

References for *Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook*

DECEMBER 3-9

TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD | ACTS 9-11

"A Vicious Persecutor Becomes a Zealous Witness"

(Acts 9:1, 2) But Saul, still breathing threat and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that he might bring bound to Jerusalem any whom he found who belonged to The Way, both men and women.

bt 60 ¶1-2

The Congregation "Entered Into a Period of Peace"

THE grim travelers are approaching Damascus, where they intend to carry out an evil plan. They will tear the hated disciples of Jesus from their homes, bind them, humiliate them, and drag them to Jerusalem to face the wrath of the Sanhedrin.

²The mob leader, named Saul, already has blood on his hands. Recently, he watched with approval as fellow zealots stoned to death Stephen, a devout disciple of Jesus. (Acts 7:57-8:1) Not content with raging against the followers of Jesus who live in Jerusalem, Saul becomes a firebrand ready to spread the flames of persecution. He wants to eradicate the pestilent sect known as "The Way."—Acts 9:1, 2; see the box "Saul's Mandate in Damascus," on page 61.

(Acts 9:15, 16) But the Lord said to him: "Go! because this man is a chosen vessel to me to bear my name to the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him plainly how many things he must suffer for my name."

w16.06 7 ¶4

Appreciating Jehovah as Our Potter

⁴When Jehovah observes humans, he does not pay attention to outward appearances. Rather, he examines the heart, the inner person. **(Read 1 Samuel 16:7b.)** This fact was amply demonstrated when God formed the Christian congregation. He drew to himself and his Son many individuals who from a human standpoint might have seemed to be undesirable. (John 6:44) One such person was a Pharisee named Saul—"a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insolent man." (1 Tim. 1:13) "The examiner of hearts," however, did not see Saul as useless clay. (Prov. 17:3) Instead, God saw that he could be molded into a desirable vessel—in fact, "a chosen vessel" to bear witness "to the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel." (Acts 9:15) Others whom God saw as potential vessels "for an honorable use" included former drunkards, immoral people, and thieves. (Rom. 9:21; 1 Cor. 6:9-11) As they gained accurate knowledge of God's Word and expressed faith, they allowed Jehovah to mold them.

(Acts 9:20-22) and immediately in the synagogues he began to preach about Jesus, that this one is the Son of God. ²¹ But all those hearing him were astonished and were saying: "Is this not the man who ravaged those in Jerusalem who call on this name? Did he not come here for the purpose of arresting them and taking them to the chief priests?" ²² But Saul kept on acquiring more and more power and was confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus, as he proved logically that this is the Christ.

bt 64 ¶15

The Congregation "Entered Into a Period of Peace"

¹⁵Can you picture the surprise, shock, and anger that must have rippled through the crowds

when Saul began to preach about Jesus in the synagogues? “Is this not the man that ravaged those in Jerusalem who call upon this name?” they asked. (Acts 9:21) When explaining his change of heart about Jesus, Saul “proved logically that this is the Christ.” (Acts 9:22) But logic is not a universal key. It cannot unlock every mind shackled by tradition or every heart bound by pride. Still, Saul did not give up.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Acts 9:4) and he fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

bt 60-61 ¶5-6

The Congregation “Entered Into a Period of Peace”

⁵When Jesus stopped Saul on the road to Damascus, He did not ask: “Why are you persecuting my disciples?” As noted above, he said: “Why are you persecuting *me*?” (Acts 9:4) Yes, Jesus personally feels the trials experienced by his followers.—Matt. 25:34-40, 45.

⁶If you are being oppressed because of your faith in Christ, be assured that both Jehovah and Jesus are aware of your situation. (Matt. 10:22, 28-31) At present, the trial may not be removed. Remember, Jesus watched Saul’s involvement in Stephen’s death, and He saw Saul drag faithful disciples from their homes in Jerusalem. (Acts 8:3) Yet, Jesus did not intervene at that time. Even so, Jehovah, through Christ, gave Stephen and the other disciples the strength they needed to remain faithful.

