

THE JESUS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

BELIEVING

IN

JESUS

BY JIM BUCHANAN AND CHRIS BROWN

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This Bible Study Guide is the first in a Series designed to be practical for personal or group use. The earnest desire we share is that followers of Jesus will think, grow and most importantly get to know Jesus from a new perspective. If those who participate in this study see these goals come to fruition in their lives, then we have accomplished our goal.

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Jim Buchanan and Chris Brown

PROLOGUE

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. – John 20:31

It seems so simple, just believe in Jesus and you will be saved. Yet this easy statement is not accepted by many people of the world. It was accepted only in a small part of the world in the time of Jesus and by only a small number of people at first. The lack of understanding of many as to what the statement meant led to great dissent among the people from the early days of Christianity all the way to today.

Following the death of Jesus came the attempt of the Jews and later the Romans to destroy Christianity. Just saying, let alone believing, could lead you to crucifixion, death in the Coliseum, being dipped in pitch and used as human torch. As Christianity spread more and more people of other faiths determined to stamp it out by killing the preachers and followers of Jesus.

Even among Christians, how you believed in Jesus could be fatal. Wars were fought between Catholics and Protestants in Europe. Huguenots in France were killed in the St. Bartholomew's Massacre. In Britain Catholics and other Christians fought until King James I came to power and united the groups, including the publication of the King James Bible by a group of Biblical scholars appointed to the task.

In many respects it is no easier today to accept Jesus and display Christianity in some parts of the world. Christians are still martyred, whether they be missionaries, priests, or just believers. One need only read one month of the Voice of the

Martyrs to see how Christians still face death and government sanction because they believe in Jesus.

This study looks at people in Biblical times as they began to believe in Jesus. But the authors hope that you already believe in Jesus, and if not, then you will come to know him through the words of people who walked with or met Jesus during His lifetime.

1.

MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

Mary, the mother of Jesus was the first person to ever believe in Him. When the angel came and told her about the child she would have, and named Him, Mary became a believer. Between the angel and the visit to the temple when the child Jesus was born, Mary learned not only of the deity and role of Jesus, but also His eventual fate. As the child Jesus grew, Mary carried all of the words and actions in her heart.

Yet Mary's belief required hope and compassion. The child was only two when the family had to leave their homeland for the safety of Jesus. Even after they returned, as Jesus grew, she always knew of the eventuality of His death. When He was missing at age 12, she first saw the extent of His knowledge and contact with God through the eyes of the priests and scholars at the temple. After he began his ministry, leaving John the Baptist, she was at the wedding at Cana at which she and the world saw the first miracle Jesus performed. Throughout His ministry, Jesus had the faith of His mother, except for one time when she and His siblings tried to take Jesus home from His ministry.

In the end, she stood by the cross as her son died, but she also saw the resurrection afterward. From conception to ascension, Mary was the first believer in Jesus.

AN ANGEL TELLS MARY ABOUT JESUS

Read Luke 1:26-38

Key Verse – “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled.” – Luke 1:38

Read also Luke 2:8-20

The Story

It is one of the most recognizable stories of the Bible. Many who are not Christians know the story about Mary because it is part of our Christmas tradition. It can be seen on television, in churches and is told by families who read the Christmas story at that time of year. The angel Gabriel came to a teenage girl who was betrothed to be married. Her name was Mary and she was still a virgin. The angel announced that she would become pregnant through the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the Trinity, Gabriel said that the child would be the son of God Himself. Mary concluded that she was the Lord’s servant and she agreed to have the child as Gabriel said.

Study Questions

- Why do you think it is so hard for people to believe this story?
- How much faith does it take to believe that this is how Jesus came to our world?
- Would artificial insemination in our world today compare to this creation of the child Jesus? What about cloning? How would they be the same or different?

CANA

Read John 2:1-12

Key Verses – When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” – John 2:2-4

The Story

From the time of Gabriel’s visit until the first miracle of Jesus, Mary had treasured in her heart everything about her son. She knew He would someday save His people. The song, “Mary Did You Know” expresses some of the thoughts she must have held in her mind as Jesus grew. By the time of the events at Cana, Mary had spent about 30 years storing up the happenings regarding Jesus.

The discussion between Mary and Jesus at the wedding verifies that Mary knew Jesus had extraordinary powers, but not the extent of them. She went to Jesus and, because of her role at the wedding, it is believed that she was also probably related to the bride. Also, the fact that she approached Jesus when the wine was running out indicates she was probably either involved with putting the wedding on or related to one of the parties and did not want to see them embarrassed in front of the guests.

While she asked Jesus to do something about the wine situation, Jesus at first answered that His time had not yet come, but did not specify why it had not yet come. Ignoring what Jesus said, Mary gave instructions to the servants to do what Jesus told them. She believed He would act as she requested. Jesus then turned the water into wine as the first

miracle He did. Mary's faith was vindicated by her son's actions.

Study Questions

- Did your mother ever ask you to do something you did not want to do?
- Did you do it even though you did not want to do it?
- Jesus had been involved with the ministry of John the Baptist before going to Cana with His disciples. Why might Jesus have wanted His own disciples to see the miracle?

AT THE CROSS

Read John 19:25-27

Key Verses – When Jesus saw his mother there, and John, the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, Jesus said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. – John 19:26-27

Read also Matthew 27:55-56

The Story

Jesus was being crucified. The gospels discuss in detail the events of that day. But it is clear from three gospels that Mary was present when her son was killed. Near the end of His life, Jesus addressed His mother and told her that from now on John would be considered her son and told John that Mary would be his mother.

From that time on, John took Mary into his home. Historians and archaeologists have investigated this and at least one documentary has shown what is believed to be the home where John and Mary lived after John moved to Ephesus. According to early and later sources, John was believed to have died in Ephesus about 98 A.D., the only apostle not martyred despite Roman attempts to kill him.

Study Questions

- Why was it so important for Mary to see her son crucified?
- Why did Jesus trust His mother to John when He knew He would be resurrected and see her again before He ascended into heaven?
- Why do you think the Romans or Jews did not take any action against Mary just because she was a Christian?

Application

Mary was a key player in the life of Jesus. Because she gave birth to Jesus, she is revered by Christians. But she also was a parent who helped her son grow into manhood. She had the opportunity to see Jesus begin His ministry and for it to end. Although she always knew from Gabriel what the ultimate end was for Jesus, she did not know in the early days that He would return to life and then ascend to heaven.

In a sense, Mary's knowledge led her to help Jesus begin His ministry by her actions at Cana. Only once did she falter in her faith, when she and her other children tried to take Jesus home during His ministry. (Mark 3:21-34). At the end, Mary was there to see her son die, prepare his body for burial, and then see Him resurrected.

Unit Study Questions

- How would you be able to handle being told that your son at age 8 days was going to die for His people?
- Why do you think Mary waited until Jesus had already been involved with ministry before she led Him to His first miracle?
- Do you think that she believed being a preacher with John the Baptist did not fulfill the role Jesus was supposed to play for His people according to what she had been told at the temple?
- Have you ever felt that a child of yours was destined for a particular profession? What did you do to steer him or her to that profession?
- The hard question – have you ever lost a child and what feelings do you believe Mary might have experienced for years knowing Jesus would die for His people?

2.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

The ministry of John the Baptist was entering a new phase after he had baptized Jesus. After the 40-day desert experience Jesus had returned to work with the Baptist. During this time, two of his disciples saw Jesus and John the Baptist told them to follow Jesus rather than himself. He acknowledged that Jesus was going to grow in ministry while he would diminish. Perhaps he knew what his future was at that time given the opposition of King Herod.

