

## Acts – Adventures of the Apostles

by Joelee Chamberlain

We've had some really good stories together, haven't we? Of course, I think the best ones are about the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, don't you? Remember when we talked about the life of Jesus when He was here on earth? Four different books of the Bible, the 4 Gospels, which are in the New Testament, tell the story of Jesus, don't they? Who wrote those 4 books, do you remember? That's right. These 4 Gospel books in the Bible were written by men named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And in the book of Luke it tells at the very end that Jesus went back up to heaven. But then in another book of the Bible that Luke also wrote, the book of Acts, which is also in the New Testament, Luke tells more about how Jesus went back up to heaven and then what happened to the disciples after that. Would you like to hear more about it?

Well, let's see, now. Jesus had been resurrected, raised from the dead, remember? Then He was with His disciples for 40 days teaching them, wasn't He? After 40 days, though, it was time for Him to go back up to heaven, so Jesus took His disciples out onto the Mount of Olives, which is right near the city of Jerusalem. Jesus said to them, "Don't leave Jerusalem yet. Wait there, and in a few days the Holy Spirit will come on you as the Father promised. Then you will have special power and you will tell about Me all over the world."

And when Jesus had finished talking to them, what do you think happened? Why, suddenly Jesus began just going up into the air! And the disciples watched and watched as Jesus went up and up, until He went into a cloud and they couldn't see Him anymore! What do you think of that?! Well, while the disciples were standing there looking up into the sky, there came to be two men in white robes with them who asked them, "Why are you looking up into the sky that way?" Then the two men told the disciples, "Jesus Himself is going to come back again the very same way that He went up."

When Jesus went up into heaven is called the Ascension of Jesus. To ascend means to go up. The Ascension, when Jesus went back up to heaven, is told about in the book of Acts. Now, an act means something that someone does. The book of Acts tells lots of things that God the Holy Spirit helped the apostles to do after Jesus went back up to heaven, the different things they did, the acts they did. That's why it's called the book of the Acts of the Apostles, what the apostles did, how they acted. The rest of the book of Acts is just full of stories about what the apostles did with the help of the Holy Spirit. Some of the stories are about the apostles Peter and John and some other men, but most of them are about the apostle Paul. Let's tell some of those stories now. Would you like that? And remember, they're all true stories; they really happened.

Well, after Jesus went back up into heaven, ascended into heaven, the disciples went back to Jerusalem just as Jesus had told them to do, and they and other disciples and even Mary the mother of Jesus all got together and prayed and worshipped God. Ten days later they were all together in a house, when suddenly there was a loud noise like a big wind and then what looked like tongues of fire came on each of the disciples. And the Holy Spirit came on the disciples just as Jesus had said He would. And guess what the disciples did then? The Holy Spirit made it so that the disciples could begin

talking other languages from other countries, languages that they hadn't known before!

Well, there were lots and lots of people in Jerusalem at that time, many of them from other countries, and many of them heard all of the noise, and they came to see what was going on. Then they heard the apostles talking other languages, ones from their own countries that they could understand, and they were very surprised! So Peter stood up and talked to all of those people. He reminded the people that the many miracles that Jesus had done had shown who Jesus was, but that they hadn't understood and had crucified Him. Peter told them that many prophecies in the Old Testament had said this would happen and had also said that Jesus would rise from the dead. Peter said that he and the other apostles had seen Jesus alive after He'd been crucified and died, that Jesus had really been raised from the dead, resurrected, and that they were now sent to tell them about Jesus. Peter explained to the people all about Jesus. How Jesus had come and died for our sins. That Jesus was the Lord and the promised Messiah, the Christ, and that they had crucified Him.

The people who were listening then were very sorry and asked, "What should we do about this?" And Peter told them to be sorry for their sins and trust the Lord Jesus Christ and then be baptized. So that day a whole big bunch of the people, about 3000 people, trusted in Jesus to save them from their sins and were baptized, and they were very happy. And many of the believers in Jesus sold their things and shared with other believers, and they would get together every day and praise God and pray. And the apostles, Peter and John and the other apostles, did many miracles through the power of God.