(Acts 10:6) This man is staying as a guest with Simon, a tanner who has a house by the sea.”

nwtsty study note on Ac 10:6

Simon, a tanner: A tanner worked with the hides of animals, using a lime solution to remove any fur or traces of flesh and fat. Then he treated the hide with a potent liquor so that

it could be used to make articles of leather. The tanning process smelled bad and required a great deal of water, which may explain why Simon lived **by the sea**, likely on the outskirts of Joppa. According to the Mosaic Law, a person who worked with the carcasses of animals was ceremonially unclean. (Le 5:2; 11:39) Therefore, many Jews looked down on tanners and would hesitate to lodge with one. In fact, the Talmud later rated the tanner’s profession as lower than that of a dung collector. However, Peter did not let prejudice keep him from staying with Simon. Peter’s open-mindedness in this case makes an interesting prelude to the assignment that came next—visiting a Gentile in his home. Some scholars consider the Greek word for “tanner” (*byr-seus*’) to be a surname of Simon.

Bible Reading

(Acts 9:10-22) There was a disciple named An-a-ni’as in Damascus, and the Lord said to him in a vision: “An-a-ni’as!” He said: “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹ The Lord said to him: “Get up, go to the street called Straight, and look for a man named Saul, from Tarsus, at the house of Judas. For look! he is praying, ¹² and in a vision he has seen a man named An-a-ni’as come in and lay his hands on him so that he may recover sight.” ¹³ But An-a-ni’as answered: “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, about all the harm he did to your holy ones in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to arrest all those calling on your name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him: “Go! because this man is a chosen vessel to me to bear my name to the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him plainly how many things he must suffer for my name.” ¹⁷ So An-a-ni’as went and entered the house, and he laid his hands on him and said: “Saul, brother, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you

on the road along which you were coming, has sent me so that you may recover sight and be filled with holy spirit.” ¹⁸ And immediately, what looked like scales fell from his eyes, and he recovered his sight. He then got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and he ate some food and gained strength. He stayed for some days with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately in the synagogues he began to preach about Jesus, that this one is the Son of God. ²¹ But all those hearing him were astonished and were saying: “Is this not the man who ravaged those in Jerusalem who call on this name? Did he not come here for the purpose of arresting them and taking them to the chief priests?” ²² But Saul kept on acquiring more and more power and was confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus, as he proved logically that this is the Christ.

DECEMBER 10-16

TREASURES FROM GOD’S WORD | ACTS 12-14

“Barnabas and Paul Make Disciples in Far-away Places”

(Acts 13:2, 3) As they were ministering to Jehovah and fasting, the holy spirit said: “Set aside for me Bar’na-bas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

bt 86 ¶4

“Filled With Joy and Holy Spirit”

⁴ But why did the holy spirit specifically direct that Barnabas and Saul be set apart “for the work”? (Acts 13:2) The Bible does not say. We do know that the holy spirit directed the choosing of these men. There is no indication that the prophets and teachers in Antioch contested the decision. Instead, they fully supported the appointment. Imagine how Barnabas and

Saul must have felt as their spiritual brothers, without envy, “fasted and prayed and laid their hands upon them and let them go.” (Acts 13:3) We too should support those who receive theocratic assignments, including men appointed as congregation overseers. Rather than being envious of those who receive such privileges, we should “give them more than extraordinary consideration in love because of their work.” —1 Thess. 5:13.

(Acts 13:12) Then the proconsul, on seeing what had happened, became a believer, for he was astounded at the teaching of Jehovah.

(Acts 13:48) When those of the nations heard this, they began to rejoice and to glorify the word of Jehovah, and all those who were rightly disposed for everlasting life became believers.

(Acts 14:1) Now in I-co’ni-um they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks became believers.

bt 95 ¶5

“Speaking With Boldness by the Authority of Jehovah”

⁵ Initially, Paul and Barnabas stopped at Iconi-um, an enclave of Greek culture and one of the principal cities of the Roman province of Galatia. This city sheltered an influential Jewish population and a large number of non-Jewish proselytes. According to their custom, Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue and began preaching. (Acts 13:5, 14) They “spoke in such a manner that a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks became believers.”—Acts 14:1.