But this day belonged to Andrew and another disciple. They followed Jesus and talked with Him. Andrew believed in Jesus and went to find his brother Simon who came and met Jesus. Simon's name was changed to Peter, but he and Andrew returned to their fishing careers.

The next day Jesus decided to return to Galilee to begin His ministry. That day He met Philip and the two spent the day together. Philip then found Nathaniel who spoke with Jesus and came to believe as well. They left for Galilee. Andrew and Simon Peter would come to leave their occupation and follow Jesus at a later date, but for the moment they had found the Messiah.

ANDREW

Read John 1:40-42

Key Verse – The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ) – John 1:41

The Story

One day two of John the Baptist’s disciples saw Jesus coming and John the Baptist said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” The disciples left John and followed Jesus who began to speak with them. In the end, both stayed the rest of the day with Jesus.

Andrew was convinced of the identity of Jesus, and he went to find his brother Simon, the fisherman. After telling Simon that they had found the Messiah, Andrew took Simon to see Jesus. Upon seeing Simon, Jesus told him that Jesus was changing his name to Cephas, which translated to Peter. No further discussion is noted at this time and apparently the men went back to fishing as Jesus would later call them away from their occupation to “fish for men.” (John 4:16-20)

Study Questions

- What might be the reasons why Andrew decided to meet Jesus that first time?
- What do you think convinced him that Jesus was the Messiah?
- What might have Simon thought when Andrew told him to come and see Jesus?

PHILIP

Read John 1:43-46

Key Verse – We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. – John 1:43-44

The Story

The day after Andrew and a man who was believed to be John the disciple followed Jesus, the next person to follow Jesus was approached. Jesus had decided to leave the area of the Jordan Valley and go to Galilee, although it was not a great distance away. He saw Philip and said “Follow me” which Philip did. No further discussion with Philip occurred and the two set off across the northern end of the Sea of Galilee.

Study Questions

- Do we assume that Philip already knew Jesus because he simply followed him upon request?
- Do you suppose Philip had talked to Andrew and Simon about Jesus, since the three men were all from the same town of Bethsaida?
- Because there is no discussion of a profession for Philip, is it possible that it was easier to follow Jesus than the two brothers who were fishermen?

NATHANAEL

Read John 1:43-51

Key Verse – Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” - John 1:49

The Story

Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael’s immediate response seems sarcastic but was in line with Jewish belief. He asked, “Is there anything good that comes from Nazareth?” Philip simply invited Nathanael to come and see.

Once Nathanael met Jesus, he was still skeptical. It took just one question from Nathanael to set the stage as he asked how Jesus knew him. Jesus replied that he saw Nathanael under the fig tree, asked if Nathanael believed Him and then told Nathanael that he would see greater things than that. He would see heaven opened and angels coming and going. Nathanael joined Philip in following Jesus.

Study Questions

- Do you trust what your friends say more than what you would trust words from a stranger?
- Why would Jesus telling Nathanael he saw him under a fig tree make Nathanael follow Jesus? Did Nathanael believe he was hidden at the time?
- Or might Nathanael have simply been curious about what Jesus said about seeing angels coming and going from heaven?

Application

Following John the Baptist’s comments about needing to follow Jesus, the first four men Jesus approached all eventually did. Despite Andrew’s enthusiasm and Simon coming to meet Jesus and being renamed Peter, those two

men returned to fishing and would only become disciples later after Jesus approached them on the seashore. Philip agreed to follow Jesus easily and Nathaniel was convinced either by what Jesus knew about him or by what Jesus told him he would see if he followed Jesus.

Each of us have been curious about who Jesus was and is now or we would not have come to Him. Nowadays, like with Andrew and Simon, most of us have a job, family or other reason we would not drop everything and follow somebody. Like the fishermen, however, we believed in Jesus and would serve him in other ways than being missionaries.

Unit Study Questions

- How and why did you decide to follow Jesus?
- Did you accept Jesus when you were young or as an adult with additional responsibilities?
- Do you wonder how certain missionaries the church supports simply took their families, including children, with them to foreign countries?
- How did these stories differ from those people who followed Jim Jones to their ultimate deaths in the compound in Guyana? Many of his followers deeply believed in him as well.

3.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

As seen in the second study, John the Baptist was the primary evangelizer in the areas over which Rome had control. When Jesus arrived one day, John the Baptist baptized Him and then Jesus joined the ministry of the Baptist after Jesus spent the time in the desert being confronted by Satan. If John did not already know the role of Jesus and believe in Him, the baptism certainly cemented his belief when God spoke, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove.

The belief in Jesus, however, had to be reinforced after John was imprisoned by King Herod. The Baptist sent people to ask Jesus if He was the Messiah and Jesus gave a response using examples of things that the Messiah would accomplish and Jesus was doing.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Read John 1:29-35

Key Verse - I have seen, and I testify that this is God's Chosen One. - John 1:34

Read also Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-24

The Story

Numerous people had asked John the Baptist if he was the Messiah, but he always denied it. He referred to the "Chosen One" who remained unidentified until Jesus came to John for baptism. On the day Jesus was baptized, God spoke and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, all in verification of the connection of Jesus with the Trinity.

This public baptism of Jesus served multiple purposes. First, it made Jesus like other men who had been baptized. Second, it identified Jesus with both God and the Holy Spirit. Finally, it showed the followers of Jesus the Messiah they had been seeking rather than John. Once God spoke and identified Jesus as His Son, the identity of the parties was established, for good and bad. Herod could now oppose John the Baptist without fear that he was opposing God.

Study Questions

- What was the significance of the dove and God's voice at this ceremony?
- How might this ceremony for Jesus have endangered the life of John the Baptist?
- Would this have taken anything away from John the Baptist's message?

WHEN JESUS LEFT JOHN

Read John 3:25-36

Key Verse - Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. - John 3:36

The Story

Although Jesus had worked with John the Baptist for some time, it was necessary for Jesus to begin His own ministry to fulfill His purpose on Earth. This separation from John was mainly positive for Jesus, but in the end, it was what Herod needed to proceed against John the Baptist to arrest him.

Jesus left John the Baptist and shortly thereafter began His own ministry in Galilee. John continued in the Gentile areas for a short time, then was imprisoned and eventually killed by Herod. Some of John's disciples had already become disciples of Jesus by the time Herod had John arrested.

Study Questions

- Did John really know and accept that someday his cousin would displace him as the most important voice for the salvation of the people?
- Why did Jesus need to separate His ministry from John the Baptist?
- How might John the Baptist have felt after Jesus came forward and then John himself was arrested and thrown into prison?

JOHN IN PRISON

Read Luke 7:18-23

Key Verse - So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are

cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”

- Luke 7:22

Read also Matthew 11:2-6; John 11:1-6

The Story

It is hard to imagine what prisons were like in the days of John the Baptist. Unlike today with modern amenities, these buildings were not made to rehabilitate or serve the prisoners, but to punish them. There were no law libraries, computers, exercise rooms and so forth. In the case of John, Herod had even more reasons to make his life miserable. He was probably chained and alone in a cell.

What person under these circumstances might not doubt what he believed to be a better life with his cousin being the Messiah? Doubt turns to questioning and John asked questions. Jesus answered them with references to prophets who said the mark of the Messiah would be the one who heals the lame, restores hearing to the deaf, cleanses the lepers and proclaims the good news of salvation to the poor. Jesus' answer was to assure John the Baptist of his beliefs that Jesus was the Messiah. John knew that the world could be saved and he was assured a place in heaven.