One day Peter and John went up to the temple. There at a gate of the Temple was a poor man who had been born crippled; he'd never been able to walk at all. Every day he was brought there and set down to beg for money. Peter looked at the man as he was begging for money. "I don't have any money," said Peter, "but I will give you something that I do have." Then Peter told the beggar, "In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk." And Peter then helped the man up, and the man was all well! His feet and legs were strong! This beggar who had never even been able to walk before, began jumping around and praising God and went into the temple area with them. That was a miracle that Peter was able to do by the power of the Holy Spirit, wasn't it? And lots of people who knew the man who had been crippled, now saw the man walking and praising God.

Peter told the people that he hadn't made the man well by himself; it was through faith in Jesus that the man was able to walk again. Then Peter began explaining to all of the people there about Jesus. Peter told them that a long, long time ago in the book of Deuteronomy that Moses had said that a great prophet would come and that Jesus was that great prophet. Peter explained that Jesus was the Son of God and how they had killed Him but now Jesus was alive in heaven. And Peter told the people what we call the Gospel. Remember, "Gospel" means "good news," the good news about how Jesus made it so that we can go to heaven. Jesus did this by dying for us and then being alive again, and that we are to trust Jesus to take away our sins.

Some of the leaders didn't like what Peter and John were saying and put them in jail, but God the Holy Spirit helped Peter tell the leaders about Jesus, too. But the leaders didn't believe them and told them not to preach about Jesus to the people anymore and let them go.

But Peter and the other apostles had to obey God not just men, right? So they had to preach about Jesus, didn't they? And many people began believing on Jesus and trusting Him to take away their sins. This made the leaders really angry, and they put the apostles in jail again. But what do you think happened? Why, during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and took them out! The angel of the Lord said to them, "Go out and stand in the temple and talk to the people!" So that's what they did! Early in the morning Peter and the other apostles went to the temple and preached to the people there. Then that same morning when the leaders sent to take the apostles out of the jail, of course the apostles weren't there! Instead, the apostles were out at the temple telling about Jesus.

So the apostles were taken to the leaders again. The leaders were very angry and wanted to kill the apostles, but one of the leaders told the other leaders that they shouldn't do that, so instead they beat the apostles and let them go. But the apostles were happy, even though they had been beaten. It had been for Jesus, and they were happy to do anything for Jesus. And they preached about Jesus more and more, telling people how they could go to heaven by believing in Jesus.

After a while there were so many people in Jerusalem who believed in Jesus that the apostles needed some help with taking care of the widows, so they had 7 men help them. We call those 7 men "deacons," which means a helper or servant. The deacons took care of the widows, and the apostles then had the time to be able to teach about Jesus and pray more.

One of these deacons was named Stephen. Stephen had a lot of faith in the Lord, and God let Stephen do miracles. But there were some people who didn't like this. They took Stephen to the leaders and said that Stephen was telling lies. But he wasn't, was he?

Well, the leaders asked Stephen about it, and Stephen talked to them about how Abraham had followed God, and Abraham had a son named Isaac, and Isaac had a son named Jacob, and Jacob had had 12 sons. (Some of these sons were named Judah and Levi and Joseph, remember?) Then Stephen told the leaders how Joseph's brothers had been jealous and had sold Joseph as a slave but then Joseph had saved them from the famine. (We can read about this in the Book of Genesis, can't we?) Then Stephen reminded them that then later the Jews had been slaves in Egypt. Stephen talked about Moses and how God had had Moses lead the Jews out of Egypt. (And we can read about this in the book of Exodus, can't we?) Stephen told them other things that we can read about in the Old Testament. He told them that their ancestors, their great-great-great-grandfathers, had disobeyed God and how they had often killed God's prophets who had told them about a Saviour who was going to come. Then Stephen told the people who were listening to him that they themselves had killed this very Saviour that God had sent to them. He was talking about Jesus, of course, wasn't he? The people got very, very angry, and they grabbed Stephen and threw him out of the city, and they threw rocks at Stephen until he died. But Stephen, as he was dying, saw Jesus in heaven and called out to God, "Lord, forgive them for this," and then he died.

