. They dressed him in gorgeous apparels and sent him back to Pilate. The trial of Christ gave Herod and Pilate an opportunity to reconcile for they were enemies before thay period.

## **THE CRUCIFIXION, DEATH AND BURIAL OF JESUS CHRIST** **(MATTHEW 27:32 – 61)**

After Jesus had been condemned to death, he was led away by soldiers to the place of crucifixion. Due to physical exhaustion, Jesus was unable to carry his cross. A man of Current, Simon whom they met on the way was appealed to carry the cross for Jesus to the place of his crucifixion called Golgotha which means the place of skull. There they offered him wine filled with gall which he tasted but refused to drink. At that place they crucified him along with two robbers, one on his right and the other on the left. They shared his garment among themselves by drawing lots. Over his head, they put a charge against him: "This is Jesus the king of the Jews." Nailed on the cross the passerby, the Pharisees, the scribes and the chief priests mocked him, each according to his own perspective.

And about the sixth hour, there was darkness over the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli lama sachtani" which means "My God My God why has thou forsaken me". Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. The curtains of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom; the earth shook and rocks were split; the tombs were opened and the body of the saints who have fallen asleep raised.

When those who were keeping watch over Jesus saw what happened were filled with awe and said, "truly this was the son of God". Then so many women who were looking at the whole thing

from afar were those who had followed Jesus from Galilee ministering to him, including Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and John and Mother of the sons of Zebedee.

### The Burial of Jesus

In the evening of the day of crucifixion, a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea who was also a disciple of Jesus went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate ordered it to be given to him. Joseph took the body wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his own new tomb. He rolled over the stone at the entrance of the tomb and departed. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulcher.

### Significance Of Joseph's Action In The Burial Of Jesus

He was a true friend (a friend in need)

He made up for the friendship denied Jesus by his enemies.

It would be sad to allow Jesus to be left hanging on the cross on the Sabbath day as if he were a common criminal.

It would be worse still if it was left till the Passover night which the paschal lamb was being slain.

He could not allow Jesus' body to be buried in a common burial ground meant for criminals.

As a mark of his faith in Jesus, he had to honour him by burying him in a new grave.

### The Resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:1 – 8; Mark 16:1 – 6; Luke 24:1 – 11)

Resurrection means coming back to life after death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was to show his victory over death. The account of the resurrection appears in all the three synoptic gospels. They all stated that when the women disciples – Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James and Salome went to the tomb to embalm the body of Jesus, they discovered that he has resurrected. Matthew reported that there was a great earthquake; and the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone and sat upon it. It was the angel that informed the women that Jesus had raised from the dead.

However, Luke and Mark did not report an earthquake. Mark reported that as the women were contemplating who would help them roll away the stone at the entrance of the tomb. They

discovered that the stone was no more there. On entering the tomb, they were amazed. He said to them: “Do not be amazed; you seek the Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him”. (Mark 16:6)

The angel then directed them to go inform the disciples to prepare themselves and meet him in Galilee. Mark added that the women left the tomb trembling and astonished and they could not say anything to anybody. Luke’s account was similar to that of Mark except that he added that as the women were perplexed over what happened to the body of Jesus, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. It was these men that informed them of the resurrection of Jesus. When the women told the news to the disciples, they did not believe them.

### The Significance of the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of Christian faith. Without his resurrection, there would be no more Christian faith. God raised Jesus from the death thereby confirming him as His son. Resurrection equally forms the basis of Christian hope of salvation. It is an assurance that as God raised Jesus from the dead, so will God raise every Christian’s hope of eternal life in the kingdom of God which is in Christ Jesus. Again, the resurrection of Jesus is the hope that the Lord we are serving is alive and this is Christian’s hope of eternal life in the kingdom of God which is in Christ Jesus. It was the resurrection of Jesus from death that helped to encourage the early apostles to preach the gospel with boldness. The fulfillment of all that Jesus had promised gave the disciples and early apostles much confidence and trust in him.

The resurrection of Jesus is central to Christian belief. To Christians the resurrection is an assurance of Christ’s victory over sin and death.

Christ’s resurrection day became for Christians, the day of the Lord, the day of salvation. Hence, the shift away from the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) to the Christians first day of the week, Sunday – a day of devotion to God; the most memorable day.

### Appearance Of Jesus (Matthew 28:9 – 20; Luke 24:13 – 49)

After the resurrection, Jesus made several appearances to his disciples. Matthew recorded that Jesus appeared to the women disciples. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James while

they were on their way to Galilee to inform other disciples about his resurrection. Jesus asked them to inform the disciples to meet him in Galilee.

Matthew further recorded that the chief priests and the scribes bribed the guards to falsify the resurrection story to make people believe it was the disciples that came and stole him at night. He concluded by stating that wJesus asked his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, charging them to do all that he had commanded them and that he would be with them till the close of age.

