

**READ The BIBLE Together**



**Acts 1-12**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> September – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

**SHALOM CHURCH, SINGAPORE**  
**(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)**

## Introduction to ACTS

The human author of ACTS is *Luke* (He is affectionately known as ‘*Luke the beloved physician*’ – Colossians 4:14). ACTS is his second book.

His first book is the Gospel of LUKE. LUKE 1:1-4 says this: *Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*

In writing his second book, this is how *Luke* begins in ACTS 1:1-3: *The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

We note that both LUKE and ACTS were written to a man named Theophilus. We further note that *Luke* considered his former account (Gospel of LUKE) as a record of all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach until His ascension. What then does his second book (ACTS) record? A record of what the ascended Jesus *continued* to do and teach by His Spirit through His apostles!!

*“It is no exaggeration to say that they set Christianity apart from other religions that regard their founder as having completed his ministry during his lifetime. Luke says Jesus only began his. True, he finished the work of atonement, yet that end was also a beginning. For after his resurrection, ascension and gift of the Spirit he continued his work, first and foremost through the unique foundation ministry of his chosen apostles and subsequently through the post-apostolic church of every period and place. This, then, is the kind of Jesus Christ we believe in: he is both the historical Jesus who lived and the contemporary Jesus who lives. The Jesus of history began his ministry on earth; the Christ of glory has been active through his Spirit ever since, according to his promise to be with his people always, to the very end of the age.”* (John Stott)

Hence, while ACTS is normally called ‘*The Acts of the Apostles*’ in our Bibles, it is more appropriate to call ACTS as ‘*The Continuing Words and Acts of Jesus by His Spirit through His apostles.*’

Day 1 Read the Introduction to ACTS above

1. What have you learnt from the Introduction?
  
2. How has it changed your life?
  
3. Go look for someone to share the lesson you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

Day 2 Read ACTS 1:1-5

1. (a) How long a period was it between the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ?
  
- (b) During this time, what three things did Jesus do? (Verses 2-3)
  - \*
  - \*
  - \*
- (c) Why do you think Jesus did these three things?

*“The proofs were infallible, **tekmeria**—plain indications, both that he was alive (he walked and talked with them, he ate and drank with them) and that it was he himself, and not another; for he showed them again and again the marks of the wounds in his hands, and feet, and side, which was the utmost proof the thing was capable of or required.*

*They were many, and often repeated: He was seen by them forty days, not constantly residing with them, but frequently appearing to them, and bringing them by degrees to be fully satisfied concerning it, so that all their sorrow for his departure was done away by it. Christ's staying upon earth so long after he had entered upon his state of exaltation and glory, to confirm the faith of his disciples and comfort their hearts, was such an instance of condescension and compassion to believers as may fully assure us that we have a high priest that is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”*

Matthew Henry

2. (a) In verse 4, Jesus gave His apostles a specific command . . .

not to \_\_\_\_\_

but to \_\_\_\_\_

(b) What is the Promise of the Father? (Verse 5)

(c) How important, do you think, is this 'Promise of the Father' to the eleven apostles? Explain your answer. [Hint: Read JOHN 16:5-15]

Day 3 Read ACTS 1:6-8

1. (a) What question did the apostles ask Jesus? (Verse 6)

(b) Why, do you think, did they ask this question?

2. The reply of Jesus is found in verses 7-8. What did He say?

Verse 7:

Verse 8:

Did Jesus give a direct answer to the question of the apostles in His reply? Explain your answer.

Day 4 Summary Notes for ACTS 1:1-8

During the 40 days between Christ's resurrection and His ascension, our Lord spent His time mainly with His apostles. They were men whom He had chosen. In other words, they were not self-appointed or appointed by other men, but Christ chose and

appointed them.

These men have a task to perform: *To be witnesses of Jesus* (verse 8). To borrow the words of LUKE 24:46-48, they were to be witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, they were to tell others that (a) Jesus died on the cross according to the Scriptures, (b) He had been raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and (c) now they must repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.

To equip these men for this task, Jesus presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs to the apostles. They must see the resurrected Lord with their own eyes before they can bear witness of Him.

During His many post-resurrection appearances to His apostles, Jesus spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the rule of God in the hearts of men. When men repent of their sins and believe in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, God's kingdom is set up in their hearts. In other words, the task of being Jesus' witnesses and the kingdom of God are intimately linked!

To properly and truly carry out this task, the apostles needed the Holy Spirit. Hence, Jesus commanded them not to rush off to do the task, but to wait for the baptism of the Spirit. He will come '*not many days from now*', our Lord said to these men. The implication is that they should proceed with their task only after the coming of the Spirit.

Sadly, the apostles were still confused about the kingdom of God. Hence, their question in verse 6: *Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?* The verb, noun and adverb of their sentence all betray confusion in the minds of the apostles at this time. The verb '*restore*' shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom. The noun '*Israel*' shows that they were expecting a physical, national kingdom. The adverb '*at this time*' shows that they were expecting its immediate establishment. In reply, Jesus corrected their mistaken notions of the kingdom's nature, extent and arrival.

In reply to their question, Jesus again talked about the coming of the Holy Spirit and giving them the power to be His witnesses:

(a) The reference to the Holy Spirit defines the nature of the kingdom – it is spiritual. It is spread by witnesses, not soldiers; through a gospel of peace, not a declaration of war; and by the work of the Spirit, not by military force, political intrigue or revolution.

(b) In mentioning '*Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth*' Jesus broadened the horizon of these men while overthrowing their narrow, nationalistic aspirations. The kingdom of God is not restricted to just Israel. It will encompass all nations! That's the extent of God's kingdom.

(c) The words of our Lord in ACTS 1:7 is a direct response to their '*at this time*': it is

not for them to know the times and seasons. In other words, the time when the kingdom of God be fully established belongs to the secret things of the Lord (Deuteronomy 29:29). What they can know is that the Spirit will come upon them to enable them to do their task, and they must then get on with it, starting at Jerusalem. We know, from other parts of Scripture, that when the Son comes again, God's kingdom will be fully established. From the Spirit's coming till the Son comes again, the apostles (and the church) must give themselves to the worldwide mission stated in ACTS 1:8.

1. What new truths have you learnt from the Summary Notes, and how has it impacted your life?
2. What old truths were you reminded of from the Summary Notes? How can you live out these truths you've re-learnt in your life right now?
3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

Day 5      Read ACTS 1:9-11

These 3 verses speak of a historical event – the ascension of Jesus. This event marks the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and the beginning of His continual work from heaven by His Spirit.

1. How did *Luke* describe the ascension of Jesus? (Verse 9)
2. Who witnessed the ascension of Jesus?
3. What did the two men in white apparel say?
4. What is the significance of this event – the ascension of Jesus?

Day 6      Read ACTS 1:12-14

1. (a) These 3 verses record a prayer meeting. Who's present?
  - (b) Do you attend your church's prayer meeting? Why or why not?
  
2. (a) Verse 14 mentions two features in their prayers. What are they?
  - 
  -
  - (b) Are these two features present in your prayers?
  
3. Verse 14 mentions '*supplication*'. '*Supplication*' means '*asking*'. What do you think they were asking God to do at this prayer meeting?

Day 7      Summary Notes for ACTS 1:9-14

The ascension of Jesus was a real, historical event. The 11 apostles were eyewitnesses – “*while they watched*”, “*out of their sight*”, “*while they looked*”, “*why do you stand gazing*”, “*as you saw*” (verses 9-11).

During the 40 days after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples at various times and in various places. The ascension brought these appearances to a close. He will no longer appear to them on earth. He was going back to the Father in heaven. The next time men will see Him physically on earth will be when He returns in glory at the end of the age.

The apostles understood this. That is why, after the mild rebuke by the two angels, they left Olivet and returned to Jerusalem. There, they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus in ACTS 1:8. While waiting, they were engaged in prayer. The promise of the Lord is a spur to prayer!

At this prayer meeting, the 11 apostles were present together with the women who were involved in the earthly ministry of Jesus, Mary the mother of Jesus and also the

half-brothers of Jesus. It is likely that other disciples also joined in so that the total figure present was around 120 (cf. ACTS 1:15). Two features in their prayers stood out:

- It was *persevering* (they all continued)
- It was *united* (with one accord)

With persevering and united prayer, they were asking God to fulfill His promise and send the Holy Spirit. Ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost, their prayers were answered (cf. ACTS 2:1).

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes above?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

## **Week 2**

**[30<sup>th</sup> September – 6<sup>th</sup> October 2012]**

Day 1 Read ACTS 1:15-26

Besides the prayer meeting, the disciples also had a business meeting! These 12 verses tell us what happened at the business meeting – Peter proposed a twelfth apostle to replace Judas Iscariot.

1. According to Peter, why was there a need to find a replacement? (Verses 15-20)
2. (a) What qualifications should the person who would replace Judas possess? (Verses 21-26)  
  
(b) Why were these qualifications important?
3. Who was the replacement? How was he chosen?

Note #1: The replacement of Judas by Matthias was done through a rather detailed process:

- *The general leading of the Scripture that a replacement be made (v16-21)*
- *The use of common sense: if the person chosen is to replace Judas, then he must have seen the Lord during His earthly ministry; hence the nomination of only two names (v22-23)*
- *The seeking of the Lord in prayer, asking Him to choose and make His choice known to them*
- *The drawing of lots -- a method used in the Old Testament to determine God's will. This method appears to fall into disuse after Pentecost.*

Today, Scripture, common sense, prayer and the Spirit's guidance constitute a wholesome combination through which God guides us as we make decisions big and small.