One of the men who wanted Stephen killed was named Saul. Saul hated anyone who believed in Jesus, and Saul and others began persecuting the believers in Jesus. Persecuting means that they were mean to the believers. Saul got permission to put believers in Jesus in jail, and some of them were

beaten and some were even killed. Saul thought he was serving God by doing this, but he was wrong, wasn't he? Well, then lots of believers in Jesus ran away to other cities so they wouldn't get in trouble. But God just used this to spread the Gospel, the good news about Jesus to these other cities, because everywhere that these believers in Jesus went, they told people about Jesus, and then more people believed in Jesus. So more and more people were believing in Jesus and being saved! That was good, wasn't it?!

But this really made Saul angry. He got permission from the leaders to go to the other cities and arrest the believers and bring them back to Jerusalem and have them punished. So Saul started off with some other men to go a long way to a city named Damascus. But when they got near the city, what do you think happened? Why, suddenly a very, very bright light from heaven shone all around Saul and the other men. They all were really scared, and they fell to the ground. Then a voice spoke to Saul. The voice said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul said, "Who are you, Lord?" And the Voice said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting!" So Saul knew that Jesus was alive then, didn't he?! And Saul knew that when he was being mean to the people who believed in Jesus, that it was like he was being mean to Jesus. Saul was so scared that he was shaking! Then Saul asked Jesus, "What do you want me to do?"

The other men heard this voice, but they couldn't understand what was said, but Saul could, because Jesus was talking to him. Then Jesus said to Saul, "Get up off the ground and go into the city of Damascus and wait there until you are told what you must do." And Jesus told Saul that Saul was going to tell lots and lots of people about Jesus. So Saul got up, and what do you think he saw? Nothing! He was blind! The other men took blind Saul by the hand and led him into the city of Damascus, and Saul waited there for 3 days, blind, and he didn't eat or drink anything, just waited to be told what he had to do.

Then God gave Saul a vision of a man named Ananias going to him and laying his hands on him so that he could see again. So, of course, that is just what happened. God told Ananias to go to Saul, and Ananias did. And Ananias laid his hands on Saul, and suddenly Saul could see again. Then Saul, who now believed in Jesus, was baptized and then he ate something.

At first the other people who believed in Jesus didn't think that Saul was really saved. They were still afraid of him, but Saul began preaching about Jesus everywhere, so then they knew that Saul really loved Jesus, and they helped Saul get away when some bad men wanted to kill him.

Well, we were talking about Saul from the book of Acts, but then the book of Acts stops talking about Saul for a while and tells some more about Peter. Peter was preaching about Jesus in lots of cities. In one city there was a man who had been paralyzed and had had to stay in bed for 8 years. Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ makes you well. Get up!" And the man got up right away and was well! That was a miracle, wasn't it?

Now near the city where Peter was when he healed the man, there was another city named Joppa. In Joppa lived a very nice woman whose name was Tabitha (or Dorcas, as she was also called in another language). Tabitha believed in Jesus, and she used to make clothes for the poor widows in the

city and do many other good things. Well, Tabitha got sick, and she died. The other believers in Jesus had heard that Peter was near their city, so they sent for Peter. Peter went to Joppa where Tabitha was lying dead. The widows were crying and showed Peter the clothes that Tabitha had made for them. Peter had them go out, and he knelt down and prayed to God. Then Peter said to the dead Tabitha, "Tabitha, get up." And what do you think happened? Why, Tabitha opened her eyes and sat up! She was alive! Peter helped her up and called the believers and widows and gave her to them, and she was all well! Peter had done these miracles by special power that God had given him, and lots of people believed in Jesus when they saw the miracles or heard about them.