(Acts 14:21, 22) After declaring the good news to that city and making quite a few disciples, they returned to Lys’tra, I-co’ni-um, and Antioch. ²² There they strengthened the disciples, encouraging them to remain in

the faith and saying: “We must enter into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations.”

w14 9/15 13 ¶4-5

Serve God Loyal despite “Many Tribulations”

⁴ After visiting Derbe, Paul and Barnabas “returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. There they strengthened the disciples, encouraging them to remain in the faith and saying: ‘We must enter into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations.’” (Acts 14:21, 22) At first, that statement might seem strange. After all, the prospect of going through “many tribulations” would seem distressing, not encouraging. How is it, then, that Paul and Barnabas “*strengthened* the disciples” with a message that pointed to more tribulation?

⁵ We can find the answer if we look carefully at Paul’s words. He did not simply say: “We must *endure* many tribulations.” Rather, he said: “We must *enter into the Kingdom of God* through many tribulations.” So Paul strengthened the disciples by emphasizing the positive result of a faithful course. That reward was no mere illusion. Indeed, Jesus stated: “The one who has endured to the end *will be saved*.”—Matt. 10:22.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Acts 12:21-23) On a set day, Herod clothed himself with royal raiment and sat down on the judgment seat and began giving them a public address. ²² Then the people who were assembled began shouting: “A god’s voice, and not a man’s!” ²³ Instantly the angel of Jehovah struck him, because he did not give the glory to God, and he was eaten up with worms and died.

w08 5/15 32 ¶7

Highlights From the Book of Acts

12:21-23; 14:14-18. Herod readily accepted glory that should be given only to God. How that differed from the immediate and emphatic rejection of undue praise and honor by Paul

and Barnabas! We should not desire glory for whatever accomplishments we may have in Jehovah’s service.

(Acts 13:9) Then Saul, also called Paul, becoming filled with holy spirit, looked at him intently

nwtsty study notes on Ac 13:9

Saul, also called Paul: From this point on, Saul is referred to as Paul. The apostle was born a Hebrew with Roman citizenship. (Ac 22:27, 28; Php 3:5) It is therefore likely that from childhood, he had both the Hebrew name Saul and the Roman name Paul. It was not unusual for Jews of that time, particularly among those living outside Israel, to have two names. (Ac 12:12; 13:1) Some of Paul’s relatives likewise had Roman and Greek names. (Ro 16:7, 21) As “an apostle to the nations,” Paul was commissioned to declare the good news to non-Jews. (Ro 11:13) He apparently decided to use his Roman name; he might have felt that it would be more acceptable. (Ac 9:15; Ga 2:7, 8) Some have suggested that he adopted the Roman name in honor of Sergius Paulus, which seems unlikely, since Paul retained the name even after leaving Cyprus. Others have suggested that Paul avoided using his Hebrew name because its Greek pronunciation sounded similar to a Greek word that referred to a person (or an animal) who swaggered when walking.—See study note on Ac 7:58.

Paul: In the Christian Greek Scriptures, the name *Pau’los*, from Latin *Paulus*, meaning “Little; Small,” is used 157 times when referring to the apostle Paul and once when referring to the proconsul of Cyprus named Sergius Paulus.—Ac 13:7.

Bible Reading

(Acts 12:1-17) About that time Herod the king began mistreating some of those of the congregation. ² He put James the brother of

John to death by the sword. ³ When he saw that it was pleasing to the Jews, he also went on to arrest Peter. (This was during the days of the Unleavened Bread.) ⁴ He seized him and put him in prison, turning him over to four shifts of four soldiers each to guard him, intending to bring him out before the people after the Passover. ⁵ So Peter was being kept in the prison, but the congregation was intensely praying to God for him. ⁶ When Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping bound with two chains between two soldiers, and guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. ⁷ But look! Jehovah's angel was standing there, and a light shone in the prison cell. Hitting Peter on the side, he woke him, saying: "Get up quickly!" And the chains fell off his hands. ⁸ The angel said to him: "Get dressed and put on your sandals." He did so. Finally he said to him: "Put your outer garment on, and keep following me." ⁹ And he went out and kept following him, but he did not know that what was happening through the angel was real. In fact, he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ Going past the first sentinel guard and the second, they reached the iron gate leading into the city, and this opened to them by itself. After they went out, they made their way down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. ¹¹ And Peter, realizing what was happening, said: "Now I know for sure that Jehovah sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's hand and from everything that the Jews were expecting to happen." ¹² After he realized this, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John who was called Mark, where quite a few were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ When he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the call. ¹⁴ On recognizing the voice of Peter, she was so