Note #2: *"The stage is now set for the day of Pentecost. The apostles have received Christ's commission and seen his ascension. The apostolic team is complete again, ready to be his chosen witnesses. Only one thing is missing: the Spirit has yet come. So we leave Luke's first chapter of Acts with the 120 waiting in Jerusalem, persevering in prayer with one heart and mind, poised ready to fulfill Christ's command just as soon as he has fulfilled his promise."*

John Stott

Day 2 Read the Introduction to ACTS 2

### Introduction to ACTS 2

*"Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from his fruit, and no effective witness without his power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead."*

John Stott

Finally, the day arrived when the ascended Christ will send His Spirit upon His people. It took place on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost. ACTS 2 records what happened then:

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Verses 1-13  | The description of the Pentecost event by <i>Luke</i> .                |
| Verses 14-41 | The explanation of the Pentecost event by <i>Peter</i> in his sermon   |
| Verses 42-47 | The effects of the Pentecost event on the life of the Jerusalem church |

1. What difference would it make if the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from your Christian life?

2. Without the Holy Spirit, would you be able to live out the principles of the Christian life? Why do you think so?
  
3. What difference would it make if the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from Shalom Church?

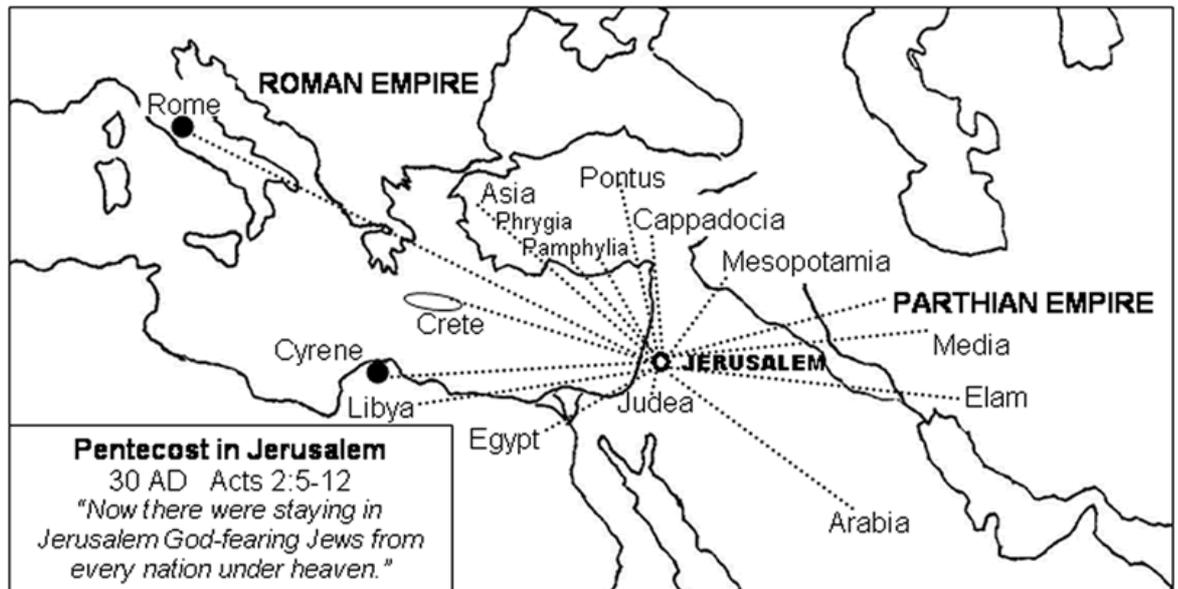
Day 3 Read ACTS 2:1-13

1. Imagine that you were a reporter present there and then. Describe what you would see and hear.

See:

Hear:

2. Verse 5 mentions the presence of Jews and devout men from every nation under heaven. To put it in modern terms, this was an international, multi-lingual crowd.
  - (a) Where were they from? (Verses 9-11)



(b) What did they experience (hear)?

*"Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel. At Babel human languages were confused and the nations were scattered; in Jerusalem the language barrier was supernaturally overcome as a sign that the nations would now be gathered together in Christ, prefiguring the great day when the redeemed company will be drawn 'from every nation, tribe, people and language' (Gen 11:1-9, Rev 7:9). Besides, at Babel earth proudly tried to ascend to heaven, whereas in Jerusalem heaven humbly descended to earth.*

John Stott

(c) What's the response of the crowd present there and then?

Verse 12:

Verse 13:

*"And therefore, to prove that Christ could give authority to preach to the nations, he gives ability to preach to them in their own language. And it should seem that this was the accomplishment of that promise which Christ made to his disciples (John 14:12), 'Greater works than these shall you do.' For this may well be reckoned, all things considered, a greater work than the miraculous cures Christ wrought. Christ himself did not speak with other tongues, nor did he enable his disciples to do so while he was with them: but it was the first effect of the pouring out of the Spirit upon them."*

Matthew Henry

## Day 4 Special study on the Pentecost event

The Jewish feast of Pentecost has two meanings, one agricultural and one historical. Originally, it was either called the Feast of Harvest because it celebrated the completion of the grain harvest, or the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) because it took place fifty days after the Passover. Towards the end of the period between the Old and New Testament, it began to be observed as the anniversary of the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai.

The Holy Spirit came upon the 120 disciples on the day of Pentecost in AD 30. Since then, Pentecost takes on a very special significance for the Christian church in these four ways, as summarized by John Stott:

*"First, it was the final act of the saving ministry of Jesus before the Parousia (i.e. the Second Coming of Christ). He who was born into our humanity, lived our life, died for our sins, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, now sent his Spirit to his people to constitute them his body and to work out in them what he had won for them. In this sense the Day of Pentecost is unrepeatable. Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Day, Ascension Day and Whit Sunday are annual celebrations, but the birth, death, resurrection, ascension and Spirit-gift they commemorate happened once and for all.*

*Secondly, Pentecost brought to the apostles the equipment they needed for their special role. Christ had appointed them to be his primary and authoritative witnesses, and had promised them the reminding and teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14-16). Pentecost was the fulfillment of that promise.*

*Thirdly, Pentecost was the inauguration of the new era of the Spirit. Although his coming was a unique and unrepeatable historical event, all the people of God can now always and everywhere benefit from his ministry. Although he equipped the apostles to be the primary witnesses, he also equips us to be secondary witnesses. Although the inspiration of the Spirit was given to the apostles alone, the fullness of the Spirit is for us all.*

*Fourthly, Pentecost has been called - and rightly - the first 'revival', using this word to denote one of those altogether unusual visitations of God, in which a whole community becomes vividly aware of his immediate, overpowering presence."*

1. What new truths have you learnt from the Special Study above and how has it impacted your life?
2. What old truths were you reminded of from the Special Study above? How can you live out these truths you've been re-learnt in your life right now?

3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

### Day 5 Special study on tongues (*glossolalia*)

Three supernatural phenomena took place during the Pentecost event: *wind-like noise, tongue-shaped fire-liked objects* and *men speaking in other tongues*. What exactly was this third phenomenon that Luke stressed, the result of which people heard God's wonders in their native language? How does *Luke* understand *glossolalia*?

It WAS NOT a miracle of hearing. Some Bible students have mistakenly understood this phenomenon as the disciples speaking in the Hebrew language while crowds present that day heard what was said *in their own language*. These Bible students point to these verses to support their claim:

Verse 6: *And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.*

Verse 8: *And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?*

Verse 11: *... we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.*

However, these Bible students are mistaken because when *Luke* writes his own descriptive narrative, he puts the matter beyond dispute: *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance* (verse 4). *Glossolalia* was indeed a phenomenon of hearing, but only because it was first a phenomenon of speech.

It WAS a miracle of speech -- a supernatural ability to speak in recognizable languages. The list of fifteen regions in verses 9-11 points us in this direction. The crowd's astonishment was due to the fact that the languages spoken were foreign to the speakers, yet to the hearers they were their own native languages. In simple words, these Galilean disciples were speaking the mother tongue of that varied group of people from 15 different regions, but these early disciples had never learnt those languages before! The *glossolalia* of ACTS 2 were known, intelligible languages.

ACTS 10:46, 19:6 and 1 CORINTHIANS 12-14 also mentioned *glossolalia* without further explanations of what they were in essence. Following the principle of using the explained to interpret the unexplained, we can only conclude that *glossolalia* mentioned in these passages are similar to that in ACTS 2, namely known, intelligible languages.

1. What new truths have you learnt from the Special Study above and how has it impacted your life?

2. What old truths were you reminded of from the Special Study above? How can you live out these truths you've been re-learnt in your life right now?
  
3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

Day 6 Read ACTS 2:14-41 (if you can), else just ACTS 2:14-21

After *Luke* has described the Pentecost event in verses 1-13, what followed was Peter's explanation of the event in verses 2:14-41. After rejecting the trivial accusation that they were drunk, he quoted from an Old Testament prophetic book - Joel 2:28-32.

1. Why did Peter quote from the prophecy of Joel?
  
2. According to the prophecy of Joel, the Spirit will be poured on all flesh.
  - (a) Who would be included in the "all flesh"? (Verses 17-18)
  
  - (b) When would this prophecy be fulfilled?

Note #1: Verses 19-20 can be understood either literally as upheavals of nature or metaphorically as convulsions of history (the apocalyptic imagery for times of social and political upheavals),

Note #2: Between the Day of Pentecost (when the Spirit came, inaugurating the last days) and the Day of the Lord (when Jesus will come, concluding them) there stretches a long day of opportunity during which the gospel of salvation will be preached throughout the world and "*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" (Verse 21)

Note #3: "*It is observable that though Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost, and spoke with tongues as the Spirit gave him utterance, yet he did not set aside the scriptures, nor think himself above them; nay, much of his discourse is quotation out of the Old Testament, to which he appeals, and with which he proves what he says. Christ's scholars never learn above their Bible; and the Spirit is given not to supersede the scriptures, but to enable us to understand and improve the scriptures.*"

Matthew Henry

## Day 7 Summary Notes for ACTS 2:14-21

Peter started his explanation of the Pentecost event with a “***this is that***” statement. ‘***This***’ refers to what the crowd were seeing and hearing: *the disciples speaking of God’s wonderful works in tongues*. ‘***That***’ refers to the prophecy of Joel. In other words, Peter was saying that the Pentecost event was the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32.

