



Theme Overview

Jesus Christ is the ultimate Hero of history. He is the main character, the Savior, the One it's all about. And now, He has graciously invited us to join His superhero team. The Lord is looking for partners and sidekicks to assist Him in His quest of saving the world one soul at a time. He's transforming the vilest of villains into good guys by His mercy. And He's strengthening His followers as they stand for truth, justice and the Heavenly way.

This summer we'll be digging into the Book of Acts to witness how this legendary league of believers (known as the Church) began. We'll see how God took a handful of cowards and changed them into a super squad who turned the world upside down. We'll discover the true Source of power in these courageous champions' lives. And we'll learn of Christ's desire for each of us to take a stand, engage in battle, and become one of His elite heroes. In short, we'll experience our Leader's call to join...



Suggested Teaching Schedule

This curriculum is designed to guide students on an intensive, week-long journey through the first thirteen chapters of Acts. The scripture segments missing from these teaching times will be covered in the campers' small-group cabin devotions. Obviously, you are free to adapt the following schedule to meet your group's needs. However, we hope that you will strive to preserve the chronology of the teaching as it is recorded in Scripture. May God bless the proclamation of His Word!

Monday Evening Worship & The Word

Title: The Ultimate Hero

Text: Acts 1:1-11

Tuesday Morning W+W

Title: The Heroes Receive Power

Text: Acts 2:1-47

Tuesday Evening W+W

Title: The Heroes Heal

Text: Acts 3:1-26

Wednesday Morning W+W

Title: The Heroes Reminded

Text: Acts 4:32 - 5:16

Wednesday Evening W+W

Title: The Heroes Suffer, Part I

Texts: Acts 5:17 - 7:60

Thursday Morning W+W

Title: The Heroes Scatter

Text: Acts 8:4-40

Thursday Evening W+W

Title: From Villain to Hero

Text: Acts 9:1-31

Friday Morning W+W

Title: The Heroes Multiply

Text: Acts 10:1 - 11:18

(6-Day Camps Only)

Friday Evening W+W

Title: The Heroes Encourage

Text: Acts 11:19-30

Saturday Morning W+W

Title: The Heroes Depart

Text: Acts 12:24 - 13:4



Teaching Notes

The following summaries are meant to serve as "jumping-off points" for each of the teaching sessions. Four of the large group lessons below also include more detailed "Additional Notes". These passages were gleaned from our actual experience of teaching through the curriculum, and we hope that they will be of some use to you.

Unless otherwise noted, all of the following quotations from Scripture are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

Monday Evening

Title: The Ultimate Hero

Text: Acts 1:1-11 (along with selections from the Gospels)

Topics: Christ's identity, life, death, resurrection and ascension

Jesus Christ is the ultimate Hero. In fact, most comic book heroes are rip-offs of Him in some way or another. This is because Jesus taught us what true heroism looks like. However, Christ is so much more than a fictional caped crusader. He is Creator and God, and therefore, the main character of the ultimate story: reality. Like most heroes, the Lord spent His time on earth serving others and performing amazing feats. These included healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, walking on water and even raising the dead. But it wasn't freak gamma rays or a radioactive spider bite that gave Jesus His power. It was the Spirit of God. (Luke 4:14, 5:17)

Also, similar to many comic book characters, Jesus had a secret identity of sorts. Throughout most of His ministry He only revealed who He truly was to His closest friends, and He instructed them to keep it quiet. (Luke 9:20-22) However, as the time drew near for Him to die, Jesus went public with the fact that He was (and is) God the Son. (Luke 22:66-71)

Then, inspiring all the great heroes ever since, Jesus gave up His life to save countless souls. Indeed, His sacrifice was (and is) for everyone in the entire world, if we will only choose to accept it. (John 3:16-17, I John 2:2) Through His death, Christ paid the penalty for our sins in order to reconcile us to the Father and save us from eternal punishment.