overjoyed that she did not open the gate, but ran inside and reported that Peter was standing at the gateway. ¹⁵ They said to her: "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so. They began to say: "It is his angel." ¹⁶ But Peter remained there, knocking. When they opened the door, they saw him and were astonished. ¹⁷ But he motioned to them with his hand to be silent and told them in detail how Jehovah had brought him out of the prison, and he said: "Report these things to James and the brothers." With that he went out and traveled to another place.

DECEMBER 17-23

TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD | ACTS 15-16

"A Unanimous Decision Based on God's Word"

(Acts 15:1, 2) Now some men came down from Ju-de'a and began to teach the brothers: "Unless you get circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ² But after quite a bit of dissension and disputing by Paul and Bar'na-bas with them, it was arranged for Paul, Bar'na-bas, and some of the others to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem regarding this issue.

bt 102-103 ¶8

"There Had Occurred No Little Dissension"

⁸ Luke continued: "When there had occurred no little dissension and disputing by Paul and Barnabas with them [the "certain men"], they [the elders] arranged for Paul and Barnabas and some others of them to go up to the apostles and older men in Jerusalem regarding this dispute." (Acts 15:2) The "dissension and disputing" reflected strong feelings and firm convictions on both sides, and the congregation in Antioch could not resolve it. In the interests of peace and unity, the congregation wisely

arranged to take the question to “the apostles and older men in Jerusalem,” who made up the governing body. What can we learn from the elders in Antioch?

(Acts 15:13-20) After they finished speaking, James replied: “Men, brothers, hear me. ¹⁴ Sym'e-on has related thoroughly how God for the first time turned his attention to the nations to take out of them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written: ¹⁶ ‘After these things I will return and raise up again the tent of David that is fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, ¹⁷ so that the men who remain may earnestly seek Jehovah, together with people of all the nations, people who are called by my name, says Jehovah, who is doing these things, ¹⁸ known from of old.’ ¹⁹ Therefore, my decision is not to trouble those from the nations who are turning to God, ²⁰ but to write them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from what is strangled, and from blood.

w12 1/15 5 ¶6-7

True Christians Respect God's Word

⁶ The passage that helped settle the matter was Amos 9:11, 12. As quoted at Acts 15:16, 17, it reads: “I shall return and rebuild the booth of David that is fallen down; and I shall rebuild its ruins and erect it again, in order that *those who remain of the men* may earnestly seek Jehovah, *together with people of all the nations*, people who are called by my name, says Jehovah.”

⁷ ‘But wait,’ someone may object, ‘that text does not say that it was unnecessary for Gentile believers to be circumcised.’ That is true; however, Jewish Christians would have got the point. They did not consider *circumcised* Gentiles as ‘people of the nations’ but as brothers. (Ex. 12: 48, 49) For example, according to Bagster’s version of the *Septuagint*, Esther 8:17 reads: “Many of the Gentiles were circumcised, and

became Jews.” Thus, when the Scriptures foretold that those remaining of the house of Israel (Jews and circumcised Jewish proselytes) *together with* “people of all the nations” (*uncircumcised* Gentiles) would become one people for God’s name, the message was clear. Circumcision was not required of Gentiles who wanted to become Christians.

(Acts 15:28, 29) For the holy spirit and we ourselves have favored adding no further burden to you except these necessary things: ²⁹ to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you carefully keep yourselves from these things, you will prosper. Good health to you!”