The Pentecost event marked the beginning of the Messianic age. This is the age of the Spirit in which His ministry is one of abundance. Note the phrase “*pour out*” in Joel’s prophecy. The picture is not one of a drizzle or even a shower, but a heavy tropical rainstorm. It is to illustrate the generosity of God’s gift of the Spirit. It also points to its finality (what has been poured out cannot be gathered again) and its universality (widely distributed among the different groupings of humankind).

‘*All flesh*’ does not mean every one irrespective of their inward readiness, but every one irrespective of their outward status – no social distinctions whether of sex (*your sons or daughters*), of age (*your young men . . . your old men*) or of rank (*servants . . . men and women*).

Verse 18 adds an interesting phrase: *and they will prophesy*. Everyone in the Messianic age who had received the Spirit will prophesy. How can this be, since it is taught elsewhere in the New Testament that prophecy is a gift and not every one has this gift (1 Corinthians 12:27-30)?

The answer is found in understanding what is prophecy. In its essence, prophecy is God speaking, God making Himself known by His Word. To say that everyone who received the Spirit will prophesy means that everyone will know God. This is exactly what the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:34 ~ *No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

In simple words, everyone who receives the Holy Spirit is in the New Covenant. One hallmark of membership in this covenant is a personal and intimate knowledge of God. In the words of ACTS 2:18, they shall all prophesy!

Do you know God in the sense of having a personal relationship with Him?

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes above?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_

(Name)



(b) What has the Pentecost event got to do with the exaltation (ascension) of Jesus?

5. The four questions above cover the crux of the Gospel – the life and ministry, the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. The Apostle’s Creed aptly sums it up in this way:

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.*

Take some time to memorize this section of the Apostle’s Creed.

Day 2 Read ACTS 2:37-41

1. How did the preaching of Peter impact the hearers?
  
2. (a) What two commands did Peter give them?  
  
(b) What two promises did Peter offer them?
  
3. What else did Peter say to them? (Verse 40)
  
4. (a) For those who gladly received the words of Peter, what did they do?  
  
(b) If you were present there and then, would you join this group of 3000? Would you want to join them? Please explain your answer.

Day 3 Read ACTS 2:42-47

*“Having first described in his own narrative what happened on the day of Pentecost, and then supplied an explanation of it through Peter’s Christ-centered sermon, Luke goes on to show the effects of Pentecost by giving us a beautiful little cameo of the Spirit-filled church.”*

John Stott

1. The church at Jerusalem had the following hallmarks:

Scriptural References

- Learning church \_\_\_\_\_
- Loving church \_\_\_\_\_
- Worshipping church \_\_\_\_\_
- Growing church \_\_\_\_\_

Please write down the correct Scriptural references in the space provided.

2. (a) Does Shalom Church have the same hallmarks?

(b) Which one is missing or lacking? What can be done to ensure its presence?

Day 4 Summary Notes for ACTS 2:22-47

Verses 22-36

Having addressed the mockery of some of the Jews present at that time (verses 14-21), Peter moved to the main point of his sermon: Jesus Christ! His argument here is actually very simple and straightforward – *Jesus is the reason why the disciples are now speaking God’s wonders in tongues!*

Jesus walked this earth doing great wonders. He was put to death by evil men, but God remained in full control, carrying out His will. He rose from the dead in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Psalm 16), and He ascended to heaven in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Psalm 110). And it is this ascended, exalted Christ who pours out the Spirit upon the disciples, resulting in the phenomenon they witnessed!

To the Jewish minds, knowing that the Messianic age is the age of the Spirit, the

message is clear – Jesus is the Messiah! This is what Peter was saying in conclusion in verse 36: *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

**Are you persuaded that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ)?**

**If He is the Messiah (Christ), then what should be your response to Him?**

Verses 37-47

Having demonstrated to the Jews that Jesus is indeed the Christ, many in the crowd were convicted of their sins, that they have rejected Jesus the Christ and crucified Him! Hence their question: *What shall we do?*

Peter's response is clear: *Repent!* And show the reality of your repentance by *baptism!* To encourage them to heed his call, he tells them of two wonderful promises: God will grant the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit to those who repent!

We must also give attention to what Peter said in verse 40. In essence, he is calling them to be separate from the world. To be separate from the world is to be gathered to God. In short, leave the world and enter the church!

The 3000 understood Peter's call. Hence they turned from their sins, showed their loyalty to Jesus publicly by water baptism, and being part of the church visibly! *Luke* described it as the 3000 new believers being added to the church.

**Have you repented of your sins?**

**Have you demonstrated the reality of your repentance by *water baptism* and *being part of the church visibly*? If 'No', why?**

The remainder of the passage shows us the new life of these Christians. Having become the disciples of Jesus, they continue to learn from Him through the apostles. And it is not simply an intellectual learning, for they put into practice what they have learnt by loving one another sacrificially, praying and telling others of the Gospel, bowing in worship of God and doing all these with joy and gladness of heart!

**Take time to pray that the description in the above paragraph will increasingly be true of you and of Shalom Church.**

Day 5 Read ACTS 3:1-10

ACTS 3 & ACTS 4 belonged together. In these 2 chapters, we read of the devil using his crudest weapon against the church – *physical violence*. The structure of these chapters is simple:

- The miraculous healing of the cripple (3:1-10)
- The explanation of the healing by Peter (3:11-26)
- The hostile response of the religious leaders (4:1-22)
- The godly response of the church (4:23-31)

Today, we shall focus on ACTS 3:1-10.

1. Describe, as if you were there looking on, what happened between Peter and John, and the man who was crippled from birth.

2. (a) When Peter and John spoke to the crippled man, what was he expecting? (Verses 3-5)

*“But he had that done for him which he looked not for; he asked an alms, and had a cure.” (Matthew Henry)*

(b) What did Peter say to him? What did Peter then do? (Verses 6-7)

(c) How soon was the crippled man healed? How did he respond?

3. How did all the people respond?

Day 6 The miracle of the lame man healed

Take some time to read the following extract of a sermon by Pastor Derek Thomas (our 2013 Church Conference speaker, God willing) on this miracle:

*“It’s first of all a demonstration of the power of God. Peter didn’t heal this man. It wasn’t something inherent within Peter to heal this man. This was the power of God. Peter was an instrument. Even though Peter may have had what Paul refers to in I Corinthians 12 as “the gift of healings” (using the plural). The gift of healings...maybe Peter has the gift of healings, but at the end of the day, this is not Peter; this is God who has done this. This is a miracle. This is what C.S. Lewis calls ‘an interference with nature by a supernatural power.’*

*Peter tells him to do something that he cannot do. He commands him to do something that’s impossible for him to do: to walk. That’s the very thing he cannot do. And God puts forth His power. It’s a sovereign demonstration of the omnipotence of God, and you either believe that or you don’t. There’s no way of trying to explain this scientifically. This is a supernatural act. This is something that doesn’t happen. This is something that only a forth putting of power from outside can explain. It’s a mighty work; it’s a mighty power.*

*But it’s also a sign . . . it’s a sign; the miracles were signs. The Lord of creation is here. This is an act of re-creation. What is this deformity? Why is there sickness in the world? Well, sickness is in the world because of sin. If there had been no sin in the Garden of Eden, there would be no sickness. One of the great glories of the final chapter of the Bible is to say that in heaven there will be no sickness. There will be no work for doctors to do in heaven, but only to praise God and give Him glory, because creation will be re-created; because that which is out of joint and out of sorts and torn apart will be put back together again, and this is a sign of it. This is what Jesus has come ultimately to do. Not just, you understand, to save souls, but to bring about a re-creation: the new heavens and the new earth. Those dry bones will come to life again. Isn’t that what Paul talks about in the eighth chapter of Romans when he talks about creation ‘groaning and travailing in birth pangs, waiting for the regeneration of all things.’*

*But I’m saying in the gospels and in The Acts of The Apostles, these healing miracles are often signs indicating what it is that Jesus has come to do. Blindness, for example . . . the restoring of hearing to those who are deaf . . . this man who was able to walk and leap about in the temple and praise God . . . it’s a little glimpse of what Jesus does in the souls of men and women. Because what does the gospel do?*

*Precisely this. The gospel commands men and women to do something that they cannot do: to repent and believe the gospel. And the fact of the matter is that men and women in their natural state, in their Adamic state, cannot do that. The natural man cannot believe. The natural man cannot repent. He’s dead in trespasses and in sins. His will is bound and enslaved to the disposition of his character. To be sure, he has what theologians these days call “free agency” — that you know, I chose this particular tie; whether you like it or not is irrelevant, but I chose it and I’m responsible for that — but I don’t have “free will;” I don’t have the ability to choose all of the moral options in any given situation. I don’t have that ability by nature, because I’m dead in trespasses and in sins.*

*Do you remember that great, great prayer that Augustine writes in his Confessions? ‘Command,’ he says, ‘what You will, and give what You command.’ The gospel, my friend,*

*comes to you. I'm talking about somebody whose heart has been transformed by the power of the gospel. And the gospel comes to you and commands you tonight, this very night it commands you, to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. But you know, by your own strength and by your own ability you cannot do that. And you know what the gospel does?*

*It reduces us. It reduces us to cry out the very prayer that Augustine prayed: 'Command whatever You want, but give what You command. So if I must repent and if I must believe, God must do something within me. I must experience the mighty power of God. The Holy Spirit must come down and transform and take away the stony heart of unbelief and give to me a heart of faith that I might be able to believe and lay hold of Jesus Christ as He is freely offered to me in the gospel.'*

*And you see, in this miracle I think we're being given a little sign, a little glimpse, a little picture, if you like, of how the gospel operates, of how Jesus operates in His grace: He commands, but He gives what He commands. He enables us to repent and believe."*

1. What new truths have you learnt from the sermon extract above and how have they impacted your life?
2. What old truths were you reminded of from the sermon extract above? How can you live out these truths you've been re-learnt in your life right now?
3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

Day 7 Read ACTS 3:11-26

The most remarkable feature of Peter's second sermon, as of his first, was its Christ-centeredness. He directed the crowd's attention away from both the healed cripple and the apostles, and towards the Christ.