However, most important of all, Jesus didn't stay dead. He conquered death and rose again ... just like Superman, Phoenix, Elektra, Captain America and so many others. However, unlike those comic book wannabes, Christ's resurrection is more than just a fictional plot gimmick. It is the most significant event in human history. It proves that Jesus is who He says He is. And it means that we too can have real life, abundantly and eternally, if we believe in His Name.

Finally, forty days after His resurrection, the Lord ascended into heaven, which has since become the superhero exit of choice. Before He left, He entrusted His followers with

an assignment: to be His witnesses to the remotest parts of the earth. The scope of this mission was mind-blowing, and the odds were stacked overwhelmingly against the small band of believers. But Jesus promised the new heroes that He wouldn't leave them on their own. And that is where our story begins...

Additional Notes

INTRO: Who's your favorite super hero? This week, we want to focus on the Ultimate Hero: Jesus Christ. I'm not saying that Jesus is like superheroes. I'm saying that, in some ways, superheroes copy Jesus. That's because Jesus showed us what a real Hero looks like. The hero that rips off Jesus the most is ...

ARRIVAL ON EARTH:

Stars and Lights. Announcement that this Child was different. "For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11)

POWERS:

Water into wine. Heal the sick. Walk on water. Sight to blind. Raise the dead. The source of Jesus' power was Spirit of God. "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit." (Luke 4:14)

SECRET IDENTITY:

"And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them saying, 'Who do the people say that I am?' They answered and said, 'John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others that one of the prophets of old has risen again.' And he said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Peter answered and said, 'The Christ of God.' But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone." (Luke 9:18-21)

But Jesus did reveal His identity on multiple occasions, and by the end of His life it was plain to all Who He claimed to be. -- "And they all said 'Are you the Son of God then?' And He said to them, "Yes, I am." (Luke 22:70)

Jesus is God. The second person of the Trinity. A lot of people say that He never claimed that. But He did, over and over again. One of His most clear statements is John 8:58, "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." The rest of the NT makes this claim as well. (Colossians 2:9) "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."

SAVING PEOPLE:

Jesus' mission wasn't just to save a girl or a city. It was to save the entire world. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that through Him the world might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

How did Jesus save the world? By dying. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

So how did Jesus save people by dying? Well, we've got to back up a bit and talk about the villains in this story. The villains are us. We were created to live in fellowship with God. But we messed it up. We are all sinners. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Sin is missing the mark. "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) "And according to the Law, one may almost say all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22) "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." (I John 2:2) "But God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

So Jesus' death paid the price and saved us from the punishment that we deserve. And His salvation is available to every member of the human race, past, present, and future. Take that Superman. But, of course, Christ didn't stay dead...

RESURRECTION:

Superman, Phoenix, Elektra, Captain America. These days, rising from the dead is almost a prerequisite to being a hero...

However, Jesus' resurrection is real and means so much more! It proved that He is Who He says He is. Without the resurrection, our faith is meaningless and we aren't saved! (I Corinthians 15:17) But with the resurrection, we don't have to fear death. We have abundant and eternal life. (John 10:10) "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

So how do we get this life? Not everyone in the world has it. We must believe and confess. "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation." (Romans 10:9-10)

If you have never done that, then now is the time!

THE REST OF THE STORY:

Jesus' mission was to save the entire world, but in His lifetime, He never traveled outside of a small area. So... how was He going to get the word out? That's what this week is all about. Jesus had a plan. He would take minor villains and transform them into heroes. They weren't going to become the main character, of course, but rather super-powered sidekicks. And that's where our story picks up...

Read **ACTS 1:1-11**.

v. 1 - Luke is writing volume II of a history for Theo. ("Dear to God.") We know from Luke 1:1-4 that he is writing it all in chronological order. He wants Theo to know the exact truth.