Luke recorded that Jesus appeared to the disciples. Cleopas and his friend's on their way to Emmanus; while the disciples were still discussing about his appearance, Jesus stood among them. They were afraid and they felt it was a spirit. Jesus said to them:

“Why are you troubled and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see me; for a spirit has no flesh and bones as you see that I have.” (Luke 24:38 – 39)

While they were still expressing their surprise of joy, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat? They gave him a piece of boiled fish and he ate before them. Luke concluded by stating that he charged the disciples to preach repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. However, the disciples should first of all wait for power (the Holy Spirit) from above.

### The Significance of the Appearance of Jesus Christ

The physical appearance of Jesus Christ helped in strengthening the confidence of the disciples.

It was during the appearance of Jesus that he told the disciples what would be their responsibilities after his departure.

It was at that period that he promised them power from high (Holy Spirit). This promise was fulfilled on the Pentecost day. When this power came, He gave the disciples the boldness to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations of the world.



## **THE RESURRECTION**

**(MATTHEW 28:1 – 8, MARK 16:1 – 6, LUKE 24:1 – 11)**

Resurrection means coming back to life after death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was to show his victory over death. The account of the resurrection appears in all three synoptic gospels. They all stated that when the women disciples-Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James and Salome went to the tomb to embalm the body of Jesus, they discovered that he had resurrected. Matthew reported that there was a great earthquake; angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone and sat upon it. It was this angel that informed the women that Jesus had risen from the dead.

However, Luke and Mark did not report any earthquake. Mark reported that as the women were contemplating who would help them roll away the stone at the entrance of the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right side dressed in a white robe and they were amazed. He told them:

“Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him” (Mark 16:6)

The angel then directed them to go and inform his disciples to prepare themselves and meet him in Galilee. Mark added that the women left the tomb trembling and astonished and they could not say anything to anybody. Luke’s account was similar to that of Mark except that he added that as the women were perplexed over what happened to the body of Jesus, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. It was these men that informed them of the resurrection of Jesus. When the women told the news to the disciples, they did not believe them.

## **COMMUNAL LIVING IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN**

### **ELECTION OF THE SUCCESSOR OF JUDAS ISCARIOT Act 1:15-26**

Fellowship in the early church depicts the intimate relationship that existed among the brethren of the early church.

After Jesus Christ’s ascension the apostles and the disciples about one hundred and twenty of them were together. Peter addressed them on the need to find a replacement for Judas Iscariot who had committed suicide following his betrayal of Jesus Christ. The person must have also

witnessed, resurrection and ascension and should preach the gospel and take care of the needs of the Christian community.

Two names were forwarded – Barnabas and Matthias. After they prayed they cast lots for them; the lot fell on Matthias. He was numbered among the Eleven.

After Peter's speech on the Pentecost day, about three thousand men were converted to Christianity. Thus, the number joined the apostles to form the first Christian community, living a communal life. They ate together. Lived together and did almost everything in common.

### **Identify the characteristics of the early Christian community.**

They all lived as a community sharing, Fellowshiping, praying and praising God.

There was a common purse for all disciples and the ones who had enough food shared it with others according to each person's need. Those who owned lands and other properties sold them and deposited the proceed at the apostles' feet for the common use of all.

There was the spirit of oneness among them, as they worshipped God daily, sharing what they could afford with joy God responded by multiplying their number greatly daily.

### **PROBLEMS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND SOLUTIONS – Act 5:1-11**

Like any other organization of human beings, the joy and communal living among the brethren gave way to human weaknesses and problems. In the early church dishonesty and discrimination came in to destroy and discrimination came in to destroy the spirit of fellowship but was quickly stopped by the apostles. The case of Ananias and Sapphira should the whole church. They lied upon the Holy spirit, they died a shameful death.

The early church was made up of Hebrews, Greeks and people from other nations of the world. Problem arose when the non-Jews accused the Jews of neglecting their widows in the daily distribution of food that was donated by the wealthy members of the church. A meeting was summoned at the end of the meeting, Seven deacons were chosen from the congregation. The selected deacons' included: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas.

Some social problems facing the church today.

The issue of women ordination, So many pastors take the work of God as part time duty, Local traditions are clashing with Christian values and ethics, Stealing of church funds, The urge to get rich over night by pastors, Proliferation of churches, Lack of unity among members, Fight for positions of authority, Differences in doctrine, The legitimacy or otherwise of polygamy.

### **LESSON TO LEARN**

There is no human organization that does not experience problems of one kind or another.

Dishonesty and lies do not pay but lead to death.

The poor and less privileged should be cared for in the church.

Domestic problems in the church should not be allowed to distract us from the major task of evangelism

### **MISSION OF THE GENTILES**

#### **Saul's Conversion (Acts 9:1 – 19)**

After the death of Stephen, many Christians ran to Damascus for their lives. Saul was happy at the death of Stephen. He went to the high priest in Jerusalem and demand for a written permission to Damascus and bring down Jerusalem in chains those who proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

On his way near Damascus, he met with Jesus Christ in a transforming vision. A light from heaven shined on him and fell down as he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Saul replied who are you Lord. The voice replied "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, but rise and enter the city, and you would be told what to do".