1. Peter's sermon contains a *denial*, an *attribution* and an *accusation*.
  - (a) What was the *denial*? (Verse 12)
  - (b) What was the *attribution*? (Verse 13, 16)
  - (c) What was the *accusation*? (Verse 13-15)

2. Look at each of the titles Peter gives to Jesus.
  - (a) How does each of these speak to the uniqueness of Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - (b) Take one of the titles of Jesus given here, craft a prayer around it and use it to worship Jesus:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Peter ends his sermon by challenging his hearers with the necessity of repentance. What blessings would follow if they repented (vv19-26)?

#### **Week 4**

**[14<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> October 2012]**

Day 1 Read ACTS 4:1-4

The public proclamation of Jesus as the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies, as demanding repentance and promising blessing, and as the author and giver of life, physically to the healed cripple and spiritually to those who believe, aroused the indignation and antagonism of the authorities. The devil cannot endure the exaltation of Jesus Christ. So he stirred up the religious leaders of the Jews to persecute the apostles.

1. (a) Who initiated this persecution? (Verse 1)
  - (b) What's their motivation? (Verse 2)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Verses 1-3 and verse 4 formed a sharp contrast.
  - (a) How would this contrast encourage the infant church then?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - (b) How can this contrast encourage us today?

Day 2 Read ACTS 4:5-12

1. The Sanhedrin asked Peter and John “*by what power or by what name have you done this?*” What was Peter’s reply?
  
2. According to Peter . . .
  - (a) What did the religious leaders do to Jesus? (Verse 10)
  
  - (b) What did God do for Jesus? (Verse 10)
  
  - (c) Who is Jesus? (Verses 11-12)
  
3. Copy out ACTS 4:12 in the space below:

Who is this verse talking about?

Do you believe what this verse says?

Take time to memorize it.

Day 3 Read ACTS 4:13-22

1. What did the religious leaders see, perceive, and realize about Peter and John? (Verse 13)
  
2. What could the religious leaders not deny? (Verse 14)
  
3. (a) What did the council command Peter and John? (Verse 18)

(b) How did they respond? (Verses 19-20)

(c) How would you have responded? Why?

Day 4 Read ACTS 4:23-31

1. Upon their release, what did Peter and John do?

Verse 23:

Verse 24a:

2. The church began their prayers by talking about God! Note what they said:

Verse 24b:

Verse 25-26:

Verse 27-28:

Is this how you regularly begin your prayers?

3. Verses 29-30 contain their three main requests. What are they?

Verse 29a:

Verse 29b:

Verse 30:

*Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.*

4. What happened in response to their prayer? (Verse 31)

#### Day 5 Review & Summary Questions for ACTS 3:1 – 4:31

There will be NO summary notes for ACTS 3:1 – 4:31. Instead, take time to ponder these questions in the light of these two chapters:

1. When was the last time you've seen resistance, subtle or overt, to the gospel of Christ? What truth from this passage equips you to face this resistance?
  
2. Who is suffering persecution for the gospel that you could be praying for?
  
3. (a) Take time to praise the Lord Jesus for who He is and what is revealed about Him in this passage.  
  
(b) Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the boldness needed, when you face persecution.

#### Day 6 Read ACTS 4:32-37

1. In ACTS 4:31 we see that the prayer of the believers was answered and they were freshly filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

From verses 32-35, we see three evidences of this filling of the Spirit. What are they and what do they mean?

(a) What is it? (Verse 32)

What does it mean?

(b) What is it? (Verse 33)

What does it mean?

(c) What is it? (Verse 34-35)

What does it mean?

2. What could Shalom Church learn from this example?
3. Who was singled out as an example of such love and generosity?

Day 7 Read ACTS 5:1-11

1. Standing in sharp contrast to Barnabas was the couple named Ananias and Sapphira. Outwardly, they appeared to have done exactly what Barnabas did: *sold a possession and laid it at the apostles' feet*. However, instead of being commended as Barnabas was in 4:36-37, they were being judged and punished.

(a) What were their offences?

(b) Why do you think their offenses were so grave?

2. Luke clearly intends us to understand that the death of Ananias and Sapphira were a work of divine judgment.

Do you see their punishment as being too severe? If yes, why? If no, why?

3. What effect did this incident have on the church and the people? (Verse 11)

4. What lessons concerning (a) God and (b) sin can be learnt from this incident?

Day 1 Read ACTS 5:12-16

1. (a) Who performed signs and wonders among the people?  
  
(b) Among those sick and tormented who were brought to the apostles, how many of them were healed?
  
2. What were the two effects of this ministry by the apostles?

Verse 13:

Verse 14:

*“This is church growth, and it seems to me that Luke is concerned about church growth; church growth, that is to say, by conversion, by the sovereign outpouring of God’s Spirit as men and women are coming to embrace Jesus Christ as Messiah, as Lord, as Savior, as Prophet, Priest, and King. This astonishing work is being done in this city of Jerusalem. We’re given a cameo portrait, I think, a little glimpse of New Testament evangelism, New Testament church growth—church growth, New Testament style!*

*There are no buildings here. There was no choir. There was nothing to attract them from an external point of view. There was just the blandness of the apostles and other men and women talking about Jesus. That’s all there was. There was no movie, there were no books, there were no pamphlets or tracts; there were no radio stations. As far as we know, there weren’t any great preachers, although Peter seems now to be turning into a great preacher. It’s all of God, you see. It’s all of God. This is the Lord’s doing. There are no formulas here; there is no methodology of evangelism that you can discern. They’re engaging in witnessing to Jesus, to His life and death and resurrection, and exaltation to the right hand of God. It’s all about Jesus Christ, and they’re talking about Him! And men and women are being drawn to Him!”*

Derek Thomas

Day 2 Read ACTS 5:17-32

1. (a) Who was filled with indignation and had the apostles put into custody?  
(Verses 17-18)

(b) What was discovered the next morning when the apostles were sent for from prison?

(c) Who freed the apostles during the night? What were they told to do?

2. What three charges did the high priest make against the apostles?



3. (a) What was the initial response of Peter and the apostles to these charges? (Verse 29)

(b) What else did the apostles proclaim on this occasion? (Verses 30-32)

(c) What would you have said if you were facing the charges of the high priest then?

Note: They disobeyed the Sanhedrin -- the Council of priests, elders and scribes -- who had told them not to speak in the name of Jesus (4:17), in order to obey the angel of the Lord who told them to speak the words of life (5:20, 21).

Day 3 Read ACTS 5:33-42

1. Hearing the words of defiance and triumph from the apostles, what was the council's initial reaction? What were they planning to do?

2. (a) Who in the council stood up and spoke? Who was he? (Verse 34)

- (b) What was his initial counsel? (Verse 35-37)
- (c) What was his final counsel? (Verse 38-39)
- (d) What did the Council do to the apostles after hearing his counsel? (Verse 40)
3. (a) How did the apostles respond as they left the Council? (Verse 41)
- (b) How could they have such a response? (Cf. Matthew 5:10-12)
- (c) What did the apostles continue to do? Where did they do it? (Verse 42)

*“This is Christianity: whole-souled commitment to Christ. First, last, beginning and end and middle, they lived for Christ. They were prepared to die for Christ. Christ was everything to them. What does Charles Wesley say? “Happy if, with my latest breath, I might but gasp His name; Preach to all, and cry in death: ‘Behold, behold, the Lamb.’”*

Derek Thomas

#### Day 4 Summary Notes for ACTS 4:32 – 5:42 (I)

##### ACTS 4:32-35

This is the second glimpse that *Luke* gives us of the infant church at Jerusalem after Pentecost. The first glimpse was found in ACTS 2:42-47. Both present a most beautiful picture of a church when the members are filled with the Holy Spirit. We see unity and love, sacrifice and service. Whenever these things are missing or on the decline in a local church, it is because the members are no longer filled with the Spirit!

##### ACTS 4:36 - 5:11

In ACTS 3:1 – 4:31, we saw Satan attacking the church using his first and crudest weapon: *physical violence*. Having weathered that attack, the church at Jerusalem now faced Satan’s more cunning assault: *moral corruption and compromise*. It came through a couple named Ananias and Sapphira.