Study Questions

- What might have caused John to doubt that Jesus was the Messiah?
- John did not resist death. Was he convinced by the time that he died that he was assured a place in heaven?
- Do you believe the answers John received from Jesus eased his fears when he knew he would be killed?

- Why did it not matter to John the method by which he was killed, or even that his head was displayed at the banquet?

Application

Although John and Jesus were cousins, until the two eventually met as followers of God, their lives were not similar. John became an itinerant preacher while Jesus was a carpenter until close to the time of John's death. This fact alone may have caused doubt for John as to the role of Jesus in God's plan while Jesus was only a working man, not part of the priestly class.

The one factor that might have eased John's fears was not mentioned in the events. John had baptized Jesus, saw the heavens open, and heard God's voice speak. The dove descended on Jesus. Perhaps these could have reassured him, but since Jesus was still alive, He could have wanted to hear it directly from Jesus.

More probably, John was seeking assurance by the time he asked the questions. Knowing Herod's desire to eliminate him, John probably felt the need for assurance that he had made a difference in the world. His greatest assurance would be that he would be in heaven, not hell. Many people today want that reassurance before they die.

Unit Study Questions

- Do you know people that have lived most of their lives trying to bring people to Christ?
- How might they compare to John the Baptist's work to the same end?

- Do you know of people today that have been martyred because of their attempts to save people for Christ?
- What assurance might you want to seek before your death?
- Why might Jesus have not come in person to speak with John who was in prison?

4.

PETER

Peter, or Simon Peter as some knew him, was originally a follower of John the Baptist. But John knew he was only a forerunner, so he told his disciples to follow Jesus. Andrew, the brother of Simon, was the first to do so and once he met Jesus, he went and brought his brother Simon to meet Jesus.

Although Peter did not become a disciple at the first meeting with Jesus, he did so after Jesus called him from his fishing boat. After that he was with Jesus for the next three years and the 40 days after the resurrection of Jesus. During this period, Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah, he walked on the water until he lost sight of Jesus and began to sink. He went among the people as one of the 12 and then the 72.

But Peter also had his bad times. He denied Jesus three times on the night Jesus was arrested. He placed his own safety ahead of acknowledging Jesus. Jesus had predicted it, and Peter regretted it. Jesus then restored him at the Sea of Galilee and from that day forward Peter was the leader of the church.

Peter went on to meet with Paul in Jerusalem, to do his own outreach in the areas around Israel and eventually to Rome where he was crucified by Nero. The spot on which he was buried after his crucifixion was later used as the site for

the Basilica of St. Peter in what is now the headquarters of the Catholic Church, the Vatican City.

BECOMING A DISCIPLE

Read Matthew 4:18-22

Key Verse – And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.” - Matthew 4:18-19

Read also Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:2-11

The Story

The point at which Peter became a disciple of Jesus was not the first time he met Jesus. In Matthew 4, we see how Andrew was one of the first two to leave John the Baptist and go with Jesus. He brought his brother Simon to meet Jesus and there Jesus gave Simon the new name, Cephas which means Peter. (John 1:52). However, Peter and Andrew did not remain with Jesus at that time but returned to their occupation as fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. Later Jesus would be walking along the Sea of Galilee and would call both men to be fishers of men as His disciples. Jesus would officially name His apostles at a later time, (Luke 6:12-16) but both Peter and Andrew followed Jesus from this day until their lives ended.

Study Questions

- Why would people leave their jobs to follow an itinerant preacher?
- Did the first meeting prepare Andrew and Peter to give up their day job and follow Jesus?

- How do you think Jesus' terminology about making them fishers of men was understood by Peter?

PREACHING AT PENTECOST

Read Acts 2:14-41

Key Verse – Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.” – Acts 2:14

The Story

Forty days after Jesus ascended to heaven the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus descended on the disciples and other followers. The Spirit sounded like the wind and appeared as tongues of fire that touched each one in the room. Each person in the room began to speak in tongues or in the language of others who were in Jerusalem. Acts 2 gives a list of people from many nations that were in Jerusalem at that time.

Peter addressed the crowd, and each person heard Peter's speech in their native languages. This fulfilled the prophecy of Joel which stated that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on His people. (Joel 2:28-29) They heard Peter talk about Jesus and how He came for them, was crucified and raised again to the right hand of God. Peter showed how David, the most famous king remained in his grave, but Jesus had risen from the grave.

The people asked Peter what they could do about this message. And Peter told them to repent and be baptized. For this they would receive the Holy Spirit as the disciples had.

That day about 3,000 accepted the invitation and came to Jesus. Peter would go on to preach to many other crowds in Galilee and surrounding areas, and eventually in Rome.

Study Questions

- How do you think Peter felt when the tongues of fire descended upon the disciples?
- What do you think the disciples felt when they each could speak a foreign language they had never known prior to Pentecost?
- Did Peter ever expect that thousands would become Christians on Pentecost as a result of his speaking to them?

TRAVELS AFTER THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

Read Acts 11

Key Verse – Believe in the name of the Lord and be saved. – Acts 16:31

Read also Acts 3:9; 8:14-25, 9:32-43; 1 Corinthians 1:12, 7:22, 9:15; Galatians 1 and 2; 1 Peter 1:1, 14-15; 5:13

The Story

Prior To the ascension of Jesus, Peter was designated as leader of the Apostles. But the brother of Jesus, James was the head of the early Jerusalem church. After James was executed, Peter remained the head of the Apostles, and some have considered him as head of the church.

Peter left Jerusalem during a period of suppression by the Jewish church leaders and Rome. Several times he left and went to other areas to preach and share the history and word of the Lord Jesus. He returned to Jerusalem several times, but then eventually left for other areas. He was present in areas Paul had established churches, such as Corinth and Galatia. Historically, he eventually went to Rome where he was executed by the Romans.

In the various Biblical citations above, we see Peter first traveling in Samaria and areas around Israel. God then led him to Joppa where he saved Cornelius and his family. Later he visits Paul in Antioch and “Babylon,” about which the actual location scholars are uncertain to this day.

Study Questions

- Why was Peter targeted by the Jews first then the Roman authorities?
- Why did Peter have to go to so many places in his career as head of the Apostles?
- Did it make sense for Peter to go to Rome when he knew Paul was already under arrest there and the Roman authorities hated him?

Application

There are many stories about Peter’s role as a disciple of Jesus and his leadership of the disciples while Jesus was alive and again after Jesus had ascended. He was the one who first understood that Jesus was the Messiah. But he allowed his brashness to overcome him when he said he would never deny Jesus, then did so three times one night.

But Jesus forgave him and placed him back into leadership at the Sea of Galilee before Jesus ascended.

Following the ascension of Jesus, Peter remained close to Jerusalem, but Paul travelled the countries around the Mediterranean Sea. Peter became the leader of the church. He was involved in the Councils in Jerusalem. He also travelled the countryside of Israel and nearby areas to take Jesus to the people. He met Paul and the two of them worked as leaders of different aspects of the church, although in different locales. In the end, they were both crucified in Rome but had set the church on its path for the future until God calls it home.

Unit Study Questions

- Was Peter more knowledgeable than the other disciples when it came to Jesus or did he just determine it as he went?
- Why did Peter stay in the area around Israel after the disciples left Jerusalem and scattered around the known world to take Jesus to all nations?
- If you remember when Peter went to meet Paul at Tarsus, why did Paul have to call him out about continuing Jewish dietary customs when many of the people of the Antioch church were Gentiles?