(Acts 16:4, 5) As they traveled on through the cities, they would deliver to them for observance the decrees that had been decided on by the apostles and the elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ Then, indeed, the congregations continued to be made firm in the faith and to increase in number day by day.

bt 123 ¶18

“Strengthening the Congregations”

¹⁸ Paul and Timothy worked together for years. As traveling ministers, they carried out various missions on behalf of the governing body. The Bible record says: “As they traveled on through the cities they would deliver to those there for observance the decrees that had been decided upon by the apostles and older men who were in Jerusalem.” (Acts 16:4) Evidently, the congregations did follow the direction from the apostles and older men in Jerusalem. As a result of such obedience, “the congregations continued to be made firm in the faith and to increase in number from day to day.”—Acts 16:5.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Acts 16:6-9) Moreover, they traveled through Phryg'i-a and the country of Ga-la'ti-a, be-

cause they were forbidden by the holy spirit to speak the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ Further, when they came down to Mys'i-a, they made efforts to go into Bi-thyn'i-a, but the spirit of Jesus did not permit them. ⁸ So they passed by Mys'i-a and came down to Tro'as. ⁹ And during the night a vision appeared to Paul—a Mac-e-do'ni-an man was standing there urging him and saying: "Step over into Mac-e-do'ni-a and help us."

w12 1/15 10 ¶8

Learn Watchfulness From Jesus' Apostles

⁸ What can we learn from this account? Note that only *after* Paul set out for Asia did God's spirit intervene. Then, only *after* Paul neared Bithynia did Jesus step in. And finally, only *after* Paul reached Troas did Jesus direct him to Macedonia. As Head of the congregation, Jesus may deal with us in a similar way. (Col. 1:18) For example, you may have been thinking about serving as a pioneer or moving to an area where the need is greater. But it may be only *after* you take steps to reach your goal that Jesus, by means of God's spirit, will guide you. To illustrate: A driver can direct his car to turn left or right but only if the car is moving. Likewise, Jesus may direct us in expanding our ministry but only if we are moving—if we are putting forth effort to reach our goal.

(Acts 16:37) But Paul said to them: "They flogged us publicly, uncondemned, though we are Romans, and threw us into prison. Are they now throwing us out secretly? No, indeed! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

nwtsty study note on Ac 16:37

we are Romans: That is, Roman citizens. Paul and apparently also Silas were Roman citizens. Roman law stated that a citizen was always entitled to a proper trial and was never to be punished in public uncondemned. Roman citi-

zenship entitled a person to certain rights and privileges wherever he went in the empire. A Roman citizen was subject to Roman law, not to the laws of provincial cities. When accused, he could agree to be tried according to local law; yet, he still retained the right to be heard by a Roman tribunal. In the case of a capital offense, he had the right to appeal to the emperor. The apostle Paul preached extensively throughout the Roman Empire. He made use of his rights as a Roman citizen on three recorded occasions. The first is here in Philippi when he informed the Philippian magistrates that they had infringed on his rights by beating him.—For the other two occasions, see study notes on Ac 22:25; 25:11.

Bible Reading

(Acts 16:25-40) But about the middle of the night, Paul and Silas were praying and praising God with song, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly a great earthquake occurred, so that the foundations of the jail were shaken. Moreover, all the doors were instantly opened, and everyone's bonds came loose. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, assuming that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul called out with a loud voice: "Do not hurt yourself, for we are all here!" ²⁹ So he asked for lights and rushed in, and seized with trembling, he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He brought them outside and said: "Sirs, what must I do to get saved?" ³¹ They said: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will get saved, you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of Jehovah to him together with all those in his house. ³³ And he took them along in that hour of the night and washed their wounds. Then he and his entire household were baptized without delay. ³⁴ He brought them into his house and set a table before them, and he rejoiced greatly

with all his household now that he had believed in God. ³⁵ When it became day, the civil magistrates sent the constables to say: “Release those men.” ³⁶ The jailer reported their words to Paul: “The civil magistrates have sent men to have you two released. So come out now and go in peace.” ³⁷ But Paul said to them: “They flogged us publicly, uncondemned, though we are Romans, and threw us into prison. Are they now throwing us out secretly? No, indeed! Let them come themselves and escort us out.” ³⁸ The constables reported these words to the civil magistrates. These grew fearful when they heard that the men were Romans. ³⁹ So they came and pleaded with them, and after escorting them out, they requested them to depart from the city. ⁴⁰ But they came out of the prison and went to the home of Lyd’i-a; and when they saw the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