*“To all appearances, Barnabas and Ananias did the same thing. Both sold a property. Both brought the proceeds of the sale to the apostles, and both committed it to their disposal. The difference was that Barnabas brought all the sale money, while Ananias brought only a portion. Thus Ananias and Sapphira perpetuated a double sin, a combination of dishonesty and deceit. At first sight, there was nothing wrong in their withholding part of the sale money. As Peter plainly said later, their property was their own both before and after the sale (see verse 4). So they were under no obligation to sell their piece of land or, having sold it, to give way any – let alone all – of the proceeds. That is not the whole story, however. There is something else, something half-hidden. For Luke, in declaring that Ananias kept back part of the money for himself, chooses the verb nosphizomai, which means to ‘misappropriate’ (BAGD). The same word was used in LXX of Achan’s theft (Joshua 7:1), and in its only other New Testament occurrence it means to steal (Titus 2:10). We have to assume, therefore, that before the sale Ananias and Sapphira had entered into some kind of contract to give the church the total amount raised. Because of this, when they brought some instead of all, they were guilty of embezzlement.*

*It was not on this sin that Peter concentrated, however, but on the other, hypocrisy. The apostle’s complaint was not that they lacked honesty (bringing only a part of the sale price) but that they lacked integrity (bringing only a part, while pretending to bring the whole). They were not so much misers as thieves and – above all – liars. They wanted the credit and the prestige for sacrificial generosity, without the inconvenience of it. So, in order to gain a reputation to which they had no right, they told a brazen lie. Their motive in giving was not to relieve the poor, but to fatten their ego.”*

John Stott

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes above?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

Day 5 Summary Notes for ACTS 4:32 – 5:42 (II)

### ACTS 5:12-16

*“Luke is about to record the second wave of persecution by which the devil attempted to annihilate the church. As he does so, he will highlight various developing attitudes, especially ‘the deepening jealousy and antagonism of the Sadducees, the moderation of the Pharisees, and the increasing joy and confidence of the Christians’. But before this he refers to the fact that the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people, especially Peter (verse 12a). Having given an account of their message, he now describes the extraordinary signs which authenticated it.”*

John Stott

### ACTS 5:17-32

The exaltation of Jesus will always provoke a reaction from Satan! And he will direct his fury at the disciples of Jesus on earth! This is exactly what we see from the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders who arrested the apostles and threw them into jail. Not even the angelic rescue of the apostles will stop these hostile men from persecuting Christ's messengers!

As the apostles stood trial before the Jewish religious leaders, they said two things:

(1) *They must obey God rather than men!*

The implication is, if men (especially those in authority) misuse their God-given power to command what He forbids or forbids what He commands, then as Christians, our first duty is to obey God!

(2) *They will direct all attention to Jesus Christ!*

It is most amazing to see how obsessed these men were with Jesus! This was the third time they face opposition (earlier recorded instances are ACTS 2 and ACTS 3-4), and like previous occasions, instead of launching into a detailed self-defense, they talked about Jesus – verses 30-32.

***Ponder over the response of the apostles as outlined above. How may you model your Christian Life after them from today onwards?***

### ACTS 5:33-42

Verse 33 says, "When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them." The reason why the apostles were still alive (humanly speaking) was the intervention of Gamaliel. He was a Pharisee, the grandson and follower of a famous liberal Rabbi named Hillel. He had a reputation for scholarship, wisdom and moderation, and was greatly honoured by all the people. Saul of Tarsus had been one of his students (ACTS 22:3).

***Ponder over Gamaliel's final counsel in verses 38-39. Is this a counsel we should adopt in our dealings with others? Explain your answers.***

The apostles' reaction arouses our admiration (verses 41-42). They felt so honoured to be dishonoured for Jesus' sake! And they would not stop preaching Jesus! ***Take time to go before the Lord and pray that we will be such people!***

Day 6 Read ACTS 6:1-7

1. Verse 1 informs us of a new problem facing the church. What was it?

2. How was the problem resolved?

Verse 2:

Verses 3-4:

Verse 5-6:

3. What was the result of implementing this solution? (Verse 7)

4. What lessons can Shalom Church learn from this account?

Day 7 Re-read ACTS 6:1-7

1. The task assigned to the 7 men was to serve tables (Ministry of Tables) – verse 2.

(a) What was involved in this task of serving tables?

(b) What kind of men were to be chosen for this task? (Verse 3) Why?

(c) *“This delegation of social welfare to the Seven is commonly thought to have been the origin of the diaconate.”* (John Stott)

Do you agree? Explain your answers.

2. (a) What was the essence of the apostles' ministry? (Verse 4)
- (b) Do you think this is also the essence of the elders' ministry in the local church? Explain your answers.
3. Take time to read/sing this hymn by Emily E. Symons:

*We who would lead Thy flock must be,  
Shepherd of Israel, led by Thee  
We who would feed Thy lambs be fed  
With Thee, O Christ the Living Bread.*

*Great God, we feel our helplessness,  
Do Thou our work assist and bless;  
O breathe upon us from above,  
And fill our hearts with ardent love.*

*O make us gentle, patient, kind;  
Teach us to guide the opening mind,  
By winning words of sacred truth,  
To Jesus in its early youth.*

Take time to pray for your church leaders by *name*.

## **Week 6**

**[28<sup>th</sup> October – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2012]**

Day 1 Introduction to ACTS 6:8 – 12:24

*“After the coming of the Spirit and the counter-attack of Satan (whose overthrow Luke celebrated in 6:7), the church is almost ready to initiate its world-wide mission. So far it has been composed only of Jews and restricted to Jerusalem. Now, however, the Holy Spirit is about to thrust his people into the wider world and the apostle Paul (Luke’s hero) is to be God’s chosen instrument to pioneer this development. But first, in the next 6 chapters of the Acts, Luke explains how the foundations of the Gentile mission were laid by two remarkable men (Stephen the martyr and Philip the evangelist), followed by two remarkable conversions (Saul the Pharisee and Cornelius the centurion). These four men, each in his own way, together with Peter, through whose ministry Cornelius was converted, made an indispensable contribution to the global expansion of the church.”*

John Stott

In ACTS 6:8 – 8:2, we meet Stephen the martyr. His preaching met with fierce

opposition from a certain section of the Jews. He was finally put to death on the order of the Sanhedrin. His martyrdom might have exerted a profound influence on Saul of Tarsus. It most certainly led to the scattering of the disciples throughout Judea and Samaria.

In ACTS 8:4 - 40, we meet Philip the evangelist. He has the distinction of being both the first to share the Gospel with the despised Samaritans and the means by which the Jewish-Samaritan barrier was broken. God has also used him to lead the Ethiopian eunuch (first African Christian) to faith.

In ACTS 9:1 - 31, we saw the conversion and commissioning of Saul of Tarsus. This ex-Pharisee was to become the distinguished apostle to the Gentiles. The story of the spread of the Gospel to non-Jews outside Palestine, finally reaching Rome (ACTS 13 - 28), was told via the missionary journeys of this man and his co-workers.

In ACTS 10:1 - 11:18, we saw the conversion of the very first Gentile - Cornelius. The gift of the Spirit to him plainly authenticated his inclusion into the Messianic community on the same terms as the Jews, hence overcoming the apostle Peter's narrow Jewish prejudice.

As we take time to view this "big-picture", we begin to see how Christ is directing the mission operations from heaven in a systematic and orderly manner! Looking at each event/development on its own, we may not understand what is happening and how it all fits. But when each piece is placed in its right place, and we see everything from heaven's perspective, we begin to understand slowly but surely!

What have you learnt from the Introduction above?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

Day 2 Read ACTS 6:8-15

1. Write down what you can know of Stephen from ACTS 6

Verse 3:

Verse 5:

Verse 8:

Verse 10:

From the descriptions of Stephen above, would you want this man to be your friend? Why?

2. In spite of Stephen's outstanding qualities, his ministry provoked fierce antagonism.

(a) Who opposed Stephen? (Verse 9)

(b) How did they oppose Stephen?

Verse 9:

Verse 11:

Verse 12:

3. *"Thus the opposition degenerated from theology through slander to violence. The same order of events has often been repeated. At first there is serious theological debate. When this fails, people start a personal campaign of lies. Finally, they resort to legal or quasi-legal action in an attempt to rid themselves of their adversary by force. Let others use these weapons against us; may we be delivered from resorting to them ourselves!"*

John Stott

Have you ever been guilty of this?

Have you ever been on the receiving end of this?

Day 3 Re-read ACTS 6:8-15

1. (a) What were the accusations made against Stephen? (Verses 13-14)

(b) How serious were these accusations? Explain your answer.

2. (a) Who brought these accusations against Stephen?

(b) Who else (mentioned in the Gospels) had a similar experience?

(c) What lesson can we learn from this?

3. Verse 15 says that Stephen's face was like that of an angel. What is the significance of this observation?

Day 4 Read ACTS 7:1-8

Two accusations were brought against Stephen (ACTS 6:13-14):

- [i] He blasphemed against the Temple, saying that it will be destroyed
- [ii] He blasphemed against the Law of Moses, saying that it will be changed

In ACTS 7:1, the high priest asked Stephen a direct question: "*Are these things so?*"

In reply, Stephen preached a sermon (verses 2-53) to the council, covering the four major epochs of Israel's history, dominated by four major figures:

- Abraham and the patriarchal age (verses 2-8)
- Joseph and the Egyptian exile (verses 9-19)
- Moses, the Exodus and wilderness wanderings (verses 20-43)
- David and Solomon, and the establishment of the monarchy (verses 44-50)

Verses 51-53 contain Stephen's application and conclusion of his sermon.

We shall look at what Stephen said about Abraham and the patriarchal age (verses 2-8) today.

1. (a) Where was Abraham when God first appeared to him?  
  
(b) The next place we find Abraham was in Haran. What did God do to him while he was there?  
  
(c) Finally, Abraham came to Canaan. While in Canaan, what did God give to Abraham? What did God *not* give to Abraham?
  
2. In narrating Abraham's story, Stephen's first point was that God is not limited to only the land of Canaan! Hence we see that God spoke to Abraham when he was at two different places outside the land of Canaan!

How was this a defense against the charges laid against Stephen? (Take time to think through this and give your own answers without going to Q4)

3. In narrating Abraham's story, Stephen's next point was that God was no hurry to give Abraham the land of Canaan. Hence we see that Abraham sojourned in Canaan as a pilgrim, traveling from place to place. Of course, while living as a sojourner in Canaan, God was with him.