The companions of Paul were silent and afraid because they heard the voice speaking but saw no one. When Saul woke up from the ground he could not see for he had been blinded by the light from heaven. His companions led him into the city of Damascus. He remained in the city for three days without food and water.

In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias who lived in a street named straight, whom God had commissioned to restore Saul's sight. But Ananias told God that he had heard of Saul how he had caused havoc on those who belonged to the way and that the man, Saul was a dangerous person. God assured him that He had made him a chosen instrument to preach and

propagate the gospel, death and the resurrection of Jesus to the Jews and Gentiles and that since he had persecuted the church of God, he too wouldn't go without being persecuted by Jesus. Ananias went as commanded by God and laid hands on Saul, something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptised, and took food and was strengthened. He became a Christian. Immediately Saul had been converted to Christianity, he started preaching to the Jews in Damascus about Jesus Christ, declaring Jesus as the son of God.

### **Effects of Saul's Conversion on the Spread of Christianity**

- i. Saul, a strong persecutor of Christians became a major soul winner for the church.
- ii. Saul's conversion led to the expansion of the church.
- iii. Saul, through his missionary activities was able to bring many people to Christianity.
- iv. Saul with other took the gospel to the Gentile cities, many Gentiles were converted to Christianity.
- v. His conversion led to the universality of the church.

### **The Mission Of Peter In Lydda and Joppa (Acts 9:32 – 42)**

Peter went to visit the Christians at Lydda, there, he met one of them called Aenas. He was paralysed and for eight years he had lain in bed. Peter had compassion on him and said to him "Aenas, Jesus heals you, rise and make your bed." Immediately, Aenas rose from his bed and was well again. The news of Aenas healing soon spread throughout the town of Lydda and the neighbouring village. Sharon and many people believed and were converted into Christianity.

### **Peter in Joppa (Acts 9:36 – 43)**

Joppa was a town on the sea coast, not far from Lydda. Among the members of the church, there was a woman called Tabitha (or Dorcas). She was kind, generous and devoted. She spent all her time helping the poor and the needy. But while Peter was in Lydda attending to the Christians there, Tabitha fell ill and died. When other disciples heard that Peter was at Lydda, they sent two members to him to come at once, Tabitha was dead.

Peter immediately left Lydda and went to Joppa. He went to the room where the body was lying in state. He saw many weeping. They showed him the coats and other dresses that Tabitha had made for them while she was alive. Peter asked them all to leave the room, then he knelt down and prayed. After praying he turned to the body and said, "Tabitha rise".

The dead woman opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Peter took her by her hand and lifted her up. He called other Christians to her room to see her alive and well. There was great rejoicing in Joppa. The news spread once again many of the people in Joppa who heard it believed and became Christians.

### **Effects of the Mission of Peter in Lydda and Joppa on the Spread of Christianity**

- i. The healing and raising of the dead through Holy Spirit performed by the land of Peter in Lydda and Joppa caused many people to believe and to become Christians. Miracles are therefore one of the strongest means of the church in winning people to Christianity.
- ii. Peter's visit to Lydda and Joppa enabled him to learn of the believers problems and was able to solve them with the help of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Admission of Gentiles into the Church (Acts 10:44 – 48; 11:1 – 18)**

After the conversion of Cornelius, the brethren in Judea learnt that the Gentiles had received the word of God through Peter. Because of this, Peter was challenged for mingling and eating with the uncircumcised Gentiles in Caesarea. Peter took time to explain how he was in a trance in Joppa and saw all sorts of animals let down in a great sheet and he was asked to kill and eat. He refused the order for three times saying that, nothing common or unclean had ever entered his mouth. He was each time told not to call anything God created common or unclean.

After this, three men came from Caesarea met him and told him that Cornelius had sent them. He was told by the spirit of God to accompany them and not to make any distinction. On their arrival and after Cornelius' explanation, Peter addressed that the audience, declaring that God was no respecter of persons, but those that feared Him and did what was right from every nation, would be accountable to Him.

Hardly had he completed his address when the Holy Spirit descended on Cornelius and his friends and they spoke in tongues. They were baptized. The council of members were perplexed by what they heard and kept silent. They praised God for granting salvation to the Gentiles.

### **Lessons To Learn**

- i. God is the God of all flesh, races and men. He loves all men because created us in His own image. He wants all men to be saved. Therefore, we should not discriminate among others because they are of different races. We are all equal before Him.
- ii. The Jews believed that salvation was for Israel only, but God proved them wrong by opening the door of salvation to the Gentiles and also to all races on earth.

