

Purpose

- To learn about people of the New Testament
Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Ananias, Barnabas, Timothy, Lydia, and
Aquila and Priscilla

Materials

- Bibles
- Handouts

Background Information

After Pentecost the disciples were drawn together. Judas was no longer part of the group, of course, and Luke names the eleven disciples who gathered in the upper room. The group in the upper room included women, Mary (Jesus' mother), Mary Magdalene, and Jesus' brothers. Among the eleven disciples Peter quickly assumed a leadership role. It was important to them that they select someone to take the place of Judas. Twelve was a very significant number to the people of Israel. Jesus had selected 12, and there were 12 tribes of Israel. So lots were cast and Matthias was selected to be the new disciple.

PETER

We do know that Peter was the one who stepped up and started preaching at Pentecost. Remember that Peter was once called Simon, and Jesus gave him the name Peter. Peter means the "rock". Jesus knew that Peter would be the solid force when he was gone. Peter was very human though; remember he was the one who denied Jesus three times on the night he was arrested and at the trials. Peter along with John was the first to do healing after Jesus left. In Acts 3:1-10 it tells about the lame man at the gate of the temple who was begging. Peter offered to heal him, so that he could stand and walk. When people saw the man walk they wondered what had happened. Peter took the opportunity to speak to them about God. The priests, captain of the temple and the Sadducees were outraged. They were angry because Peter and John were getting a lot of attention from the crowds and also they were so bold in their acting and speaking. They had Peter and John arrested and brought into court. When Peter was questioned about the man walking he quickly told about the power God had given them. Now the authorities were in trouble. They could not deny that the lame man now could walk. The only thing the authorities could do was warn Peter and John not to speak again. We know that didn't work because both men continued to witness to anyone who would listen.

We do not hear much about Peter until we hear about the two books that Peter wrote (I Peter and 2 Peter). Peter went to Rome and work there spreading the gospel. It was rumored (never proven) that Peter was killed and became a martyr while in Rome.

STEPHEN

After Matthias was added to the disciples the disciples decided to turn over to seven others the distribution of the food while they (the disciples) would take care of the prayer life and preaching ministry. The distribution of the food was a ministry and those selected had to be of good stand, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. One of this group was Stephen. Stephen was able to do great wonders and sign among the people. Some of the people of the synagogue were opposed to what Stephen was saying. They stirred up the people against Stephen. He was seized and brought before the council. False witnesses spoke against him. When Stephen was given a chance to respond to the charges he made a long statement telling the history of God's dealing with the Israelites. The speech infuriated the crowd and they drug Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death. Stephen was the first Christian martyr.

PHILIP

Philip was also one of the seven chosen to serve as a deacon to help distribute food (like Stephen). Philip went to Samaria, a place despised by the Jews. Remember many Jews felt that only the Jews could follow Jesus. That did not include Samaritans. Philip left Jerusalem to go to Samaria because he and the other disciples were being persecuted. An angel of the Lord told Philip to travel down the road to Gaza. There he encountered an Ethiopian, a eunuch, an official in the court of the Ethiopian queen. This eunuch, traveling in a chariot, was reading the prophet Isaiah. The passage he was reading was about who had to suffer. The eunuch was having trouble understand what he was reading, so Philip interpreted the passage of the suffering servant to refer to the suffering of Jesus. The eunuch was convinced and wanted to be baptized immediately. Philip did as he wished. This serves to show us we can all use God's gift to help others.

PAUL

We have talked a lot about Paul already, but it is important to mention him again because of how his life intertwined with so many other people of the New Testament.

Remember Paul (as we know him) was first known as Saul. Saul was present at the stoning of Stephen because he was very aggressive and violently opposed to the followers of Jesus. At Stephen's stoning the people throwing stones laid their coats at Saul's feet. He persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem and Damascus. As Saul set out for Damascus he encountered the Lord on the road to Damascus. He first had an experience of light that was so intense that he fell to the ground and could not see for several days. Then a voice spoke to Saul asking, "Why do you persecute me?" Jesus identified himself and provided someone (Ananias) to lead Saul to Damascus. God changed Saul's name to Paul. Paul picked up the challenge of spreading the word of God. Paul went on many missionary trips, and frequently took someone else with him. A pattern was established that characterizes the entire ministry of Paul. Paul was the primary preacher. He did not start out organizing the trip or even performing miracles. He simply preached. Paul

always started out preaching to the Jews, but if they were not receptive to would then go to the Gentiles and try to convert them to Christianity.

ANANIAS

Ananias also had a transformation but not as traumatic as Paul's. Ananias had a vision and God spoke to him. Ananias found the word he heard from God difficult and troubling. God asked him to lead Saul to Damascus. Ananias did not want to do that because he knew how Saul persecuted fellow Christians. In spite of the reservations and fear, Ananias did what the Lord asked of him. He helped God heal the blindness of Saul.

BARNABAS

God also used Barnabas. We first hear of Barnabas when he sold a field that he owned and gave the money to the disciples. Barnabas told the people how Saul had changed and that they should listen to him and trust him. Barnabas even went to Tarsus to bring Saul back to Antioch. Barnabas traveled with Paul on many of his missionary trips. He really followed Paul's lead in spreading the word of God to many people.

TIMOTHY

On one of Paul's missionary trips with Barnabas to Cyprus, Syria, Cilicia and Lystra they found Timothy. Timothy joined Paul on many of his trips after that. Many times the two traveled together, but Paul would leave and Timothy would stay behind to keep the Christian work going in that community. We have in our New Testament two of the letters that Paul sent to Timothy (1 Timothy & 2 Timothy). Timothy was very young so many people did not want to take him seriously. It was also a known fact that Timothy was very shy so it was hard for him to speak to people. This shows up that God can help us overcome anything to follow him and do as he asks.

LYDIA

Lydia was one of the women who played a prominent role in the early Christian community. Lydia was a key figure in Philippi. Lydia was a seller of purple garments. She was well to do, she had her own home and own servants. We know that was very unusual for a woman during those times. Paul converted her when he was in Philippi and her home became the first church in Philippi.

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

While Paul was in Corinth he met Aquila and Priscilla. They were already Christians. They open their home up to Paul and his followers. They also supported him. Aquila gave Paul a job since Aquila was a tentmaker so they worked together while Paul was in Corinth. The two of them followed Paul to Ephesus. They must have established a business in Ephesus. When Paul moved on he left Aquila and Priscilla there for guidance to the new Christians.

This is just a few of the many Christians that acted as missionaries for God.

Procedure

- Read the first paragraph of background information
- Check out handout 57-1 and go over the information on Peter.
- Go over information on Stephen.
- Read about Philip and refer to handout 57-1.
- As you move on down through the background information look at the details of that person.