How was this a defense against the charges laid against Stephen? (Take time to think through this and give your own answers without going to Q4)

4. Take some time to read Matthew Henry's comments on these few verses:

*"God appeared in his glory to Abraham a great way off in Mesopotamia, before he came near Canaan, nay, before he dwelt in Haran; so that you must not think God's visits are confined to this land.*

*God made no haste to bring him into this land, but let him linger some years by the way, which shows that God has not his heart so much upon this land as you have yours, neither is his honour, nor the happiness of his people, bound up in it. It is therefore neither blasphemy nor treason to say, 'It shall be destroyed.'*

*"The slow steps by which the promise made to Abraham advanced towards the performance, and the many seeming contradictions here taken notice of, plainly show that it had a spiritual meaning, and that the land principally intended to be conveyed and secured by it was the better country, that is, the heavenly; as the apostle shows from this very argument that the patriarchs sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, thence inferring that they looked for a city that had foundations, Heb. 11:9, 10. It was therefore no blasphemy to say, Jesus shall destroy this place, when at the same time we say, 'He shall lead us to the heavenly Canaan, and put us in possession of that, of which the earthly Canaan was but a type and figure.'"*

What have you learnt from the comments of Matthew Henry above?

We shall look at what Stephen said about Joseph and the Egyptian exile (verses 9-16) today.

1. One theme outlined by Stephen in Joseph's story is the presence and blessings of God found outside Canaan. Highlight and copy the verses/phrases that speak of this, in the space below:
  
2. Another theme outlined by Stephen in Joseph's story is the rejection of the one who will bring deliverance. Highlight and copy the verses/phrases that speak of this, in the space below:
  
3. How would the above two themes be a defense against the charges laid against Stephen?

Day 6 Read ACTS 7:17-36

We shall look at what Stephen said about Moses, the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings (verses 17-36) today.

1. (a) Where was Israel at this time?  
(b) Where was Moses born?  
(c) What kind of education did Moses have?  
(d) Where did the burning bush incident take place?  
(e) Where did God show wonders and signs?

Looking over your answers for (a) – (e), what do you think is the theme that Stephen was outlining here?

2. (a) How did the Israelites treat Moses?

(b) What do you think was the theme that Stephen is outlining here?

3. How would the above two themes be a defense against the charges laid against Stephen?

Day 7 Read ACTS 7:37-43

We shall look at what *else* Stephen said about Moses (Verses 37-43) today.

1. (a) What three things are said of Moses in verses 37-38?

\* (Hint: Key word 'said')

\* (Hint: Key word 'spoke')

\* (Hint: Key word 'received')

(b) Despite the great honour put on Moses, the children of Israel 'would not obey but rejected' him. How did they express their rejection of Moses?

Verse 39:

Verse 40-41:

(c) What was God's response to the conduct of Israel? (Verses 42-43)

2. What do you think Stephen was seeking to achieve/convey by saying what he said here concerning Moses, Israel's treatment of him and God's response to them?

**Week 7**

**[4<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2012]**

Day 1 Read ACTS 7:44-50

The focal point of these 7 verses is the reign of David and Solomon. The special focus is on the Temple that David wanted to build and which Solomon actually built. Besides talking about the Temple, *Stephen* will also talk about the Tabernacle.

1. (a) Who made the tabernacle?  
  
(b) Who brought the tabernacle into the land of Canaan?  
  
(c) Who 'came up' with the idea of the Temple?  
  
(d) Who built the Temple?

Note: The four names mentioned above are some of the greatest names in the history of Israel. By associating the tabernacle/Temple with these names in his defense, Stephen was showing that he was not critical or disrespectful towards either.

2. (a) What did God say concerning the Temple?  
  
(b) What do you think is the theme that Stephen is outlining here?

Day 2 Read ACTS 7:51-60

1. (a) How did Stephen describe the Jewish religious leaders?  
  
(b) What did Stephen accuse them of doing?
  - 
  -
2. What did the Jewish religious leaders do to Stephen in response?
3. What did Stephen see and say before he died?
4. What parallels are there between the death of Stephen and the death of Jesus?

Day 3 Review of ACTS 7:1-60

1. Look over the RTBT questions for the last 6 days. What is the one most precious lesson you've learnt from ACTS 7?
2. Looking at Stephen's example, how may you face death if you are a disciple of Jesus?
3. Take time to read the following extract from Lloyd J. Ogilvie's commentary on ACTS:

*"Before we close this phase of Luke's unfolding drama, we need to pause and reflect on what Stephen's death did to the church.*

*First of all, it raised profound questions. What was the Lord doing? How could He allow this to happen to one so faithful as Stephen? Why didn't He stop it? Stephen was at the height of his power as a witness. Why snuff out so bright a flame? We've all asked these questions about tragedies and unexplainable reversals.*

*The questions about Stephen, however, can be answered only by the reflection of history. The Lord was not finished. Through Stephen's death the sect of Judaism was forced to flee Jerusalem. The Christians were scattered, and their faith with them. They were to be part of the worldwide movement. They would never have left Jerusalem without the persecution and punishment inflicted on them. The death of Stephen ignited the fire of the pent-up hatred for the followers of Jesus. It exploded with fury. They had to leave. And their deployment in a dispersion throughout the cities of the Mediterranean basin planted the seed which would germinate until it was ready to sprout in indigenous churches.*

*The saying is true: the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. This is never more true than with the blood of the first martyr. Stephen, whose natural crown of human ability was crowned with gifts of the Lord's Spirit, then His crown of thorns, and finally the crown of glory, had lived a relatively short life. But he accomplished his purpose. Stephen was the turning point, and eventually the cause of the gnawing questions of Saul of Tarsus that only the Lord could answer."*

What have you learnt from the extract above? Write it down in the space below and share it with another person: \_\_\_\_\_ (Name).

Day 4 Read ACTS 8:1-4

1. These four verses mention two different responses to the death of Stephen. What are they?

Verse 1a:

Verse 2:

If you were present then, what would be your response and why?

2. These four verses also mention the two results flowing out of the death of Stephen. What are they?

Verse 1b, 3:

Verse 1c, 4:

If you were a member of the Jerusalem church then, seeing with your own eyes and experiencing in your own life the two results outlined above, what would you say and do?

3. Focus on ACTS 8:4

(a) If you were one of those being scattered, what would you do? Will you be doing what these believers have done?

(b) Take time to read the following extract from a sermon preached by Pastor Derek Thomas:

*“Kenneth Latourette, the Yale historian, says the chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession, but men and women who carried on their livelihood in some secular manner and spoke their faith to those they met in this natural fashion, that the expansion of the church at this point didn't depend upon the apostles, but on the grass roots, men and women gossiping the gospel as they went.*

*Now, think about that because these are men and women who've lost their homes, who have been scattered on the same day, so they probably left much of their belongings behind them. They may even have left members of their family*

*who have been carried off into prison. And you might have expected them to lie low and to hide somewhere in caves until the trouble dies down and it's astonishing, it's breathtaking that these men and women are going about and they're gossiping the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

*God uses people in evangelism, people like you and me, ordinary folk. And the rule of our duty here is not that we are able to pry into the secret will of God and discern who the elect are. The rule of duty here is: God has commanded us to do this: 'Go into all the world. You are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and in the uttermost parts of the world.' And that's you and you and you."*

What have you learnt from the sermon extract above? How has what you've learnt changed your life?

#### Day 5 Read ACTS 8:5-8

1. Here we meet with Philip the evangelist (not to be confused with the apostle Philip). Write down what you've already known about Philip from the book of ACTS:
  
2.
  - (a) Where did Philip go?
  - (b) What did Philip do?
  - (c) What was the result?
  
3. Take time to read John Stott's comment on these verses:

*"It is hard for us to conceive the boldness of the step Philip took in preaching the gospel to the Samaritans. For the hostility between Jews and Samaritans had lasted a thousand years. It began with the break-up of the monarchy in the tenth century BC when ten tribes defected, making Samaria their capital, and only two tribes remained loyal to Jerusalem. It became steadily worse when Samaria was captured by Assyria in 722 BC, thousands of its inhabitants were deported, and the country was re-populated by foreigners. In the sixth century BC, when the Jews returned to their land, they refused the help of the Samaritans in the rebuilding of the temple. Not till the fourth century BC, however, did the Samaritan schism harden, with the building of their rival temple on Mount Gerizim and their repudiation of all Old*

*Testament Scripture except the Pentateuch. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews as hybrids in both race and religion, as both heretics and schismatics. John summed up the situation in his simple statement that 'Jews do not associate with Samaritans' (John 4:9). Jesus' sympathy for them, however, is already apparent in Luke's Gospel. Now in Acts 8, Luke is obviously excited by the evangelization of the Samaritans and their incorporation in the Messianic community."*

- (a) Do you agree with John Stott that it was a very bold thing for Philip to do in taking the gospel to the Samaritans? Why or why not?
  
- (b) What 'bold' steps can you take today in bring the gospel to the 'Samaritans' of your day?

Day 6    Read ACTS 8:9-13

1. Verses 9-11 introduce us to a man named Simon. What do you know about him from these 3 verses?
  
2. What was his response to the preaching of Philip?
  
3. If you were present then, would you rejoice at Simon's response or would you have concerns? Explain your answer.

Day 7    Read ACTS 8:14-25

1. (a) Why did Peter and John go to Samaria?
  
- (b) What did they do while in Samaria? (Verse 15, 17)

(c) Why, do you think, is it that even though these Samaritans have believed in Jesus and been baptized, they have not yet received the Holy Spirit?

2. (a) What did Simon want from Peter?

(b) What was Peter's response to Simon?

Verse 20-21:

Verse 22-23:

(c) Read Simon's response to Peter's rebuke (verse 24). Is it a response that shows the faith of Simon? Explain your answer.