### **OPPOSITION TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE**

**(ACTS 4:1 – 31; 5:17 – 42; 6:8 – 15; 9:1 – 3; 12:1 – 24)**

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, attempts by the apostles to spread the gospel met with stiff resistance from the Jewish religious authorities, the chief priests and the Sanhedrin. Some of the technical employed by these people to frustrate the spread of the gospel included arrest, fake trials, imprisonment, persecution and killing. Some of these wicked techniques were used in dealing with the apostles, but the more they tried to stop them, the more the apostles succeeded until Christianity was established all over the world.

The Arrest of Peter and John (Acts 4:1 – 31)

After Peter and John healed the lame man at the temple gate, the people gathered in amazement and Peter and John preached to them in the same of Jesus. This teachings annoyed the priest, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming Jesus' resurrection from the dead. For this reason, they arrested them and put them in custody. The following day the elders, the scribes, Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, Alexander and all the high-priestly family gathered and brought Peter and John in their midst to try them. They asked for the source of the power with which they did what they had done.

Peter filled with the Holy Spirit, defended their action and declared that they performed the miracles through the power in the name of Jesus Christ whom they had crucified but whom God raised from the dead. He referred to Jesus as the stone which – they the builders rejected but has become the head of the corner. Only through him the salvation of man is assured, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they wondered greatly because they noted that though, the disciples were uneducated and common men, they had been with Jesus Christ. The authorities saw that the man who peter and John had healed was standing there with them, so they did nothing against them. They ordered them out so that they can confer with one another.

They finally decided to charge the men not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore so as to prevent further spreading of Christianity among the people.

When John and Peter were told this, they responded by asking them whether it was right in the sight of God to listen to them or God. The authorities further threatened them and then released them. Peter and John afterwards reported the incident to the church. The congregation prayed to God for more strength and power to face the opposition from the authorities. After the prayer, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they preached the gospel with boldness and more signs were done by them.

### Significance

i. The arrest of Peter and John was prompted by the commotion that came as a result of healing the man who was lame. Peter's address equally disturbed the worship in the temple. Because the captain of the temple was responsible for maintaining law and order in the temple, he had to arrest Peter and John. Again, the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, they believe that the teaching of the apostles contradicted their belief and, as such, they felt threatened.

### The Arrest and Trial of the Apostles (Acts 5:17 – 42)

As the apostles continued to spread the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, the high priest and his men got the apostles arrested and put them in prison out of jealousy. There, in the prison the angel of the Lord released them and said to them, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of His life". The apostles did exactly as the angel directed them. When the Sanhedrin met, they sent for the apostles in prison but they were not there. Later, an informant told them that the apostles were in the temple, preaching. Because of the people in the temple, they were brought gently without violence. When the men were brought to the Sanhedrin, the high priest questioned them saying:

"We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us".

Peter and the apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men. That God our Father raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we witness to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:30 – 32)

The response of the apostles enraged them and they wanted to kill the apostles. A Pharisee in the council, Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honour of our people, stood up and ordered them to be put outside for a while. Then he advised; “Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men. For before these days, Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody and a number of men, about four hundred joined him; but he was slain and all who follows him were dispersed and come to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean arose in the days of Census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished and all who followed him scattered. So, in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or undertaking is of men it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to over throw them; you might even be found opposing God’ (Acts 5:35 – 39).

The council took to his advice. When they called in the men, they beat them and before they left them, they warned them not to speak in the same of Jesus again. The apostles left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted to suffer dishonour for the name of Jesus.

#### Qualities Attributable to Gamaliel

- i. Gamaliel was a man of courage. He did not display any fear in his efforts to protect the apostles.
- ii. He proved himself an educated man with good knowledge of history.
- iii. He was a godly man who did not believe in wickedness and did not want the murder of innocent apostles.
- iv. He was a man of peace as he abhorred any form of conflict in the society.
- v. He was tolerant and allowed the exercise of individual conviction.

#### Significance and Lessons to Learn

- i. The arrest of the twelve apostles was one of the greatest threats to the Christian faith, but God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, gave the apostles the power to defend themselves. God also used Gamaliel to intervene on their behalf. If the twelve disciples had been killed, this probably would have been the end of Christian faith, but God did not allow it. This is also a lesson to Christians that in the time of difficulty, the Holy Spirit always helped in all ways to ensure that they are set free from such difficulty.

#### Different Types of Opposition confronting the Church Today



- i. In some parts of the country and even in some schools, Christians are not allowed to preach publicly.
- ii. Also, church buildings are not allowed in some parts of the country.
- iii. Christians suffer open persecution thereby leading to wanton destruction of lives and property.
- iv. There is discrimination against Christians in employment opportunities and promotions in public service.
- v. Christians are discriminated against in marriages and funeral ceremonies.
- vi. In some cases, Christians are denied the freedom of worship and religion holidays.