5.

JOHN THE DISCIPLE OF JESUS

The Apostle John was the earliest of the apostles of Jesus Christ. He was a follower of John the Baptist when Jesus came onto the scene. After seeing Jesus, he felt the need to meet Him. John the Baptist encouraged him to meet with Jesus and in a discussion with John indicated that Jesus was the Christ who had been proclaimed in prophecy. He told John to follow Jesus, which John did. Although John returned to his fishing career for a time, he eventually answered Jesus' call to become a follower of Jesus and "fish" for men.

Eventually, John became the closest apostle to Jesus and gave himself the name "The Disciple that Jesus Loved." After the death of Jesus John travelled and spread the word of Jesus, was eventually imprisoned by Rome, but after his release wrote the Gospel of John, two epistles and the book of Revelation. He died around the end of the first century in Ephesus.

THE DISCIPLE WHO JESUS LOVED

Read John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20

The Story

The term that John was the disciple that Jesus loved is only found in the gospel of John. It was a self-imposed name that John gave himself because of his closeness with Jesus.

That closeness came to light in the final days of Jesus, long before the gospel was written. It was John that sat next to Jesus at the Last Supper and leaned upon Jesus. John accompanied Jesus into Annas' courtyard and was at the interrogation of Jesus. John was at the cross when no other disciples were. And it was John that Jesus chose to care for his mother, Mary as Jesus came to the end of His life on the cross. Not from the Bible, but other historical sources, John took Mary into his household and lived with her until her death in their home near Ephesus.

Study Questions

- How do you think the other apostles felt when John called himself the disciple who Jesus loved?
- Is it possible they did not know of that title until John's gospel was written long after Jesus died?
- Why do you think that John get the seat of honor next to Jesus at the Last Supper?
- Why do you think Jesus "gave" His mother to John at the crucifixion?

LIFE AFTER THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

The story of John after Jesus ascended is one of being a senior church leader and helping set the authority and direction of the church. His life changed after Jesus rose again, but more so after Jesus ascended to heaven. John became an early leader in the church but at a cost as his brother James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, was martyred.

Once the disciples scattered from Jerusalem, John took leadership over much of the early church. He visited Peter when Peter was preaching in Samaria. He was present when Paul came to have Gentiles allowed to enter the church by salvation through Christ.

Later John was arrested on order of the Roman emperor and he was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos. Two attempts to kill him failed and John was eventually released. He spent much of his remaining days in Ephesus teaching the next generation of church leaders.

Study Questions

- How did John survive the torture and attempted killing of him by order of the Roman emperor Domitian?
- Would John's years in the Roman prison enable him to consolidate his thoughts to write the Book of Revelation?
- The Bible does not say exactly what happened to Mary, but historians and archaeologists believe she lived with John near Ephesus. Are you aware of any verification of this fact?

TELLING OF THE LAST DAYS

Read the Book of Revelation

Key Verses - The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ – Revelation 1:1-2.

The Story

The story of the end times is told by John the Disciple who Jesus loved. Written between 90 and 95 A.D. by John, who experienced a vision seen by John in which Jesus shows him the end of our world and the beginning of the new heavens and new Earth. It is the most extensive written material in the Bible concerning the last days. Other books such as that of Daniel give us a glimpse of particular things such as the New Jerusalem, but the Book of Revelation is the comprehensive view of the end times.

It seems clear that John narrates the entire book and brings many scenes of good and bad times to light. Some writers say that this was not the same John as that of the gospel, but the ties to the isle of Patmos where the disciple John was exiled by Rome seem to indicate that it was the same person. Even some television shows have taken people to the home where the apostle John and Mary, the mother of Jesus lived near Patmos.

Regardless of the dispute about the author, this study will assume it was the Apostle John because of the content of the book and the connection between the two characters, John and Jesus. Also the discussion of the various churches indicates that the author had a great deal of knowledge about the Biblical churches of the Bible.

Study Questions

- Why would Jesus choose John for the revelation about the future?
- What factors about the book of Revelation cause the worldly people to doubt Christianity?

- Do you know people today that are always seeing the end of times from events of our world?

Application

John was the earliest follower of Jesus because of his actions when he first met Jesus and invited Simon to see the Messiah John had found. Yet John was not officially a disciple until Jesus called him and his brother to be fishers of men. Once he was a disciple, he engaged in all the important activities of the ministry. When Jesus was arrested John was the only one who followed Jesus that was granted entrance to the courtyard and the interrogation of Jesus. Later he was the one disciple at the cross. And Jesus told him that John should consider Mary as his mother and told her to consider John as her son.

Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was the last one to die, almost 70 years after Jesus was crucified. He was jailed by the Romans for a time, then released and relocated in Ephesus. There, archaeologists and historians tell us, he lived with Mary the mother of Jesus, just as Christ had assigned him to do from the cross. During the time he was in custody on Patmos he received the Revelation of Jesus Christ. After his release, John helped train future church leaders such as taught others, such as Polycarp, about Jesus and Christianity and they became the next generation of preachers and evangelists. He also wrote down the Revelation which he said came to him while he was on the island of Patmos.

Unit Study Questions

- Why do you think it took John so long (probably 45 years) to write his gospel, the two epistles and the Book of Revelation?

- How can a historian authenticate much of what John wrote regarding his days with Jesus when the gospel wasn't written for more than 20 years later?
- Could John have known that he was the last apostle of Jesus alive while he was in Ephesus?

6.

THOSE IN NEED OF CURES

During His travels and ministry, Jesus became well known for His ability to cure people with physical, mental and supernatural disabilities. While people often recognize stories about the blind people and lepers, they do not as often remember those with mental issues, demon-possession, or even death.

Jesus cured people under many scenarios. On the road He met many, but He also cured people in homes and from a distance, such as speaking a word at Cana and curing the centurion's servant. Some He met along the road, one was lowered through a roof torn off a house, and one woman simply touched His cloak.

His method of curing varied as well. Some people were cured by words, others by touch, and some by asking people if they wanted to be cured. Some were children and others adults of all ages. Some had been disabled for a short time, others for decades. In all cases, however, the person had both the faith to ask Jesus for a cure and the expectation that their prayers would finally be answered.

This study takes you into the time when many of these conditions had no cure. Psychiatric care was not available and physical care was limited. The fact that many of those who needed help had been unable to receive it, even from birth, shows that the times were different than what we now

know and expect. So take yourself back in time and put aside the thoughts of today's medicine and miracles to see what Jesus saw and did.

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Read Luke 7:1-10, 5:18-25

Key Verse - So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." - Luke 8:24

Read also Matthew 10:1, 21:14, Mark 5:25-32; 7:36, John 9:11-12

The Story

During His three-year ministry Jesus was called upon by either people suffering from disabilities or their family members and friends trying to help the disabled. More than two dozen incidents could be cited here, but the key is that Jesus healed all kinds of physical and mental problems for people. The most often mentioned were blind and lame people, although others were also cured by Jesus. Several times people brought those who needed cures to Jesus as He travelled or at meetings He held.

At other times, Jesus came across them during His travels. Often Jesus simply encountered people where they happened to be, especially people who could not walk and had been put down somewhere such as the Pool of Bethesda, or lowered through a roof that had been torn away on a house in Capernaum.

A special kind of disability at that time was leprosy. Although we now know it as a form of a disease, at the time it was believed to be caused by sin of some kind by either a

parent for those born with it or an individual who suffered from it. Lepers were excluded from the temple and society in those days and they were never to go near those without the condition. Many times they ended up living in areas solely for lepers so they would be kept away from others. Numerous lepers called upon Jesus for a cure. Anywhere from one to ten lepers at a time confronted Jesus and asked for a cure.