DECEMBER 24-30

TREASURES FROM GOD’S WORD | ACTS 17-18

“Imitate the Apostle Paul in Preaching and Teaching”

(Acts 17:2, 3) So according to Paul’s custom he went inside to them, and for three sabbaths he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving by references that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, saying: “This is the Christ, this Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.”

nwtsty study notes on Ac 17:2, 3

reasoned: Paul did not simply tell them the good news. He explained it and presented proof **from the Scriptures**, that is, from the inspired Hebrew Scriptures. He did more than read the Scriptures; he reasoned from them, and he

adapted his reasoning to his audience. The Greek verb *di-a-le’go-mai* has been defined as “to engage in an interchange of speech; to converse; to discuss.” It denotes interacting with people. This Greek word is also used at Ac 17:17; 18:4, 19; 19:8, 9; 20:7, 9.

proving by references: The Greek word literally means “to put alongside (place beside).” This may imply that Paul carefully compared the Messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures with the events of Jesus’ life, showing how Jesus had fulfilled those prophecies.

(Acts 17:17) So he began to reason in the synagogue with the Jews and the other people who worshipped God and every day in the marketplace with those who happened to be on hand.

nwtsty study note on Ac 17:17

the marketplace: Located NW of the Acropolis, Athens’ marketplace (Greek, *a-go-ra’*) covered 5 ha (12 ac) or so. The marketplace was much more than a location for buying and selling. It was the center of the city’s economic, political, and cultural life. Athenians enjoyed meeting at this center of public life to engage in intellectual discussions.

(Acts 17:22, 23) Paul now stood in the midst of the Ar·e-op’a·gus and said: “Men of Athens, I see that in all things you seem to be more given to the fear of the deities than others are. ²³ For instance, while passing along and carefully observing your objects of veneration, I found even an altar on which had been inscribed ‘To an Unknown God.’ Therefore, what you are unknowingly worshipping, this I am declaring to you.

nwtsty study note on Ac 17:22, 23

To an Unknown God: The Greek words *A-gno’-stoi the-oi’* were part of an inscription on an altar in Athens. The Athenians expressed their

fear of deities by building many temples and altars, even making altars to abstract deities, such as Fame, Modesty, Energy, Persuasion, and Pity. Perhaps fearing that they might omit a god and thereby incur that god's disfavor, they dedicated an altar "to an Unknown God." By means of such an altar, the people admitted the existence of a God about whom they knew nothing. Paul skillfully used the presence of this altar as a basis for his preaching to introduce his audience to the God—the true God—who until then was unknown to them.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Acts 18:18) However, after staying quite a few days longer, Paul said good-bye to the brothers and sailed away for Syria, accompanied by Pris-cil'la and Aq'ui-la. He had his hair clipped short in Cen'chre-ae, for he had made a vow.

w08 5/15 32 ¶5

Highlights From the Book of Acts

18:18—What vow did Paul make? Some scholars suggest that Paul had taken a Nazirite vow. (Num. 6:1-21) However, the Bible does not state what Paul's vow was. Moreover, the Scriptures are silent as to whether the vow was made before or after Paul's conversion or if he was starting or ending the vow. Whatever was the case, the taking of such a vow was not sinful.

(Acts 18:21) but said good-bye and told them: "I will return to you again, if Jehovah is willing." And he put out to sea from Eph'e-sus

nwtsty study note on Ac 18:21

if Jehovah is willing: An expression that emphasizes the need to take God's will into account when doing or planning to do anything. The apostle Paul kept this principle closely in mind. (1Co 4:19; 16:7; Heb 6:3) The disciple James also encouraged his readers to say: "If Jehovah

wills, we will live and do this or that." (Jas 4:15) Such expressions should not be empty phrases; anyone who sincerely says "if Jehovah is willing" must try to act in harmony with Jehovah's will. The expression does not always need to be made audibly but is often made only in the heart.—See study notes on Ac 21:14; 1Co 4:19; Jas 4:15 and App. C.