#### The Death of Stephen (Acts 6:8 – 15; 7:1 – 60)

Stephen was one of the seven deacons selected to carry out the daily distribution of food and ensure the welfare of the less privileged people in the early church. Stephen was full of grace and power, he performed great wonders and signs among the people. Some of the Jews could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke. Consequently, these men secretly insighted men who brought false accusations against him. **The accusations were as follows;**

- i. That he blasphemed against Moses, the law and God,
- ii. That he claimed Jesus would destroy the temple.

These accusations by Jewish law constituted serious offence punishable by death.

When Steohen was arraigned before the council, he surprised them by failing to refute the allegation. He decided to trace the history of the Jews to show that they had been noted for persecuting the prophets of God. He referred to them as stiff-necked people, uncircumcised I'm heart and ears. This statement angered the people the more. Based on this, they dragged him outside the city and stoned him to death.

#### Significance And Lessons To Learn

- i. Stephen was killed based on false accusations. Therefore, present day evangelists should know that the same fate awaits them at all times. They should therefore pray always for God's guidance and protection.
- ii. The successful arrest, trial and killing of Stephen encouraged the Jews embark on mass persecution of the Christians and, consequently, many of them were killed, but that did not stop the spreading of the gospel.

- iii. The persecution of the Christians made them run various places and as they went, they kept on preaching the gospel and that led to the widespread Christianity. An example of this is Phillip's action and movement to Samaria and the conversion of the people in Samaria.
- iv. Persecution is part of the heritage of Christians and they should not be encouraged by such things; rather persecution should make them strong in their faith.
- v. The stoning of Stephen helped to introduce Saul who later became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

#### Saul's Opposition to the Gospel (Acts 9:1 – 2)

Saul was a young man born in Tarsus. He was educated in Jerusalem and he studied law under the great teacher, Gamaliel. The Roman name of Saul was Paul. He was among the Pharisees who persecuted the early Christians, Stephen was killed under his supervision.

After the death of Stephen, he went from house to house in Jerusalem arresting and dragging Christians out of their homes and taking them prisoners. Thus, Saul succeeded in killing many Christians.

Most of the Christians fled from Jerusalem and went to places such as Judea, Samaria and Damascus among others. Saul went to the high priest and obtained a letter to go to Damascus and arrest the Christians.

#### Significance and Lessons to Learn

- i. Saul engaged in the persecution of the Christians because he was ignorant of the gospel. He thought he was working for God, but when his eyes were opened, he understood the gospel and became more zealous than the apostles. Many people today are in this category. Due to their ignorance, they engage in criticism and gossips against the children of God. People should be very careful of what they do and what they say, particularly when they do not understand it very well.
- ii. God arrested Saul's spirit and converted him, God is ever ready to accept anybody, regardless of his atrocities, once he has changed and confessed. Christians should endeavour to leave their bad ways and turn unto God.

#### Herod's Persecution of the Christians (Acts 12:1 – 24)

Herod Agrippa was very violent in his opposition to the gospel. The Herods were not Jews, but were appointed by the Roman empire to rule the Jews and the Jews did not like their system of leadership. The Herods therefore did everything possible to win the confidence of the Jews.

When Herod Agrippa realized that the Jewish council was opposed to the spread of the church, he joined in the persecution of the Christians just to please the Jews. When he killed James the brother of John, he discovered that it pleased the Jews who hated the Christians. He then proceeded to arrest Peter. Herod put Peter in prison, waiting for feast of unleavened bread and the Passover to pass before he could kill him.

The night before the day Herod planned to kill Peter, Peter was sleeping bound between two soldiers. The angel of the Lord appeared to Peter and said, “Dress yourself and put on your sandals.” And he obeyed. The angel also commanded him to wrap his mantle and follow him. Peter followed the angel through the first gate and when they came to the iron-gate leading to the city; it opened without any effort by them. They went out and immediately, the angel left him. All this while, Peter thought he was seeing vision and it was after the angel left him that he realized it was the angel of the Lord that came to rescue him. Peter then went straight to Mary’s house where some Christians had gathered to pray for him. When Herod could not understand the mystery behind Peter’s escape from prison, he was furious that he executed the prison guards. Later, Herod himself was killed by the angel of God because he refused to glorify God for the gift of oration. He was eaten up by worms and the word of God continued to grow and multiply.

Significance and Lessons to Learn

- i. It is very important to note that it was the stiff opposition the early Christians faced that acted as the necessary ingredient in the spread of the gospel.
- ii. The boldness and the courage of the Christians then was enhanced by the Holy Spirit

### **PAUL’S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS**

Paul’s missionary journeys helped spread the gospel throughout much of the ancient world. Over the course of his ministry, the Apostle Paul traveled more than 10,000 miles and established at least 14 churches.

The Book of Acts records three separate missionary journeys that took Paul through Greece, Turkey, Syria, and numerous regions you won't find on modern-day maps. Some scholars argue that Paul also took a fourth missionary journey, since parts of the New Testament appear to reference travels that may have taken place after the events in Acts.

Paul's travels played a crucial role in the formation and development of the early Christian church. Many of the communities he encountered on these missionary journeys were the same ones he wrote to in his pastoral epistles.