3. (a) What else did Peter and John do? (Verse 25c)

(b) How significant is this?

## **Week 8**

**[11<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012]**

Day 1 Explanatory Notes for ACTS 8:14-25

### Simon and the Holy Spirit

We read in ACTS 8:13 that Simon (who previously practised sorcery) believed and was baptized. We note with concern that in the same verse, Luke described him as someone amazed by the miracles and the signs done. Was his faith a genuine saving faith?

Things became clearer when Peter and John visited Samaria. When Simon saw how the Holy Spirit was given to the Samaritan disciples through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered the apostles money in exchange for the power to do the same! In response, Peter rebuked him for such evil thoughts (verses 20-21) and called him to repent (verses 22-23).

Simon's response was both revealing and sad: *He did not seem to be willing or able to pray! Instead, he asked Peter to pray for him!! Also, instead of seeking God's pardon, all he wanted was to escape the threatened judgement of God!!!* Hence, it appears that this Simon was not a true believer in the first place.

- (a) Do you agree with the Explanatory Notes: Simon and the Holy Spirit above? Explain your answer.
- (b) Is there a need to revise your answers to Day 6 Question 3 of Week 7? If so, what needs to be changed?

### The Samaritans and the Holy Spirit

Why was Peter and John sent to Samaria? We don't read of them doing the same thing when the gospel was preached in other places (see ACTS 8:4). What's so special about Samaria?

It would appear that in almost all cases, when people believed in Jesus, their sins would be forgiven and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Peter in ACTS 2:38. Here in Samaria, we meet with an exception: *They believed in Jesus, had their sins forgiven but they have yet to receive the Holy Spirit. Why?*

Ponder the explanation given by John Stott:

*"The apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God (14). This is more than a matter-of-fact statement; it seems to be almost a technical expression by which Luke signals an important new stage in the advance of the gospel. He has used it in reference to the Day of Pentecost when three thousand Jews 'accepted his [Peter's] message' (2:21). He uses it here of the first Samaritans who 'accepted the word of God'. And he will use it again after the conversion of Cornelius, when the apostles heard that 'the Gentiles also had received the word of God' (11:1).*

*The gospel had been welcomed by the Samaritans but would the Samaritans be welcomed by the Jews? Or would there be separate actions of Jewish Christians and Samaritan Christians in the church of Jesus Christ? The idea may seem unthinkable in theory; in practice it might well have happened. Is it not reasonable to suggest (in view of this historical background) that, in order to avoid just such a disaster, God deliberately withheld the Spirit from these Samaritan converts? The delay was only temporary, however, until the apostles had come down to investigate, and endorsed Philip's bold policy of Samaritan evangelism, had prayed for the converts, had laid hands on them as a sign to the whole church as well as to the Samaritan converts themselves, that they were bona fide Christians, to be incorporated into the redeemed community on precisely the same terms as Jewish converts."*

- (a) Do you agree with the Explanatory Notes: The Samaritans and the Holy Spirit above? Explain your answer.

(b) Is there a need to revise your answers to Day 7 Question 1(c) of Week 7? If so, what needs to be changed?

Day 2 Read ACTS 8:26-40

These verses tell us how Philip met the Ethiopian eunuch, and the latter's conversion.

1. How did Philip meet the Ethiopian eunuch?

Verse 26:

Verse 29:

2. Write down all you know about this Ethiopian eunuch from these verses:

3. (a) What role did the Scripture play in the conversion of this Ethiopian eunuch?

(b) What role did Philip play in the conversion of this Ethiopian eunuch?

(c) How can we know if his conversion is genuine?

Note: God has given us two gifts: (a) the Scriptures and (b) teachers of the Word to explain and apply the Scriptures. This can be seen so clearly in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, where he was first able to obtain a copy of the Isaiah scroll and then had Philip sent to him to teach him out of it.

Day 3 Re-read ACTS 8:26-40

1. Verse 35 says: *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.* The 'him' refers to the Ethiopian eunuch.

Recall what verse 5 says: *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.* The 'them' refers to Samaritans.

What lesson(s) concerning evangelism can we learn from these two verses above?

2. (a) Read the confession of the Ethiopian eunuch in verse 37. Can you make the same confession *with all your heart* today? Have you?

(b) What was the first thing the Ethiopian eunuch does upon his confession of belief in Jesus? Have you done the same?

3. What is the most important thing you've learnt from ACTS 8?

Day 4 Read ACTS 9:1-9

These 9 verses detail for us the conversion of Saul of Tarsus – from a persecutor of Christians to a preacher of Christ.

1. In your own words, describe Saul's pre-conversion state, as depicted in verses 1-2:

What is the probability that such a hostile, anti-Christian person can become a Christian?

2. In your own words, describe Saul's conversion experience, as depicted in verses 3-9:

What aspects of his conversion story would be the norm of Christian conversion today?

Day 5 Read ACTS 9:10-25

1. What role did Ananias play in the discipleship of Saul?

Verse 17:

Verse 18:

Verse 19:  
(cf. verse 10)

2. Why was Ananias (initially) reluctant to play this role?

If you were Ananias, what would be your response to this assigned task from the Lord?

3. How can we know, from these 16 verses, that Saul's conversion was genuine?

Verse 11:

Verse 18:

Verse 19:

Verse 20:

Verse 21:

Verse 22:

Note: "*Behold, he is praying*" (verse 11). The very mouth that was breathing out murderous threat against Christians in verse 1 is now heard breathing out praises and prayers to God. The ravenous wolf has indeed been changed into a bleating lamb!

Day 6 Read ACTS 9:26-31

1. (a) When Saul came to Jerusalem, what did he try to do?

(b) What was the reaction of the believers in Jerusalem?

(c) How was this matter resolved?

2. Take time to read the following comments by John Stott on these verses:

*“Saul was clear about his membership of the new society of Jesus. First, in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, he sought out ‘the disciples’ (19, 26). True, both groups hesitated, but their initial skepticism was overcome. Thank God for Ananias who introduced Saul to the fellowship in Damascus, and for Barnabas who did the same thing for him later in Jerusalem. But for them, and the welcome they secured for him, the whole course of church history might have been different.*

*True conversion always issues in church membership. It is not only that converts must join the Christian community, but that the Christian community must welcome converts, especially those from a different religious, ethnic or social background. There is an urgent need for modern Ananiases and Barnabases who overcome their scruples and hesitations, and take the initiative to befriend newcomers.”*

After reading the above two paragraphs, what areas of your life do you find that need to be changed?

3. What connection do you see between Saul’s conversion and the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoying a time of peace (verse 31)?

*“Thus the story of Saul’s conversion in Acts 9 begins with him leaving Jerusalem with an official mandate from the high priest to arrest fugitive Christians, and ends with him leaving Jerusalem as a persecuted Christian himself. Witness to Christ involves suffering for Christ. It is not an accident that the Greek word for witness (martyrs) came to be associated with martyrdom.” (John Stott)*

Day 7 Review ACTS 9 – Saul’s conversion

1. In what ways do Saul’s conversion demonstrate the marvelous grace of God?

2. (a) How would your conversion account compare or contrast with Saul’s?

(b) Despite the similarities or differences, do you find and experience the same marvelous grace of God in your own conversion?

(c) How has Saul's conversion challenged your understanding of God's character and dealings with sinners?

3. Review the fruits of Saul's conversion (evidence that it is genuine). Are they also present in your life?

Fruits of Saul's conversion

Present in your life?

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4. How can you be more like Ananias and Barnabas in Shalom Church?

**Week 9**

**[18<sup>th</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> November 2012]**

Day 1 Read ACTS 9:32-43

1. How was the power of God demonstrated in the two incidents recorded in these 12 verses?

2. What were the results of the demonstration of this power?

3. What do you think is the purpose of these 12 verses?

4. With whom was Peter staying in Joppa? What's the significance of this piece of information?

Day 2 Read ACTS 10:1-8

1. In your own words, describe the man Cornelius as he is depicted in verse 1 & 2:
2. (a) What did the angel tell Cornelius to do? (Verse 5)  
  
(b) Why did the angel not tell Cornelius directly what he needed to know/do?  
  
(c) What's the response of Cornelius to the angel's directive?

Day 3 Read ACTS 10:9-23

1. How did God prepare Peter to meet Cornelius?
2. What would the command in verse 15 have meant to Peter?
3. Read the description of Cornelius in verse 22. Do you think he was a Christian then? Explain your answer.

Day 4 Read ACTS 10:24 -33

1. (a) When Cornelius met Peter, what did he do and how did Peter respond to his action? (Verses 25-26)

(b) When Peter entered Cornelius' house, what did he say? (Verse 28)

Note: *“Whether consciously or unconsciously, Peter had just now repudiated both extreme and opposite attitudes which human beings have sometimes adopted towards one another. He had come to see that it was entirely inappropriate either to worship somebody as if divine (which Cornelius had tried to do to him) or to reject someone as unclean (which he would previously had done to Cornelius). Peter refused both to be treated by Cornelius as if he were a god, and to treat Cornelius as if he were a dog.”*  
(John Stott)

2. What evidence is there that Cornelius expected God to work?

Verse 24:

Verse 33:

Day 5 Read ACTS 10:34-43

1. Verses 34-37 contain the introduction to Peter's sermon preached at Cornelius' house. What is his main point?

2. The main theme of Peter's sermon is Jesus Christ. What did he say concerning Jesus?

Verse 38:

Verse 39:

Verses 40-41:

Verse 42:

Verse 43:

3. Review your answers to Question 2 above.

(a) Are the same 5 elements present in your understanding of the gospel of Christ?

(b) If there are missing elements, what are they? Why would they be missing?