Bible Reading

(Acts 17:1-15) They now traveled through Am-hip'o-lis and Ap-ol-lo'ni-a and came to Thes-sa-lo-ni'ca, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² So according to Paul's custom he went inside to them, and for three sabbaths he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving by references that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, saying: "This is the Christ, this Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you." ⁴ As a result, some of them became believers and associated themselves with Paul and Silas, and so did a great multitude of the Greeks who worshipped God, along with quite a few of the principal women. ⁵ But the Jews, getting jealous, gathered together some wicked men who were loitering at the marketplace and formed a mob and proceeded to throw the city into an uproar. They assaulted the house of Ja'son and were seeking to have Paul and Silas brought out to the mob. ⁶ When they did not find them, they dragged Ja'son and some of the brothers to the city rulers, crying out: "These men who have overturned the inhabited earth are present here also, ⁷ and Ja'son has received them as his guests. All these men act in opposition to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus." ⁸ When they heard these things, the crowd and the city rulers were alarmed; ⁹ and after taking sufficient security from Ja'son and the

others, they let them go. ¹⁰ Immediately by night the brothers sent both Paul and Silas to Be-roe'a. On arriving, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thes-sa-lo-ni'ca, for they accepted the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, carefully examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore, many of them became believers, and so did quite a few of the reputable Greek women as well as some of the men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thes-sa-lo-ni'ca learned that the word of God was also being proclaimed by Paul in Be-roe'a, they came there to incite and agitate the crowds. ¹⁴ Then the brothers immediately sent Paul away to the sea, but both Silas and Timothy remained behind there. ¹⁵ However, those accompanying Paul brought him as far as Athens, and they departed after receiving instructions that Silas and Timothy should come to Paul as quickly as possible.

DECEMBER 31–JANUARY 6

TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD | ACTS 19-20

"Pay Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock"

(Acts 20:28) Pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the holy spirit has appointed you overseers, to shepherd the congregation of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own Son.

w11 6/15 20-21 ¶5

"Shepherd the Flock of God in Your Care"

⁵ The apostle wrote that the older men were to 'shepherd the flock of God in their care.' It was most important for them to recognize that the flock belongs to Jehovah and Jesus Christ. The elders had to render an account about how they kept watch over God's sheep. Suppose that a

close friend of yours asked you to look after his children while he was away. Would you not take good care of them and feed them? If one child got sick, would you not make sure that he received any needed medical help? Similarly, the elders in the congregation are "to shepherd the congregation of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own Son." (Acts 20:28) They keep in mind that each sheep was bought with the precious blood of Christ Jesus. Being accountable, the elders feed, protect, and care for the flock.

(Acts 20:31) "Therefore keep awake, and bear in mind that for three years, night and day, I never stopped admonishing each one of you with tears.

w13 1/15 31 ¶15

Christian Elders—'Fellow Workers for Our Joy'

¹⁵ Being a shepherd involves hard work. At times, elders spend sleepless nights in prayerful concern for God's flock or in giving spiritual support to fellow believers. (2 Cor. 11:27, 28) Still, elders carry out their responsibility fully and gladly, just as Paul did. He wrote to the Corinthians: "I will most gladly spend and be completely spent for your souls." (2 Cor. 12:15) Indeed, out of love for his brothers, Paul fully spent himself in strengthening them. **(Read 2 Corinthians 2:4;** Phil. 2:17; 1 Thess. 2:8) No wonder the brothers dearly loved Paul!—Acts 20:31-38.