In this guide, we're going to follow Paul's footsteps as he travelled across the ancient world, looking at the places he went and the major events that took place along the way. At times it can be challenging to distinguish between ancient cities, provinces, and regions (and there are sometimes multiple names that refer to the same area), so as we go, we'll make some of those distinctions more clear.

### **Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13–14)**

Paul's first missionary journey began in Antioch. You may notice that maps of the ancient world often have two cities labelled Antioch. They're both named after Antiochus, father of Seleucid I. The Antioch in Acts 13 was the third largest city in ancient Rome and capital of the province of Syria. Today, it's part of southern Turkey. The *other* Antioch was part of Pisidia, an ancient region which is also now part of Turkey. Your Bible likely refers to it as Pisidian Antioch or Antioch of Pisidia.

In Antioch (the big city in Syria), the Holy Spirit singled out Paul and Barnabas from the believers worshipping there, and sent them on their first missionary journey.

### **Cyprus**

Paul's first journey took him by boat to the Roman province of Cyprus. Today, Cyprus is a country known as the Republic of Cyprus. It's a mediterranean island south of Syria. Paul and Barnabas arrived in the port city of Salamis, where John Mark (who was possibly Barnabas' cousin), helped them share the gospel in Jewish synagogues.

From Salamis, the group moved across the island to Paphos, where they were met by a Jewish sorcerer named Bar-Jesus (also known as Elymas the sorcerer). This sorcerer worked for the

governor—Sergius Paulus—who sent for Paul and his companions because he wanted to hear the word of God. Elymas opposed them and tried to turn Sergius from the faith, and so Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, called him a “child of the devil” and struck him blind. Sergius saw what happened, and believed.

**Ironically, Elymas meant to steer Sergius away from Christ, but he became the very vehicle God used to draw Sergius *toward* him.**

### **Pamphylia**

From Paphos, Paul and company set sail for the Roman province of Pamphylia, located in modern day Turkey. They arrived in the city of Perga, where John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem (which, interestingly, was in the opposite direction from where they just came). We don't know why John Mark decided to leave, but this would later create a rift between Paul and Barnabas.

Together, Paul and Barnabas travelled to Pisidian Antioch, where local synagogue leaders invited them to speak. Initially, the Jewish people were receptive to the gospel, but a week later, the entire city gathered to hear Paul and Barnabas, and the Jewish leaders became jealous. They resisted the message of the gospel, and so Paul and Barnabas made an important pivot: **they began preaching to the Gentiles.**

Many of the Gentiles believed the gospel, and Luke (the traditional author of Acts) tells us that:

“The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.” —Acts 13:49–50

### **Phrygia**

Driven out of Pamphylia, Paul and Barnabas travelled to Iconium, an eastern city in the region of Phrygia. Iconium still exists today as the Turkish city of Konya.

Once again, Paul and Barnabas spoke in the synagogue, where Jews and Greeks alike accepted the gospel. But the Jews who didn't accept it stirred up trouble, even as Paul and Barnabas began performing signs and wonders (Acts 14:3). As support for Paul and Barnabas grew, so did the

opposition they faced, and eventually, they became aware of a plot to abuse and stone them. So they left.

## **Lycaonia**

Fleeing the threat in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas left Phrygia altogether and travelled to Lystra, a city in the province of Lycaonia. Here, Paul healed a man who was lame. The locals who witnessed this miracle thought Paul and Barnabas were gods in human form, calling Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes. The priest from the temple of Zeus brought bulls and wreaths to offer sacrifices to them.

Paul and Barnabas attempted to redirect their praise to God, but struggled to keep the crowds from offering sacrifices to them.

Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and continued what they'd started. They riled up the crowds and convinced them to stone Paul. Believing he was dead, they dragged him outside the city. When the disciples gathered around him, Paul got up and went back inside the city.

Then Paul and Barnabas went to Derbe, another city in Lycaonia. There, they “won a large number of disciples” (Acts 14:21).

## **The return to Antioch**

After a time in Derbes, Paul and Barnabas went back the way they came, working their way through Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, and Perga. In each city, they encouraged the believers there and strengthened their faith, as they would continue doing on their future missionary journeys. They did, however, stop in a new Pamphylian city on the way: Attalia. Acts only mentions it in passing, but presumably, they established a community of believers there as well.

From there, they skipped a return voyage to the island of Cyprus and went straight back to Antioch (the big one), where they told the church what happened on their journey.

## **Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:23–20:38)**

Paul's second missionary journey established many of the churches he would later write to in his pastoral epistles. Interestingly, this may have happened in part because of a “sharp disagreement” he had with Barnabas. Paul's original plan was to essentially have a rerun of their first trip,

strengthening the communities they'd formed in each city and telling them what the Council of Jerusalem had ruled in regards to Gentile believers.