Now, one day while Peter was still in Joppe, God gave a vision to a very good man named Cornelius. Cornelius and his whole family loved God, but they didn't know about Jesus. Cornelius wasn't a Jew. A person who isn't a Jew is called a Gentile. Now, what is a Jew, do you remember? A Jew is someone whose great-great-great-grandfathers were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph and his brothers were Jews. Moses and Aaron and Joshua were Jews. Gideon and Samson and Samuel were Jews. King David and Solomon were Jews. And Jesus and Peter and Saul and the other apostles were all Jews, but Cornelius wasn't a Jew; he was a Gentile. In fact, he was a Roman army officer. In this vision an angel of God told Cornelius that God had heard his prayers and seen all of the good things that Cornelius had done. Then the angel told Cornelius, "Send men to Joppa to get Peter, and he will tell you what you should do." And the angel told Cornelius just where they would find Peter. So Cornelius sent three men to Joppa, and they found Peter and asked him to come with them to Cornelius' house. Before then, the apostles had only told other Jews about Jesus, but God had shown Peter in a vision that people who weren't Jews, who were Gentiles, should hear about Jesus, too. (I'm glad, because I'm a Gentile!) So Peter went with the three men to Cornelius' house. And there Peter told Cornelius and his Gentile relatives and friends about Jesus, and then they believed in Jesus and trusted Jesus to take their sins away. And then they were baptized.

After that Peter went back to Jerusalem to the other apostles and believers there (all of whom were Jews) and told them that even the Gentiles, people who weren't Jews, were believing in Jesus and trusting Him. And the Jews thanked God for this. Isn't God kind to save Jews and Gentiles?!

About that time Herod, the king of Jerusalem, had the apostle James killed. (This king was a grandson of the Herod who had tried to kill Jesus when Jesus was a baby some years before this time.) Herod, the grandson, saw that the people and leaders who didn't believe in Jesus liked it when he'd had James killed, so then Herod decided to have Peter killed, too, so he had Peter put in jail with soldiers to guard him all of the time. And the people who believed in Jesus there in Jerusalem kept praying to God for Peter.

Now, God had plans for Peter! So the angel of the Lord came at night to the prison where Peter was sleeping between two soldiers and with a guard in front of the door. The angel touched Peter and said to him, "Get up quickly!" And the chains that were on him fell off! Then the angel said, "Get dressed and put your sandals on!" So Peter did. The angel said to Peter, "Put your coat on and follow me." Peter did all of this, but he thought he was just dreaming, having a vision; he didn't realize it was really happening! None of the guards saw the angel or knew what was happening. Then the angel led Peter past the guards and took Peter out of the prison and the locked doors opened by themselves for

the angel, and the angel led Peter outside, and then the angel left Peter! Then Peter realized that this wasn't a dream, that it was all really happening; that God had saved him from King Herod. So Peter went to a friend's house where they had been praying for him, and Peter told the other believers there what God had done for him, and then Peter left his friend's house and went somewhere else.

Well, the next morning the king, Herod, tried to find Peter, but he couldn't find him, and all of this made the king very angry. But what do you think God did to bad King Herod?! Well, one day Herod was all dressed up in his king's robes and sitting on his throne and everyone was praising Herod and saying, "That is the voice of a god, not of a man!" And Herod didn't stop them from saying this; he just let the people say that he was like a god -- and God just made it so that Herod died! No one is like God except God Himself, are they?!

Well, though, what about Saul? Why, Saul was preaching about Jesus now, wasn't he? Another man named Barnabas was a believer in Jesus, and Barnabas took Saul, and Barnabas and Saul went to a city named Antioch, and they both preached about Jesus there. And Antioch is where the believers in Jesus Christ were first called Christians. They were called Christ-ians, Christians, because they followed Jesus Christ.

Now, there were some prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, and after a while God told them to send Barnabas and Saul out to lots of other cities to preach about Jesus to both the Jews and the Gentiles. So they did, and Barnabas and Saul started traveling around to other places and telling about Jesus. About this time Saul changed his name from Saul to Paul. And after this we always hear him called Paul in the Bible, so that's what we're going to do now, too, call him Paul. But he's the same man who was called Saul before. Saul and Paul are the same person.