Study Questions

- What is the connection between the Old Testament qualities of the Savior and the New Testament reality of curing the physical needs of people?
- Why was there so much attention paid to Jesus by lepers and to lepers by Jesus?
- What changes in life could you see for those cured by Jesus such as the blind, the lame and the lepers?

DEMONS

Read Matthew 8, Mark 1, 9 and 11; Luke 4, 8 and 11,

Key Verse -When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases." - Matthew 8:16-17

Read also Matthew 7:26, 12:22

The Story

Demons were always ready to challenge Jesus. Their boss, the devil, was also always trying to prevent Jesus from saving the individual. To prove Jesus powerless to prevent death or revive a person who had died would have given the devil victory and demoralized others Jesus might have helped. So in each case, Jesus revived the person who had died.

But Jesus deal with many demons beyond those who took lives. Mary Magdalene was freed from seven demons. After the disciples were sent out by Jesus, a man came to them with a child whose demon they could not remove. Jesus then drove the demon out.

In the Decapolis Jesus drove out literally thousands of demons from the demoniac who lived in the tombs.

Study Questions

- Why do you think there was so much attention paid to Jesus casting out demons from people?
- Was the presence of demons just among people old enough to know what they were and how they affected people?
- Why were the people in the Decapolis anxious to have Jesus leave the area after driving the demons out of the man and into the pigs?
- What differences may there have been in the demons that possessed a young boy, Mary Magdalene and the demoniac in the Decapolis?

RESTORING LIFE

Read Mark 5:21-24, 35-43

Key Verse - Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe." - Mark 5:36

Read also Luke 7:11-17, John 11:38-44

The Story

Three times Jesus was called upon to bring a dead person back to life. In all three cases He responded and the person was brought back to life. The person requesting the assistance varied in importance from a widow in Nain to a synagogue leader to a dead friend.

After Jesus had driven out a demon in the Gerasenes, He returned across the Sea of Galilee to Israel. A crowd met Him and Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue, fell at His feet and begged Jesus to come with him and save his daughter. Jesus went with him. While they were on the way a messenger came to tell Jairus that his daughter had died. Jesus told him not to fear but only believe. They proceeded to Jairus' house and found a crowd in mourning. Jesus told the crowd that the girl was not dead but only sleeping.

Jesus took the parents and Peter, James and John into the room with Him. He told the girl to arise and she immediately got up and walked to the amazement of the parents. Jesus then told the parents to feed her and not to tell anybody about what had happened.

While Jesus was in Nain in Galilee, He came upon a funeral procession, The only son of a widow had died and was being carried to his grave. Jesus had compassion on her

and told her not to weep. He then went to the funeral bier, touched it and told the man to arise. The man began to speak and Jesus returned him to his mother. The people glorified God and said that God has visited His people.

The third instance involved the raising of Lazarus from the grave shortly before Jesus entered Jerusalem during Holy Week. Because this is discussed in another study, a concise fact pattern is all that will be mentioned here. Lazarus had died and was buried by the time Jesus arrived four days later. He told the sisters Lazarus was not dead, then proceeded to the burial site where He told Lazarus to come forth from the grave. Lazarus came out of the grave.

Study Questions

- Are you aware of people today that have been brought back to life when they were presumed dead?
- How does this differ from what Jesus did with the people described above?
- Are you aware of the field of cryogenics? If so, do you believe a person can be put into suspension through freezing and revived in the future once a cure for a specific condition is found?

Application

In the time of Jesus, much of what He did for people stricken by diseases of all kinds was considered as miracles. Despite the huge advances in medical science today, there are still cases in which people recover or live when it is thought to be impossible. Many of these miracles occur because of faith by the patients or the medical providers. Some cannot be explained by human minds.

Although Jesus left the world two thousand years ago, people are still being cured of physical and mental ailments through faith, hence the term faith healing that we hear nowadays. Most of us have known people, read about them, or heard through social media of people cured or saved by faith when no medical cure was possible. In other cases, conditions that were so devastating in Biblical times, such as leprosy, have been overcome by medical science.

The question of demon possession has never been proven. However, it remains a belief in many cultures, including our own. Even certain religious groups continue to believe in voodoo or spells causing people to be overcome by demons. Devil worshippers had their religion recognized by the American government, although its official name here is called Satanism. The Church of Satan has been recognized here since 1966. Nations such as Haiti have long practiced voodoo. Some nations and ethnic groups still practice devil worship. Ceremonies are still held to drive out demons. Movies such as the Exorcist highlighted a practice that the Catholic church has done for many years.

What Jesus did two millennia ago provides an example of the power of faith in His name today.

Unit Study Questions

- How would you compare today's faith healers with what Jesus did in Biblical times?
- Do you believe in voodoo and other religions that supposedly can put spells and call down demons on people? If so, what can be done for a person to rid himself of such demons?

- How many conditions and diseases can you think of that Jesus could heal by words and actions that nowadays have been eliminated by science and medical advances? What are some of these diseases or conditions?
- Why do you think so many doctors today believe that people can still be miraculously cured by faith in Jesus?
- Have you ever met, seen or heard of somebody who has been cured miraculously by faith when no other source of the cure may be found?

7.

WOMEN WHO SUPPORTED JESUS

No ministry exists without support teams. In the case of Jesus, the support teams were a variety of women who financially supported the ministry of Jesus and served the disciples in their activities. They also were present in some of the events in the ministry but especially at the end of the earthly life and resurrection.

The names of some of the women are known by most, those being the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna. Others such as Peter's wife and mother and the mother of the Zebedee served the disciples when they were in Capernaum.

In ministry there are stories that women were among the 72 sent out by Jesus in husband and wife teams. This is conjecture but possible since the Bible does not identify who the 72 were. Regardless of conjecture, women were still a vital part of the ministry of Jesus.

MARY MAGDALENE

Read Luke 8:1-3

Key Verses – After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary

(called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; - Like 8:1-2

Read also Matthew 15:47, 27:55-61, 28:1-10; Mark 6:9-10; 15:40, 47; 16:1-8; Luke 8:1-3, 24:1-12, John 9:25, 20:1-18 (and Carroll, James, Who Was Mary Magdalene, Smithsonian Magazine, June 2006)

The Story

Mary Magdalene appears as Jesus travels around the countryside. She was apparently born in Magdala in Judea on the Sea of Galilee. At some point of time Jesus drove out seven demons from her. However, her role in the ministry of Jesus is mostly seen towards the end of that ministry. She was at the crucifixion among the women who watched the events. She was also at the burial of His body in the tomb.

The most notable part of her story with Jesus comes from the book of John who tells of her visit to the tomb on the morning Jesus rose. While the other gospels list her among the women who went to the tomb that morning, only John says that she went alone. His gospel then explains how she found the tomb empty, returned and told Peter and John who then ran to the tomb to find it empty. Once the two left she looked into the tomb and saw two angels sitting where Jesus body had been. And asked where they had taken the body. They replied that He was not here, but was risen from the dead.

When she turned around there was a figure standing by her but she did not recognize Him, Jesus said one word to her, "Mary". At that she recognized Jesus (v. 16) but He asked her not to touch Him as He had not yet ascended to God. He told her to go instead and tell the disciples which she did.

Mary is also listed in Luke 8:1-3 as one of the women who supported the ministry of Jesus financially. In all of the instances where several women are mentioned Mary Magdalene is listed first.