Day 6 Read ACTS 10:44-48

1. While Peter was still speaking, what happened? (Verse 44)

2. Who was astonished by this? Why? (Verse 45)

3. How was the outpouring of the Spirit manifested? (Verse 46)

4. What was Peter's conclusion from this sequence of events? (Verses 47-48)

Luke has now recounted the conversions of Saul and Cornelius. The difference between these two men is stark: Saul was a Jew, a scholar and a persecutor while Cornelius was a Gentile, a soldier and a seeker. Yet both were saved by God's grace, both received forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit by believing in Jesus, both were baptized and both became members of the Christian church. What a wonderful example of Romans 1:16, telling us that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both Jews and Gentiles!

Day 7 Review ACTS 8, 9 and 10

1. ACTS 8 narrates the conversion of the Samaritans. ACTS 9 describes the conversion of Saul the persecutor. ACTS 10 details the conversion of Cornelius a Roman centurion.

Imagine that you are a Jewish Christian, a member of the church at Jerusalem then. What would be your response to all these developments?

Why would you have such a response?

2. Look at the make-up of Shalom Church today. Imagine that in the next 12 months, we have people of different races, cultures and social backgrounds coming into the church.

What would be your response to this development?

(a) Welcome it!

(b) Resist it!

(c) Leave Shalom Church!

(d) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Read PSALM 2. Do you think the developments told in ACTS 8-10 is a fulfillment of PSALM 2? Explain your answer.

4. (a) What have you learnt about God's person (who God is) from ACTS 8-10 and PSALM 2?

(b) How does it help your understanding about God, and how you should relate to Him and His Word?"

**Week 10**

**[25<sup>th</sup> November – 1<sup>st</sup> December 2012]**

Day 1 Read ACTS 11:1-18

1. (a) What's the contention the Jewish believers in Jerusalem had with Peter?  
  
(b) Why are they unhappy? (See also ACTS 10:28)
  
2. Verses 3-17 contain Peter's response to the unhappiness of the Jewish believers. In it, he explained how God removed his racial prejudice towards the Gentiles in four steps:  
  
The divine vision (verses 5-10)  
  
What did he see?  
  
What order and rebuke did he receive?  
  
How many times did this vision occur?  
  
The divine command (verses 11-12)  
  
Who came to see Peter?  
  
What did God command Peter to do?  
  
The divine preparation (verses 13-14)  
  
How did God prepare Cornelius for Peter's visit?  
  
The divine action (verses 15-17)  
  
What happened to Cornelius and those with him as they hear Peter's preaching?  
  
On witnessing such a sight, what was Peter reminded of?
  
3. In verse 18, we read that the criticism of the Jewish believers ceased, and their worship began. Why?

Day 2 Re-read ACTS 11:1-18

Review the conversion of Cornelius and his associates, and their acceptance by the church at Jerusalem.

What is the relevance of this to us today?

What lessons can Shalom Church learn from this incident?

Day 3 Read ACTS 11:19-26

1. (a) What did those who were scattered after Stephen's death do? (Verse 19)  
  
(b) What did some from Cyprus and Cyrene do when they came to Antioch? (Verse 20)  
  
(c) What was the response? (Verse 21)
2. The spread of the gospel (geographically – *as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch*; culturally – *to Jews and Hellenists*) flowed out of the death of Stephen and the resulting persecution of the believers in Jerusalem.

What lesson can you learn from this observation?

Day 4 Read ACTS 11:19-26 again

1. What did those in Jerusalem do when they heard of the advance of the gospel in Antioch?
2. (a) What kind of a man was Barnabas?  
  
(b) What did he see when he arrived in Antioch, and what was his response?

- (c) What is the result of his ministry in Antioch?
- (d) What else did he do? (Verse 25-26)
- (e) From his action in verses 25-26, what else can we know about the character of Barnabas, and how is that an example for all Christians to emulate?

Day 5 Read ACTS 11:19-26 once more

1. Verse 24b says: *“And a great many people were added to the Lord.”*

- (a) To whom were these great many people added?
- (b) Who did the adding?
- (c) This term “added to” has almost become a technical word for church growth in ACTS. Read the relevant verses and copy them out in the space below:
  - 2:41 ~
  - 2:47 ~
  - 5:14 ~
  - 11:24 ~
- (d) Reviewing the verses (above) and the concept itself, John Stott said, *“When we see ‘the Lord adding to the Lord’, so that he is both the subject and the object, source and goal, of evangelism, we have to repent of all self-centered, self-confident concepts of Christian mission.”*

Do you agree? Explain your answer.

2. The disciples were first called ‘Christians’ in Antioch (verse 26). Is there a difference between ‘disciples’ and ‘Christians’? Explain your answer.

Day 6      Read ACTS 11:27-30

1. (a) Who is Agabus?
- (b) What did he say?
- (c) What's the response of the church at Antioch?

Verse 29:

Verse 30:

2. Why, do you think, did *Luke* insert these 4 verses here? In other words, what's the significance of what these believers have done?

Day 7      Read the Introduction to ACTS 12

### Introduction

Since ACTS 2, we have been reading of many wonderful conversion accounts: *the three thousand on the Day of Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, the Gentile centurion Cornelius and the mixed crowd in Antioch*. Like what was outlined in ACTS 1:8, the gospel is indeed spreading like concentric circles from Jerusalem. Soon, we shall read of the various missionary journeys by Paul and his team, with the gospel finally reaching Rome (the '*end of the world*')!

Yet, before Luke tells us of this great leap forward, he first chronicled a very serious setback – the death of James and the imprisonment of Peter. Both men were important leaders of the Jerusalem church then.

As we shall soon see, Herod Agrippa I was the tyrant responsible for this double assault upon the work of God. The church was facing a very grave crisis then. Yet Luke was quick to tell us of how Peter was rescued by God's marvelous intervention. Hence, we see "*the destructive power of Herod and the saving power of God are contrasted. Indeed, throughout church history the pendulum has swung between expansion and opposition, growth and shrinkage, advance and retreat, although with the assurance that even the powers of death and hell will never prevail against Christ's church, since it is built securely on the rock.*" (John Stott)

1. Where, do you think, is the church today: *growth and advance* or *shrinkage and retreat*?

2. What is your response to where the church is today?

## Week 11

[2<sup>nd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012]

Day 1 Read ACTS 12:1-5

1. (a) What did King Herod do?  
  
(b) What are the possible reasons for this action of Herod?
2. Imagine you are a member of the Jerusalem church then.  
  
(a) What would be going through your mind at this time?  
  
(b) What would you be doing next?  
  
(c) What did the church at Jerusalem do? (Verse 5)

Note #1: What would you do if all the elders of Shalom Church were arrested and threatened with execution? Look for lawyers? Call the press? Take the first flight out? *The one thing that these disciples did here in ACTS 12, would it be the very last thing that we do? They gathered for prayer. They saw that the solution to this predicament lay in beseeching the God of heaven with earnestness and zeal, and so they held a prayer meeting!*

Note #2: “... *where many were gathered together praying...*” (verse 12). The believers at that time saw the importance of being together in prayer, praying with one mind and one heart towards the one living and true God. They believed in corporate prayer! Do we?

Day 2 Read ACTS 12:6-17

1. What was Peter doing before he was rescued?
2. How was Peter rescued from prison?

3. How did Peter understand his rescue from prison? (Verse 17)
4. What role did the prayers of the Christians play in Peter's rescue?

Day 3      Read ACTS 12:12-16

1. (a) Where did Peter go after he was rescued? (Verse 12)  
  
(b) What did Rhoda do when she see him? (Verse 14)  
  
(c) What was the response of the believers when Rhoda told them that Peter was at the door? (Verse 15)
2. Verse 16 says that they were astonished to see Peter.  
  
(a) Why do you think they were astonished?  
  
(b) Would you have the same reaction if you were present there and then?

Day 4      Review ACTS 12:1-17

1. James was beheaded (verse 2) while Peter was rescued. What lessons can we learn from this?
2. What have you learnt from this passage concerning prayer? Has your attitude towards prayer changed as a result of what you have learnt? What needs to be changed in your praying after what you have just learnt?

Note: We see both communities here, each wielding their weapons. On one side, we have the world represented by Herod, wielding the power of the sword and

the prison. On the other side, we have the church praying to God. It is clear which side wins!

Day 5 Read ACTS 12:18-24

1. (a) What's the end of King Herod? (Verse 23)
- (b) What's the immediate cause for him to suffer such a grisly death? (Verse 22)
- (c) Do you think his terrible end has something to do with what he did earlier in harassing the church (verses 1-4)? Explain your answer.

*"This memorable story shows as in a mirror the end that awaits the enemies of the church. It also shows how greatly God hates pride."* John Calvin

2. Read verse 24.
  - (a) What do you think is *Luke* seeking to convey here?
  - (b) What lesson can you learn from this verse?

Day 6 Review ACTS 12:1-24 and read PSALM 124

1. Ponder the account of ACTS 12:1-24: *James' beheading, Peter's imprisonment and rescue, Herod's grisly end.*

What lessons have you learnt?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

2. Take time to read PSALM 124 and ponder the relevance of this psalm to the believers in the Jerusalem church then.

How has PSALM 124 comforted you?

Day 7 Review of ACTS 1-12

We have spent 11 weeks on the 1<sup>st</sup> 12 chapters of ACTS

1. Can you name one belief/doctrine that has been changed/clarified as a result of reading/studying ACTS 1-12?
2. How has your life changed as a result of these 11 weeks of reading through these 12 chapters of ACTS?

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of the person)

### **Acknowledgement**

I want to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to brother NEO Chun Choon in giving his time and energy to review this RTBT guide, asking questions all the way and giving many valuable suggestions. Thank you, brother!

*Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another! (Proverbs 27:17, ESV)*