Now, the rest of the book of Acts is about Paul. Paul went out on 3 big long trips to lots of other cities and countries and had lots of exciting adventures. We call these the 3 missionary journeys of Paul. A journey and a trip are the same thing, aren't they? Paul told everyone he could find about Jesus, and many, many people, both Jews and Gentiles, believed in Jesus and were saved.

Now, what does it mean to be saved? Well, we know that we should all be punished very much, because we all do sins, don't we? Everyone sins (except Jesus, of course! Jesus is both a man and God, and God never sins, does He!?). The punishment is that sinners can't go to heaven and be with God when they die. But God loves us so much that He made a way for us to be saved from that punishment, to be able to go to heaven and be with God when we die. What is that way? You remember that, don't you? Why, God sent His Son, Jesus (who is God, too), into the world where He lived as a man (though He was still God; He is both a man and God). But Jesus never sinned at all, never even once did anything wrong. Then Jesus was put on the cross by bad men, and Jesus died there. (But, remember, this was part of God's plan to save us, wasn't it?) But then, remember, three days later Jesus was resurrected, was alive again! Then a little later Jesus ascended, went back up to heaven, and Jesus, the Son of God, is still alive in heaven with God the Father. By dying on the cross, Jesus took the punishment for our sins. All of that is called the Gospel, the Good News of how we can be saved. All we have to do to be saved is to believe that and to trust Jesus to take our punishment for us, and then we become Christians (are saved), and when we die, we will be able to go to heaven and

be with Him there.

And that Gospel, that good news about Jesus, is what Paul went around preaching to people. He told them that Jesus is God and how He died for our sins and that He was raised from the dead, resurrected. Those who believed this Gospel and trusted in Jesus were then saved, became Christians. And when they died, they would go to heaven.

On Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey, his first big trip to other cities and countries, they had many adventures. (We don't have time to tell about them here, but you can read about them in the book of Acts in the Bible.) Then after that first missionary journey they went back to Jerusalem and told the believers there how God was saving the Gentiles, too, and then they went back up to Antioch. After a while Paul chose a godly man named Silas to go with him on his next missionary journey. And Barnabas chose his nephew Mark to go with him and went somewhere else. (This is the same Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark.)

So Paul went out again this second time, this time with Silas. He traveled to different cities and countries this time, telling them about Jesus and how to be saved through trusting in Jesus. It was in one of these cities that Luke joined Paul. Luke was a doctor, and he's the one who wrote the book of Luke and the book of Acts. Many people believed what Paul was preaching about Jesus and were saved. But some people didn't believe Paul, and they would try to hurt him. Some even tried to kill Paul. Why don't I tell you about one of those times when bad people tried to stop Paul and Silas?

You see, in one city called Philippi, Paul and Silas were taken and beaten and then thrown in jail where there were other prisoners. That night instead of crying, though, they began praying and singing praises to God. And what do you think happened? A big earthquake came, and the chains that held Paul and Silas and the other prisoners all fell off of them, and the doors to the jail were opened! Of course, that was God doing this, wasn't it?! Well, the jail keeper woke up and came running to the jail, and there he saw the doors open. He was scared. He was sure that all of the prisoners had run away, and that he would be punished very much. He was so scared! But just then Paul shouted to him, "We're all here!" Well, the jailer called for a light so he could see, and then he went in and he fell down before Paul and Silas. And what do you think he said? He said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they told him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." And they preached about Jesus to the jailer and his family.

Then the jailer took Paul and Silas and washed where they had been beaten, and then he and the others who had believed and trusted Jesus were baptized, and they were all of them happy. After that the jailer took Paul and Silas to his house and gave them some food to eat. The next morning the leaders of the city told Paul and Silas they could leave the city. God had protected Paul and Silas, hadn't He? And the jailer and his family were then Christians.