But Barnabas wanted to take John Mark—who had left them shortly into their previous journey. Paul was so opposed to the idea that they parted ways, initiating two separate missionary journeys. Barnabas took John Mark and went with the original plan, making their way back to the island of Cyprus. Paul took a man named Silas and travelled through the provinces of Syria and Cilicia.

### **Lycaonia**

The first cities that Acts mentions by name on Paul's second journey are Derbe and Lystra. At this time, Paul and Silas picked up a new companion: Timothy.

The locals spoke highly of Timothy, and Paul wanted to bring him along even though he was half Greek, which meant local Jews would have a harder time accepting their message. Out of concern for these local Jews, Paul circumcised Timothy—even though, ironically, one of the things they were coming to tell Christians was that Gentiles didn't have to be circumcised. (See Acts 16:3–4.)

### **Phrygia**

Acts doesn't specify where in Phrygia Paul and his companions stopped, but since he'd established a church in Iconium on the first trip, that community would've been on his mind (even though last time he was there, people had plotted to stone him). Interestingly, Acts notes that Paul and his companions journeyed here after they were “kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia” (Acts 16:6).

### **Galatia**

Just north of Phrygia was the province of Galatia. Acts makes no mention of what happened here, but this is the province Paul wrote to in his letter to the Galatians. Interestingly, part of the purpose of Paul's second trip was to share the news from the Council of Jerusalem regarding the Law of Moses and whether or not Gentiles (or Christians in general) should be expected to follow it. The council decided the Torah didn't apply to Gentile believers (though they did hang

on to a *few* rules). But by the time Paul wrote the Book of Galatians, Christians there were feeling pressure to obey the law (particularly in regards to circumcision) in order to be saved.

## **Asia**

From Galatia, Paul's group traveled west, until they reached the border of Mysia—a western region in the province of Asia, which is now part of Turkey. They intended to head north to the region of Bithynia, “but the spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (Acts 16:7). So they passed by Mysia and headed to the city of Troas. Here, Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia, begging him to “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Paul took this vision as a sign that God was calling them to Macedonia, which was across the Aegean Sea.

**Fun fact:** Acts 16:10 is the first time the author of Acts (traditionally Luke the Physician) inserts himself into the narrative: “After Paul had seen the vision, **we** got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them” (emphasis added). It's possible that Troas is where Luke first joined the journey.

## **Macedonia**

From Troas, Paul and his companions sailed across the Aegean Sea, making a pitstop on the island of Samothrace before landing in Neapolis and then traveling to Philippi. In Philippi, they spoke with women outside the city gate. One of them was a wealthy cloth dealer named Lydia. After her household was baptised, she persuaded Paul's group to stay with her for a while.

Later, Paul, Silas, and the others were confronted by a spirit-possessed slave woman who could predict the future. She followed them for many days, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved” (Acts 16:17). Paul became so annoyed that he cast out the spirit. Her owners were furious, because they had been profiting off of her fortune telling. So they turned the local magistrates against them, claiming Paul and Silas were stirring up trouble and trying to get Roman citizens to believe and do illegal things.

The authorities had Paul and Silas severely flogged and thrown in prison. Late at night, while they were worshipping, an earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, opened the doors, and freed the prisoners from their chains. When the jailer awoke and saw the doors open, he prepared to kill himself. But Paul stopped him and assured him everyone was still in the prison.



After listening to Paul and Silas share the gospel, the jailer believed in Jesus and had his whole household baptized.

The next morning, the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas released. Paul revealed that they were Roman citizens, who had just been beaten and imprisoned without trial, and the authorities became afraid. Paul and Silas returned to Lydia's house, and then left the city of Troas.

After passing through the Macedonian cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia, they arrived in Thessalonica. Since Thessalonica had a synagogue, Paul turned to his usual method—preaching the gospel on the Sabbath. Over the course of three weeks, he achieved the usual result—many Jews and Greeks alike embraced the gospel . . . and those who didn't were outraged by it.

At night, the Thessalonian believers sent Paul and his companions away to the nearby city of Berea.

The Bereans listened eagerly to the gospel and carefully examined the Scriptures to see if they supported Paul's claims. Many Jews and Greeks became believers, but some agitators from Thessalonica heard Paul was in Berea, and they stirred up the crowds. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea, while Paul was escorted out of Macedonia to Athens.

### **Achaia**

In the first century, Athens was in the region of Achaia, just south of Macedonia. Today, it's the capital of Greece, and the largest city in the country.

Paul was essentially waiting around for Silas, Timothy, and the others to rejoin him. But while he waited, he noticed that Athens was full of idols. He debated with philosophers in both the synagogue and marketplace. Some Athenians were open to his ideas, and they were eager to discuss them. One idol in particular caught his eye—it had an inscription that read: “to an unknown god.” He seized on this as an opportunity to tell them about the “unknown God” who died and rose so that all might have eternal life.

Paul's message in Athens incorporated observations about what he saw around him as well as quotes from famous Greek philosophers to point back to the gospel. After establishing a group of believers in Athens, Paul headed west to the city of Corinth.