Many stories have grown over time concerning Mary Magdalene. Sometimes people claim she and Jesus married and had children. Others claim she became a saint. Pope Gregory claimed she was the prostitute whose life Jesus saved. Others claim she was Mary of the three siblings at Bethany. None of this is documented in the Bible so we must rest upon the words of the Scripture and leave the rest to conjecture.

Study Questions

- Why do people believe stories about Mary Magdalene that there is no proof concerning her?
- Other than her name, why is Mary's background nowhere to be found in the Bible?

JOANNA

Read Luke 8:1-3

Key Verse – Jesus travelled ...and also some women...Joanna, the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household.

Read also Luke 24:10

The Story

Joanna is mentioned in the Bible as one of the women healed by Jesus and as a supporter of His ministry, along with several other women. Being the wife of Chuza, Herod's

steward, made her presence at key moments in Jesus' life, including His crucifixion and resurrection.

During the ministry of Jesus, Joanna also helped provide financial assistance for the ministry. Due to her husband's position, she had access to the financial assets to help the ministry and travels of Jesus and His followers. Joanna was also said to have been in the Bible is noted for being healed by Jesus from "evil spirits and diseases"

Joanna was present at the death and burial of Jesus as well as with the women that discovered the empty tomb.

Study Questions

- Why was Joanna's position in life so important to the ministry of Jesus?
- What problems may her activities have caused her husband who was part of the royal court of Herod Antipas?
- Do you wonder what information she might have told her husband and, if so, what effect it might have had on the official view of the ministry of Jesus?

OTHER WOMEN SUPPORTERS

Read MT 8:14-15; 27:55-56 Mark 15:40-; Luke 23:27-31. 49; 24:1-12; John 19:20. 25. 20:1-18;31

The Story

Despite what some may believe, the ministry of Jesus included many women, not all mentioned by name. From Peter's mother to a former adulteress, and everyone in between, many women were aiding Jesus throughout His

three year ministry. Women provided for the group when Jesus was in town as well as when He was on the road. They probably accompanied men when the 72 were sent out. Some have suggested that the couples were often husband and wife.

Regardless of the fact that women were not always named in the literature of that day, God knows who they are and how they helped Jesus reach people in the three year ministry.

When Jesus was tried and executed, several women were standing by at the site of the crucifixion. When Joseph of Arimathea took the body for burial, some helped prepare Jesus for burial. On the third day, women were the first to find the tomb empty.

In some cases the Bible gives specific information about women supporters. Peter's mother was ill but Jesus healed her and she cared for them at her home. An adulteress was forgiven by Jesus and later either she or another woman anointed Jesus at Simon's house. Martha and Mary, mentioned previously, often hosted Jesus and cared for Him when He was near Jerusalem.

Study Questions

- Why are so many women who assisted Jesus not specifically named in the Bible?
- Why might some believe that the 72 sent out by Jesus possibly included husband and wife couples?
- Are you aware of how many women from Biblical times are now saints in the Catholic Church? If so, can you name these women?

Application

Hollywood does not always include specific women in their movies about Jesus and His ministry. But the reason behind this seems to be that the Bible does not always mention the names of women who assisted Him. Only in recent years have women begun to receive their recognition, although still not in some countries where the old traditions remain.

In today's world we see women in a different position. There are women pastors, elders, even denominational leaders. However, this is still not universal as women are still in positions similar to Biblical days in some countries. We must look at the underlying facts in the Bible and realize that Jesus gave more liberty to the women of His day than their social structure allowed.. We must do the same.

Unit Study Questions

- Compare the issue of women's rights in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Did Jesus make a difference?
- Why was Mary Magdalene seemingly elevated above other women who helped Jesus?
- How do you see the role of Peter's mother in relation to how women were treated in Jesus' time?
- Why do so many people automatically associate Mary Magdalene with prostitution?

8.

MEETING THE RESURRECTED JESUS

Jesus arose. There is plenty of proof in the gospels that the resurrection occurred despite what some may want you to believe. After Jesus arose, He made at least ten appearances to His followers in groups ranging in numbers from one person to 500.

This left behind a written record to prove what the authorities wanted to deny. It also reassured His followers that resurrection was possible just as Jesus had told them.

The following group of post-resurrection appearances are cited because of their importance to the story. These include two appearances to the disciples and one to a large group of followers. All could act as witnesses in the future as suggested in the 1st Corinthians Chapter 15.

CLEOPAS AND HIS WIFE

Read Luke 24:13-35

Key Verse - Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. - Luke 24:31

The Story

It is a familiar story about the day that Jesus was resurrected. Two disciples, saddened by the events of the past few days, were returning to their home in Emmaus. Many believe that this was Cleopas and his wife returning from Jerusalem where they had been party to the events of the Passover week.

As they were walking along, they were discussing the events they had seen during the week. Suddenly they were joined by Jesus although they could not recognize Him because He kept them from recognizing Him. Perhaps trying to get another viewpoint on the events, they asked Jesus whether He was aware of the events about Jesus. Not wanting to let them know who He was Jesus asked "What things?"

The two explained the events that had happened but expressed doubt since they had not seen the risen Jesus. Jesus then asked them if they didn't know the Scriptures and how they were fulfilled in what had happened at Passover. Verse 17 states that Jesus began with Moses and the prophets and explained how the Messiah had to suffer these things and enter into His glory.

By this time the three arrived in Emmaus and the two asked the stranger to stay and eat with them. As soon as Jesus took the bread, broke it and blessed it, they recognized Him but He suddenly disappeared. Excited, they decided to return to Jerusalem to find His disciples and tell them about the events. While it nowhere says that the two had accepted Jesus as their savior, the conversation seems to verify their belief that He was the Messiah.

Study Questions

- Who else did not recognize Jesus on the day He rose from the grave?

- Have you ever been surprised about something you believed was completely different than it really was?
- Put yourself in their place. Would you have reacted any differently given the things that occurred on the trip to Emmaus?

THOMAS

Read Luke 20:24-29

Key Verse - Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" - Luke 20:28

The Story

Thomas was a study in inconsistency. Shortly before Jesus went to Jerusalem, he expressed the willingness to fight and die for Jesus (John 11:16). Yet after Jesus died, He was not present at the upper room when Jesus came on the night He arose. When Thomas was told about the events, He doubted and said He would not believe until He could see the nail marks, put his hands in the nail holes and put his hand into the wound on Jesus' side. Thomas believed and called Jesus His Lord and Savior.

Study Questions

As you learned about the Bible characters did you ever doubt some of the stories you read?

Is it hard for the average person who may not know Jesus to believe everything you might know about Him? If so, how can you help them understand better?

How would you address somebody close to you who might be a doubting Thomas?

CROWDS OF PEOPLE

Read 1 Corinthians 15:4-8

Key Verse - After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. - 1 Corinthians 4:6

The Story

Following His resurrection, Jesus made no less than ten appearances to His followers. While many are described in Luke's gospel, some are found in 1st Corinthians 15.

Luke stated in Acts 1:3 that He appeared to His disciples several times over a period of 40 days. These included the meeting when they went fishing and Jesus prepared a meal for them on the shore, as discussed in another study.

1 Corinthians 4:6 describes the largest gathering to which Jesus appeared. But you ask why He did this because the authorities might find Him and try to kill Him again.

The answer is that Jesus was providing proof that He had risen again as He said He would. The Sanhedrin had no authority to try and find and kill Jesus, and the Romans may have just decided that these were tall tales. Whatever the reason, Jesus appeared to people many times before He ascended to heaven.

