



my grandma time

...doing simple things together!

Week 47, Day 1 --- Acts 7-8

Week 47, Day 2 --- Acts 9-10

Week 47, Day 3 --- Acts 11-12

Week 47, Day 4 --- Acts 13-14

Week 47, Day 5 --- James 1-5

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Week 47, Day 1 --- Acts 7-8

Stephen has been arrested and he is not given an attorney. Instead, as Jesus had promised, he is filled with the Holy Spirit and makes an incredible defense speech. Even though the result is very painful for Stephen I chuckled as I read it this morning. It is very easy to see where Stephen is going in his speech. Is Stephen defending himself or is he convicting those who have arrested him? In this chapter you will read the summary version of the entire Old Testament. Notice how often the believers in the New Testament refer back to the Old Testament. The end result of Stephen's speech is that he is stoned to death and we are introduced to a new character, Saul who will later become Paul.

When persecution comes to a church in a place the believers in that church have three options. The first option is to stay and risk arrest or death. The second option is to go away to a new place. The third option is to quit believing. We don't hear about people choosing option 3. We do hear about people choosing option 2 and moving away. This was a very good thing. The church was stuck in Jerusalem and God's intention was for it to spread out to the nations. It is the people who left Jerusalem and took the gospel with them who began the spread of the church to the entire world. Saul didn't realize it at the time, but God was already using him to spread the good news. Where have you been sent? How are you spreading the good news?

Week 47, Day 2 --- Acts 9-10

The church had spread out from Jerusalem, but the good news was still being preached only to those who were Jews. In these two chapters God's strategy for reaching those who were not Jews is revealed. Anyone who was not a Jew was called a Gentile. The first part of the strategy is to pick someone to go and preach to the Gentiles. God chose Saul. Saul was one of the best Jews who had ever lived and he was aggressively persecuting the church. He was doing everything he could to kill it. It is easy to understand why Ananias was afraid to go to him when God tells him to. How would you describe Saul based on what you learn of him here? Why didn't Saul immediately go back to Jerusalem?

The second part of the strategy was to break down the prejudice that existed among the apostles. Unlike Saul, the apostles were not perfect Jews. However, they had learned not to associate with Gentiles, especially Romans. God tells Peter to go to the house of a Roman soldier and preach the good news. When Peter does this the people believe and the Holy Spirit anoints them in a very visible way. It takes this kind of act by God to convince Peter and his traveling companions that these people are acceptable to God. The first thing they do is baptize them so that they are now identified as followers of Jesus.

Acts 9 and 10 are very important chapters to anyone who desires to follow Jesus and who is not a Jew. Without God's intervention it is very likely that Christianity would never have spread beyond the Jewish race.

Week 47, Day 3 --- Acts 11-12

The church that was begun in Antioch eventually became the new center for the church. Believers in Jesus had typically been called followers of the way until the unbelievers in Antioch began to call them Christians, or followers of Christ. The term was intended to be an insult. We use it all the time now, but it was only used 3 times in all the New Testament. Antioch was the first church where Jewish and Gentile believers met together.

Persecution continues in Jerusalem and James the brother of John is killed. Herod intends to kill Peter as well, but God rescues Peter. All of the Herods were incredibly evil men. I am certain that no one grieved very long for the death of Herod. The Roman world is changing and Christianity is going to play a significant role in the change.

Week 47, Day 4 --- Acts 13-14

These two chapters tell the story of the first missionary journey. Saul has been renamed Paul and he and Barnabus set out to take the good news of Jesus to places that have never heard it. Their basic approach is to go to the local synagogue, the place where the Jews worship, and proclaim the message there. Paul had studied under a very famous rabbi and he would have been an honored guest at first. It would be very unusual to have this happen today in any of our churches, but it was common to ask the guest to speak in those days. What they didn't realize is that Paul was going to speak a message that would turn their world upside down. The reaction is consistent from town to town. Both Jews and Gentiles are split. Some believe and some don't. Those who don't believe attack Paul and Barnabus in some way. A new church begins and Paul and Barnabus move on to the next town.

What did Paul and Barnabus risk preaching the good news? What risks do we take when we preach the good news?

Week 47, Day 5 --- James 1-5

James was the brother of Jesus. As far as we know he did not become a believer until after the resurrection. Once he became a believer he also became a leader in the early church. This letter to the church is probably one of the first that was written. It is a very practical letter. The royal law that James is talking about can be found in Matthew 22:34-40. The book of James at times sound very much like one of the Old Testament prophets. I think his main thought is that our faith should result in different behavior. If it doesn't we probably don't really believe. How has your faith changed your behavior?

Week 47, Day 6 --- Acts 15-16

Chapter 15 is full of disagreements. The church is growing and with the growth come new people and different ideas. In this case the ideas are old ideas. The Jews have lived under the strict system of the law for all their lives. They find it difficult to understand that God would create a new kind of relationship with man that doesn't require keeping the law, but that is what God did. You'll explore that

concept some more in the reading for the next two days. The important thing to see is that when the church had an internal disagreement they got together and talked about it. They listened to each other and the Holy Spirit with the result that Paul and Barnabus were able to continue their ministry to the Gentiles. I don't understand why Paul and Barnabus weren't able to work out their disagreement in a similar way. This passage shows us that while they were both full of the Holy Spirit they were still people with feelings and opinions. The good news is that this is not the end of their relationship. We know for certain that Paul asks for John Mark later in his ministry.

In chapter 16 Paul and Silas go to jail. One of the important aspects of this story is the fact that both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. In the United States everyone has the same basic rights regardless of citizenship. This was not true in the Roman Empire. Citizens had a very different status and special privileges that non-citizens did not have. Many people paid large sums of money to become citizens, but Paul and Silas were citizens by birth. They should not have been arrested and held in jail without trial and there is no way they should have been beaten. What does the jailer do when he hears the good news that has put Paul and Silas in his jail?

Week 47, Day 7 --- Galatians 1-3

Often when we think of God we ask the wrong questions and naturally get the wrong answers. We assume things about God that aren't true and the results are disastrous for us. The Jews saw God as only law-giver and judge. With this view of God they asked how they could earn eternal life. The answer they came up with was that they needed to keep the entire law all their life. They knew this was impossible from history and personal experience, but they couldn't see another way. Since this was all they understood they taught this to anyone they could.

Paul saw God as love and life. This is how God is portrayed to us throughout the Bible. God's greatest desire is to love and be loved by His children and that is us. With this view we ask how we can be in right relationship with God. God's answer is that we put our trust in Him and in the sacrifice that He made for us in Jesus.

Paul is absolutely convinced that this is critical to our relationship to God both now and for eternity. He is angry that people who understood this message have been deceived and are now trying to earn their way to heaven. This is an impossible task and puts the emphasis on us rather than on God. Whenever we do that we're making a mistake.