In Corinth, Paul stayed and worked with a couple of Jewish tentmakers named Priscilla and Aquila. Every Sabbath, he preached to Jews and Greeks in the synagogue. Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul here, and Paul began focusing his energy on testifying about Jesus to the Jews.

When the Jews opposed his message, Paul devoted himself to reaching Gentiles, and he left the synagogue. As more Greeks embraced the gospel, the Corinthian Jews brought Paul before the governor, who basically told them to take a hike and refused to help.

Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, and he left with Priscilla and Aquila.

### **The return journey**

Before setting off for Syria, Paul stopped for a vow-fulfilling haircut in the port city of Cenchreae, which was just a hop, skip, and a jump from Corinth. With his companions, he sailed across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus, where he dropped off Priscilla and Aquila, and promised to come back if he could. After a short stay in Ephesus, Paul set sail for Caesarea, which was across the Mediterranean and far to the southeast. From there, he made the trek south to Jerusalem.

Paul's second missionary journey ended in Jerusalem.

### **Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–20:38)**

When you read Acts, there's no transition from Paul's second missionary journey to his third. His arrival in Jerusalem almost immediately began his next trip. But while his second journey ends in Jerusalem, the beginning of his third journey is actually in Antioch, which is about 300 miles north.

### **Phrygia and Galatia**

From Antioch, Paul once again worked his way west, passing "from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). This included Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium.

### **Asia**

Paul traveled west to Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia, where he'd left Priscilla and Aquila on his previous journey. Since he'd last visited, a man named Apollos had been

preaching *part* of the gospel, but he didn't know about the Holy Spirit. So when Paul arrived, he taught the Ephesians about the difference between water baptism and the baptism of the Spirit.

For three months, Paul preached in the synagogues. When people started criticizing Christianity, he left and began holding discussions in a lecture hall.

This went on for two years, and all the while, God used Paul to perform miracles. Even things Paul had touched—handkerchiefs and aprons—healed the sick and drove out evil spirits.

Some Jews thought invoking Paul's name would let them drive out demons. Seven sons of a chief priest named Sceva said to an evil spirit, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out" (Acts 19:13). The spirit replied that it knew Jesus and Paul, but not them, and then it pulverized all seven of them.

As word spread about what happened, people began to revere the name of Jesus. Local sorcerers came to repent, and they burnt scrolls that would have been worth *more than 130 years' worth of wages* (Acts 19:19).

Around this time, a local silversmith named Demetrius realized that the future of his business (making idols) was jeopardized by the gospel. The demand for idols was going down all across the province of Asia, but especially in Ephesus, where he lived. So Demetrius gathered all the craftsmen and workers whose businesses were impacted, and stirred the entire city into an uproar. They seized two of Paul's companions and brought them into a theater.

Paul wanted to address the crowd, but the disciples didn't let him. Instead, a city clerk told everyone that unless they were going to bring formal charges against the men in a legal assembly, they were in danger of being charged with rioting.

### **Macedonia and Greece**

After things settled down in Ephesus, Paul headed across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. He traveled throughout the region, encouraging believers, and eventually arrived in Greece, where he stayed for three months. He intended to sail back to Syria (where his journey started), but some people plotted against him, so he took another lap through Macedonia instead.

Along the way, disciples joined Paul from many of the communities he'd ministered to. He had companions from Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, and the province of Asia. These followers went ahead of Paul to Troas, in Asia. Paul stayed briefly in Philippi, then joined them.

## **Asia**

Paul stayed in Troas for seven days. The night before he left, he stayed up late talking in a room upstairs. A young man sat in a window, drifted off to sleep, and fell to his death. Paul threw his arms around the man and declared that he was alive, and he was. Then Paul went back upstairs and continued talking until daylight.

Paul walked from Troas to Assos, which was just to the south, and then sailed for the nearby city of Mitylene. Eager to reach Jerusalem before Pentecost, Paul sailed past Ephesus and stopped in Miletus. There, he met with the leaders of the Ephesian church and essentially told them that he had taught them everything they needed to know, that he would not see them again, and that they needed to be on guard against false teachers. This is when Paul also famously quoted Jesus, sharing words that aren't recorded in any of the gospels: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). And then he set sail.

## **The return journey**

Paul and his companions stopped briefly in Kos, Rhodes, and Patara before heading across the Mediterranean Sea to Phoenicia (the coastal region south of ancient Syria, which is now part of Syria). They arrived in Tyre, where "through the Spirit" (Acts 21:4), the local disciples urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He ignored them.

From Tyre, the voyage continued to the port city of Ptolemais, and then Caesarea, where the group stayed with Philip the evangelist (not to be confused with Philip the apostle). Here, a prophet warned Paul that he would be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem and handed over to the Gentiles.

Still, he pressed on to Jerusalem, and by the end of Acts, the Jewish leaders had handed him over to Roman rulers