(Acts 20:35) I have shown you in all things that by working hard in this way, you must assist those who are weak and must keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, when he himself said: 'There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.'

bt 172 ¶20

"I Am Clean From the Blood of All Men"

²⁰ Paul's life course was in stark contrast to that of those who would in later times take advan-

tage of the flock. He worked to support himself so as not to impose a burden on the congregation. His efforts in behalf of fellow believers were not for personal gain. Paul urged the Ephesian elders to display a self-sacrificing spirit. "You must assist those who are weak," he told them, "and must bear in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, when he himself said, 'There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.'" —Acts 20:35.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Acts 19:9) But when some stubbornly refused to believe, speaking injuriously about The Way before the crowd, he withdrew from them and separated the disciples from them, giving talks daily in the school auditorium of Ty-ran'us.

bt 161 ¶11

"Growing and Prevailing" Despite Opposition

¹¹ Paul may have spoken in that school auditorium daily from about 11:00 a.m. until about 4:00 p.m. (Acts 19:9, ftn.) Those were likely the quietest but hottest hours of the day when many stopped their work to eat and rest. Imagine if Paul followed that rigorous schedule for two full years, he would have spent well over 3,000 hours teaching. Here, then, is another reason why the word of Jehovah kept growing and prevailing. Paul was industrious and adaptable. He adjusted his schedule so that his ministry met the needs of the people in that community. The result? "All those inhabiting the district of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." (Acts 19:10) What a thorough witness he gave!

(Acts 19:19) Indeed, quite a number of those who practiced magical arts brought their books together and burned them up before everybody. And they calculated their value and found them worth 50,000 pieces of silver.

bt 162-163 ¶15

"Growing and Prevailing" Despite Opposition

¹⁵ The humiliation of the sons of Sceva led to a widespread godly fear, which influenced many to become believers and abandon spiritistic practices. Ephesian culture was steeped in the magical arts. Spells and amulets were commonplace, as were incantations, often in written form. Many Ephesians were now moved to bring out their books on magical arts and burn them publicly—though these were evidently worth tens of thousands of dollars by present standards. Luke reports: "Thus in a mighty way the word of Jehovah kept growing and prevailing." (Acts 19:17-20) What a marvelous victory of truth over falsehood and demonism! Those faithful people set a good example for us today. We likewise live in a world steeped in spiritism. Should we find that we own something connected to spiritism, we would do as the Ephesians did—get rid of it promptly! Let us keep far away from such disgusting practices, whatever the cost.

Bible Reading

(Acts 19:1-20) In the course of events, while A-pol'los was in Corinth, Paul went through the inland regions and came down to Eph'e-sus. There he found some disciples ² and said to them: "Did you receive holy spirit when you became believers?" They replied to him: "Why, we have never heard that there is a holy spirit." ³ So he said: "In what, then, were you baptized?" They said: "In John's baptism." ⁴ Paul said: "John baptized with the baptism in symbol of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they got baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul laid his hands on them, the holy spirit came upon them, and they began speaking in foreign languages and prophesying. ⁷ There were about 12 men in all. ⁸ Entering the synagogue,

for three months he spoke with boldness, giving talks and reasoning persuasively about the Kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some stubbornly refused to believe, speaking injuriously about The Way before the crowd, he withdrew from them and separated the disciples from them, giving talks daily in the school auditorium of Ty·ran'·nus. ¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all those living in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. ¹¹ And God kept performing extraordinary powerful works through the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even cloths and aprons that had touched his body were carried to the sick, and the diseases left them, and the wicked spirits came out. ¹³ But some of the Jews who traveled around casting out demons also tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had wicked spirits; they would say: "I solemnly charge you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ Now there were seven sons of a Jewish chief priest named Sce'va doing this. ¹⁵ But in answer the wicked spirit said to them: "I know Jesus and I am acquainted with Paul; but who are you?" ¹⁶ At that the man with the wicked spirit leaped on them, overpowered them one after the other, and prevailed against them, so that they fled naked and wounded out of that house. ¹⁷ This became known to all, both the Jews and the Greeks who lived in Eph'e·sus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus went on being magnified. ¹⁸ And many of those who had become believers would come and confess and report their practices openly. ¹⁹ Indeed, quite a number of those who practiced magical arts brought their books together and burned them up before everybody. And they calculated their value and found them worth 50,000 pieces of silver. ²⁰ Thus in a mighty way, the word of Jehovah kept growing and prevailing.