Study Questions

- Why did the Jewish authorities not try to find Jesus after He rose again?
- Do you think they believed these were just tall tales to try and justify the claims that Jesus was alive?
- How do you think they felt after the 40 days when Jesus was gone and there were no more appearances to anybody?

Application

Jesus made several appearances to people after He rose from the grave. One should take notice that there were witnesses to His resurrection which could not be tied directly to the disciples who may have had a reason for telling a lie as the authorities believed.

For one disciple, the appearance of Jesus in the second meeting after Jesus rose, Thomas was renewed in his faith. He would take the message about Jesus to other places and die a martyr for Jesus.

Even though time had passed before the believers in Corinth would hear the story, there were plenty of witnesses still alive to verify the facts. While we have no living witnesses and other writings, to ask, the Bible can verify for us that there were plenty of witnesses to Jesus being alive and meeting people after He rose from the grave!

Unit Study Questions

- Why do you think Jesus wasn't easily recognizable to the disciples on the road to Emmaus?
- Do you identify with Thomas' questions? Why or why not?

- Does it strengthen your own belief to know so many people saw Jesus with their own eyes after His resurrection?
- Why would the disciples of Jesus be willing to suffer and die if necessary for their beliefs in Jesus?

9.

FROM “SAUL” TO “PAUL”

Paul is the overriding character of the New Testament. He originally appears in the gospels as Saul, an enemy of Jesus and persecutor of the followers of Jesus. His drive to persecute Christians led Saul to meet Christ in person as Saul rode to Damascus to execute or capture Christians and stamp out Christianity in Israel and surrounding areas.

Once Jesus converted Paul through a physical ordeal, Saul became Paul and became the greatest of the Christian missionaries in the first century. Through his work, Paul became a preacher, then a missionary bringing Christ to new people groups. He established numerous churches in much of the eastern and central Mediterranean Sea and the countries on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. The largest number of New Testament books are attributed to Paul and represent cities where he preached the gospel or fellow workers he recruited into the service of Jesus.

The following sections are related to how Saul became Paul and what happened after he met Jesus. Because he persecuted followers of Jesus prior to traveling to Damascus, the story begins with his meeting Jesus for the first of two times in his life.

MEETING JESUS

Read Acts 9:1-19

Key Verse – Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” - Acts 9:5-6

Read also Acts 22:17-21, 23:11, 26:12-18

The Story

The story of Saul’s conversion to Paul is known by most Christians. Paul, the great persecutor of Christians, was on his way to Damascus to arrest, imprison and possibly kill Christians. When he got close to Damascus, a brilliant light appeared and blocked his way. Out of that light Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting Christians.

The light blinded Paul but those who accompanied him did not hear the voice of Jesus they only saw the light. When Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting Jesus (meaning Christians) in the form of believers, Saul did not answer.

God spoke to Ananias and asked him to go to Saul and restore his sight. Ananias was afraid of the great persecutor, but God explained that Saul was going to become God’s messenger to the Gentiles reassured Ananias and he went to see Saul. Once there, Ananias prayed with Saul and his sight was restored. He then baptized him as his new brother, “Paul.”

Study Questions

- Why did Ananias not want to go see Paul and restore him?
- Have you ever resisted something that you believe God told you to do or somewhere He told you to go? Did you eventually go as requested?

- There are countries today that still persecute Christians. Would you be willing to go to these places if God asked you to do so?

PREACHING JESUS

Read Romans 1:16-17

Key Verse – For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. – Romans 1:16

Read also Ephesians 2:8-9

The Story

After Saul's conversion, Paul became the greatest of the early Christian missionaries. At first he preached in Damascus, but then had to flee for his life. Later he went to Tarsus, which became the center of the missionary movement. From there he not only visited Jerusalem but spread the word of Jesus throughout much of the eastern Mediterranean lands, including the islands of Malta and Cyprus, the western part of modern Turkey, Greece and Rome. While in these lands he continued his work, bringing the governor of Cyprus to Christ as well as many of the people of Malta.

In addition, Paul recruited and trained other church leaders and kept in touch with the churches he had established. Many of the New Testament books addressed to specific areas in the New Testament were written by Paul.

Eventually Paul was arrested and taken to Rome as a prisoner. While in prison he wrote other letters to churches and these letters became books of the Bible. He also kept in

touch with the churches and sent his co-workers as leaders to several churches.

Although one tradition claims that Paul was released from Rome and travelled as far away as Spain, there are no writings to verify this. In the end, Paul was killed for His faith in Jesus in Rome, ending a long career lived for Jesus.

Study Questions

- How many of the books written by Paul have you read?
- Why did Rome allow Paul to continue much of his work from prison?
- Are you aware of the time Jesus appeared in Paul's cell and stayed with him all night to tell him about his future?

TEACHING A NEW GENERATION OF PASTORS

Read 1 Timothy 4:6-15

Key Verse – If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. – 1 Timothy 4:6

Read also Titus 2:1 – 3:8

The Story

Although Paul started many churches during his travels around the Mediterranean countries, he could not pastor them all. One of his most important jobs was to find good pastors or leaders for the new churches. In doing so Paul

developed some guidelines that pastors should follow to more effectively reach people for God.

These guidelines are found mostly in the books of Titus and 1st Timothy. This makes sense because Timothy was a new and young pastor and Paul wanted to be certain he had a good foundation as a pastor. The advice Paul gave is necessary for good leadership of a church.

Paul wrote that if Timothy pointed out the good things of God to his congregation, he would be a good minister of Jesus Christ (v. 6). He was to avoid godless myths and old wives tales (v. 8).

Paul further reminded Timothy that he was in charge when he told the young pastor to lead the church and teach what Paul had taught him (v. 11). He was not to allow anybody to look down at him because of his age, and regardless of his age, Timothy was to set the example for his congregants. (v.13). Verses 15 and 17 reminded Timothy to devote himself to these characteristics but to be careful in what he did and said, especially in relation to doctrine, because people would be watching him (v. 15). Finally Timothy was to watch his life and doctrine carefully, good advice because people are always watching pastors to see how they live and what they believe.

Study Questions

- Why was it necessary for Paul to instruct new pastors about their conduct?
- Do you believe that people are always watching and judging pastors?

- Have you ever heard a pastor but had problems believing because his or her conduct did not match what they were teaching?
- Is it possible to respect a pastor's calling and ministry yet not place them too high on a pedestal, and remember they are only just men?

Application

The example of Paul's rise to church leader and planter cannot be lost today as the Christian population drops and the need for more godly pastors grows. But there are requirements for pastors as well. They cannot just simply want to have a profession without the faith. Paul did not pursue the Christian faith or the pastoral leadership, but God had other ideas and put into place the situation that would lead Saul to Him. A new person with a new name arose from the meeting between God and Saul on the road to Damascus and the rest is history as they say.

Once converted Paul became a minister of high standing among the Christian community, although not at first because people often remember the bad about others before seeing the good. Once he was accepted, Paul became a pastor, a missionary, a church planter, a writer of God's Word and a friend and mentor to many. His conversion is legendary, because he began as a fierce non-believer, but seeing the resurrected Jesus changed everything.

Finally, Paul's teachings for young pastors are applicable throughout time. Incorrect doctrines can impact people in negative ways. More than ever today because of fast communication through media and computer programs can devastate a church or pastor. In our lifetimes we have seen many pastors fall and the headlines blare forth about the fall.

Pastors sin, and because they are held to a higher standard, people may reject the church or even God.