Well, Paul and Silas went to other cities and other countries, all the time preaching the Gospel about Jesus. They wanted everyone to hear about Jesus and how to be saved from their sins. Then they went back to Antioch, and that was the end of Paul's second missionary journey.

On Paul's third missionary journey he left Antioch and traveled some more, visiting the churches he'd already set up in the other countries and encouraging them. In a city named Ephesus lots of people believed in Jesus, so they stopped buying idols that some men there made out of silver. This made the men who made the idols very angry, because now they weren't getting so much money for their idols anymore. So these idol makers caused a big riot. After a while the believers had Paul go away where he would be safe.

Paul had many other adventures on these three missionary journeys. People in many places believed what Paul told them about Jesus, and they were saved. But also in some places Paul was beaten or put in jail by people who didn't like Jesus. But he just kept on preaching about Jesus just as God had told him to do. We don't have time here to talk about all of these adventures Paul had, but you can read them some time yourself in the book of Acts.

Well, after Paul's third missionary journey, he went back to Jerusalem. He had been warned by prophets that he would be arrested in Jerusalem, but he felt he should go anyway. The believers in Jerusalem were very glad to see Paul, and he told them how God was saving lots of people, both Jews and Gentiles, and this made the believers in Jerusalem happy, and they praised God.

But one day some of the Jews in Jerusalem who didn't believe in Jesus saw Paul in the temple, and they began getting people all upset. And the people grabbed Paul and dragged him out of the temple and were just about to kill him when the Roman soldiers came and rescued him. (The Romans ruled the land of Israel then and were good to the Jews, and the Romans had a big fort right next to the temple.) After the Roman soldiers rescued him, Paul explained to everyone there who had been trying to kill him how he used to persecute believers, too, but that Jesus had appeared to him on the road to Damascus and that then he himself had believed in Jesus. He talked to them for a while, but they got mad again and wanted to kill him again, and the Roman soldiers rescued him again. The soldiers took him in and put Paul in jail so they could find out what all the trouble was about.

While he was in jail, Paul had several trials before different courts and different important leaders, both Jewish leaders and Roman Gentile leaders. And each time Paul preached the Gospel reminding them of what they themselves had seen and of the prophecies about Jesus and that they had been fulfilled (God's prophecies always are fulfilled, aren't they?) and telling them that Jesus had risen from the dead. One night the Lord came to Paul and told him not to worry about things, that Paul would be able to go to the big city of Rome (that's in Italy) and tell about Jesus there, too. After a while Paul, who was still a prisoner, asked to go see Caesar, the great king of the whole Roman empire. Caesar lived in Rome, so Paul was sent off on a ship to Rome. On the way to Rome, a big storm came up and the ship was wrecked, but God took care of Paul and everyone on the ship. Finally, though, Paul got to Rome. Paul was a prisoner there in Rome, but they let him live in a house he rented but with a guard.

Lots of people came to see Paul there and to hear him, and he preached to all of them about Jesus, and many more people became Christians. And that's where the book of Acts ends, with Paul as a prisoner in Rome preaching about Jesus, preaching the Gospel. We know from later in the Bible, though, that Paul wrote letters to different churches while he was in prison in Rome, and we still have

these letters. These letters are in the Bible and are called epistles. Epistle means letter.

So, that's the book of Acts, the book of what the apostles did, how they acted by the power of the Holy Spirit after Jesus went back to heaven.

Let's see now. What do we read in the book of Acts? Well, the book of Acts starts by telling about Jesus' Ascension, how He went up into the clouds with his followers watching Him all surprised, doesn't it? And they are told that Lord Jesus will come back again someday on the clouds. Then it tells about Peter and some of the other apostles as they taught and did miracles. But mostly the book of Acts tells about Paul who started out as Saul as he persecuted the Christians. But then Jesus saved him, and Paul became a great missionary. Paul did miracles, too. Many people believed Paul when he told them about Jesus, but other people tried to kill him. Then the book of Acts ends with Paul in Rome in prison but still being free to preach about the Lord Jesus Christ.

I hope you enjoyed hearing these true stories from the book of Acts.