But remember that pastors are only men. And men are fallible. They are not always right in their teaching or their lives. This is why every follower of Jesus should do their own diligence to follow God's Word as best as possible, and to make sure we do not follow a man, but always place our faith in the resurrected Jesus.

Unit Study Questions

- Was your meeting Jesus as dramatic as Paul's meeting with Him?
- In regard to a preacher you admired, explain what characteristics made you feel secure and able to learn more about God.
- Did you ever have a pastor that you did not believe was following God?
- Why is it so important today for pastors to be careful in what they say and do?
- How easily can people be led astray or away from salvation when the pastor does not exhibit godly virtues?

10.

PAUL'S CONVERTS

By the time Paul finished his missionary journeys, he had many converts that stepped into leadership positions. Some of these were leaders only in one church, but others visited many churches. Some became pastors or representatives for Paul to the various churches he had established.

Many of the letters he sent once he was imprisoned mentioned people from the various churches who had followed Paul and the Lord and continued to help Paul with his work despite being in prison. Some of these leaders are mentioned in the sections below but these were far from all the converts that continued to aid his ministry and are mentioned in the various books of the New Testament

PRISCILLA AND AQUILLA

Read Acts 18:2-3

Key Verse – The churches here in the province of Asia send greetings in the Lord, as do Aquila and Priscilla and all the others who gather in their home for church meetings. – 1st Corinthians 16:19

Read also Acts 18:18.25, Romans 16:3, 1st Corinthians 16:19, 2nd Timothy 4:19

The Story

When Paul crossed over into Greece, he began to visit numerous cities and establish churches in them. When he visited Corinth, he met Aquilla and Priscilla, refugees from Rome after Claudius ordered the Jews to be removed from Rome. Their occupation was that of tentmaker, which Paul also had adopted as an occupation, so he not only stayed with them but also worked with them. Each Sabbath he would go to the synagogue to try and educate both Jews and Greeks about Jesus. Priscilla and Aquilla, however, created a church in their home to reach others for Christ.

From Corinth, Paul moved on to Ephesus, taking Aquilla and Priscilla with him. There Paul went into the synagogue alone. Eventually Paul left Ephesus and returned to Jerusalem, then returned to his home church in Antioch, ending this missionary journey. The man who replaced Paul in Ephesus, Apollos, had a vast book knowledge of the Scriptures but apparently did not have full knowledge of the Christian faith so the couple took him under their wings to “update” his knowledge of God and the ministry of Jesus.

Study Questions

- Why do you think that Emperor Claudius ordered all the Jews to leave Rome?
- Why did they go to Corinth instead of somewhere else in what is now Italy?
- Did Paul also attend the home church of the couple because the Jewish Sabbath was not the Christian Sabbath?
- Why might Apollos not have the full knowledge of God when he came to Ephesus?

LYDIA

Read Acts 16:11-15

Key Verse – When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us. - Acts 16:15

The Story

Lydia was a resident of the Roman city of Philippi, originally a Greek city. She was originally from Thyatira, which was located in what is now Turkey. Paul’s introduction to Lydia came early in his second missionary journey after he crossed over to Greece. At Philippi, he and his fellow missionaries went out to the river where the women were washing clothes to speak with them. Paul discovered that she was a follower of Judaism and a seller of purple cloth in an area that was a center for purple dye. She apparently had a large home for the time and invited Paul and his companions to stay with her, which they did.

After meeting Paul, Lydia converted to Christianity and baptized her and her whole family, which probably meant her servants as no husband or children are mentioned. Lydia then opened her home to others in Philippi as the home churches were the location of early Christian gatherings.

Because Lydia is not mentioned again in the Book of Acts, some believe she eventually returned to her home in Thyatira. When John wrote the book of Revelation, he wrote about the seven churches mentioned by Jesus, including Thyatira. (Revelation 2:18-29)

Study Questions

- Why would Paul go to the river to speak with women washing clothes on the Sabbath?
- If Lydia was a strict believer in Judaism, why was she washing cloth on the Sabbath?
- What do the verses tell us about Lydia's standing in the community?

ONESIMUS

Read book of Philemon

Key Verse – ...no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. – Philemon 16

Read also Colossians 4:9

The Story

The story of Onesimus brings into Biblical view the issues of slavery, crime, escape, redemption and forgiveness. It is a book that was used by abolitionists during the days prior to the American Civil War and by the Underground Railroad workers.

Onesimus was a slave belonging to Philemon, who was apparently a friend of Paul. He robbed Philemon and fled to Rome. Paul was in prison at the time and somehow the two met. It seems that Paul converted Onesimus in Rome (Philemon v. 10) and the former slave assisted Paul there. Paul wanted Onesimus to remain with him in Rome, but felt

obligated to obtain permission from his former owner, so Paul wrote this letter to Philemon.

Paul wrote Philemon but appeal to you for “my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.” Paul also wrote a letter to the Colossian church at the same time and gave the letters to Tychicus and Onesimus to carry to Colossi. (Colossians 4:9) Philemon forgives Onesimus and frees him from his slavery.

Study Questions

- With slavery now abolished, how does this story still remain relevant to us today?
- Have you ever forgiven a person who wronged you then disappeared?
- Whose problem is it when you cannot confront a person who wronged you?
- What would you do if such a person returned and asked your forgiveness?

Application

The Apostle Paul had many converts. He also had many partners in his ministry his missionary voyages. Although there are many others that became Christians because of Paul, the ones mentioned here had specific importance to his ministry. In the case of Aquilla and Priscilla he obtained long-term supporters and missionary partners. Lydia allowed his ministry in Colossi by giving Paul shelter and support as well as having a home church and possibly later returning home to create a church in her home town of Thyatira.

The story of Onesimus holds special meaning because not only did he come to Christ, but he also followed Christian ideals of redemption through addressing his past crime. It brought to light the issue of slavery in Paul's days but also proved to be a light on the issue when Britain and the United States had to confront their own problems with slavery.

In each case, a person who believed in Jesus and followed Biblical values in their actions and lives show us that believing in Jesus will lead us to better things in our own lives.

Unit Study Questions

- How do you think Paul's method of meeting people in their worlds encouraged them to listen to his message?
- Does what we do and who we associate with reflect on how people view Christianity?
- Do you have a good friend or friends to help you in reaching nonbelievers?
- In what ways did this book of Philemon affect the history of the United States?

CONCLUSION

When Jesus came, it was natural for many to be skeptical. There were many Jewish leaders, teachers and rebels who claimed to be the one whom God would use to deliver Israel from their enemies. Jesus systematically presented His

testimony, His teachings and His works as proof that He was the true Messiah that God had promised.

During His time on earth, people began to believe in Him that He was indeed the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. Starting with Joseph and Mary, one by one people would encounter Jesus and begin to believe. Then, many more would hear Him or be healed by Him. They too, believed that He was the Son of God.

But as Jesus suffered and died on the cross, many would question, and lose faith and heart that Jesus was genuine. Perhaps they were mistaken. Perhaps they were caught up in wishful thinking. But everything changed when Jesus did exactly what He said He would do: walk out of the tomb, alive and whole and well 3 days after His death. The Resurrection of Jesus was the final declaration that Jesus was who He said He was, who the Prophets said the Messiah would be and that by believing in His name we receive forgiveness and eternal life.

Today, people are still believing in Jesus. Still following Him, 2,000 years after He lived and died and rose again on the earth. This study was meant to give you a closer look at the Jesus and those who placed their faith in Him. Now you might know more of the “why” behind their faith, so that you can also believe!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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