- Notice that Jesus' ministry was just the beginning of what He did. He is still at work ... through us.

v. 2 - "apostle" = one who is sent. Ambassadors. They had to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ.

v. 3 - This was forty days after the resurrection. "Kingdom" = God's rule on earth. The kingdom of God was one of Jesus' main topics of teaching. It is among us. In our hearts, now.

v. 4 - Jesus had spoken a lot about another Helper. Now He promises that His disciples will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in just a few short days.

v. 8 - This is our theme verse for the week. Without the empowering of the Holy Spirit, we cannot be the kind of followers that Jesus intends us to be. When we believe in Christ, we are in-dwelt with the very Spirit of God. He guides us, convicts us, comforts us, teaches us, and strengthens us. And when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we want to tell others about all that God has done in our lives. We become powerful witnesses of the resurrected Lord starting at home and branching out to our community. Who knows? Maybe God will even send us to witness "to the remotest part of the earth."

Tuesday Morning

Title: The Heroes Receive Power

Text: Acts 2:1-47

Topics: The identity and work of the Spirit; Pentecost; Peter's sermon; the amazing results

Main Points: The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. He teaches us all things and brings to remembrance the words of the Son. (John 14:26) He also convicts, renews, empowers, guides, comforts, enlightens and strengthens, just to name a few of His activities. At Pentecost He filled the young Christians with power to serve as witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. (Acts 2:32) Those who had deserted the Lord as cowards just fifty days

earlier now took a courageous stand for Christ, thanks to the indwelling of His Spirit. And, by the power of the same Spirit, three thousand souls were saved. Now that's a super feat!

Tuesday Evening

Title: The Heroes Heal

Text: Acts 3:1-26

Topics: The healing of the lame man; the necessity and gift of faith

Main Points: Peter makes it clear that this miracle did not occur because of his own piety or for his own glory. Rather, God demonstrated His power through the apostle for the glorification of the Son. (Acts 3:12-13) Peter also states that the healing happened on the basis of faith in the name of Jesus, and he specifies that this faith comes through Christ Himself. (Acts 3:16) Thus, Christ is the author and giver of faith. (Hebrews 12:2, Ephesians 2:8-9) And faith is the key to the Spirit being unleashed in our lives. Without it, it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6) But with faith, nothing will prove impossible. (Luke 18:27, Philippians 4:13)

Additional Notes

Read **ACTS 3:1-8**.

v. 1 - Believers in Jesus could worship God in the Temple more accurately than anyone else in Jerusalem.

v. 2 - Think of how small this man's legs must have been. Often lame people's legs shrink and entropy. This guy had never walked. In our natural state we are also spiritually lame. We cannot come close to God. (Ephesians 2:1-10 -- We were dead in our trespasses and sins, but God made us alive with Christ and raised us up with him.)

v. 4 - What made Peter single this guy out? Definitely the Spirit. Has God ever put someone on your heart like that? Christians should be others-focused.

v. 6 - Peter probably didn't have silver and gold because he gave it to any believers with need.

- "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene" -- Not a magic word or an incantation. Peter was saying "With the power and authority of Jesus, walk." He was Jesus' representative there. We can't use Jesus' name as a magic word. Look what happened to the seven sons of Sceva. (Acts 19:13-17)

- "WALK!" -- What faith! This guy had never used his legs before! And Peter grabs him and pulls him up BEFORE the miracle happens! Peter knew that nothing was impossible with God. He had seen Jesus do this. Do we believe that Christ can do anything?

v. 7 - "Feet and ankles strengthened" -- What did that look like? Just seems important that Peter pulled him upright before it happened. That's faith!

v. 8 - Miracles always result in praise to God. Excited praise. That's us. We've been healed. Start leaping!

Read **ACTS 3:9-16**.

v. 10-11 - "wonder and amazement" -- Where is it in our lives? We serve the same God. We have the same Spirit within us.

v. 12 - The people give Peter and John the superhero treatment. But Peter makes it clear that it wasn't his power or piety. Religion by itself has no power. I'm not saying read your Bible five hours a day and you will be super-powered. I'm saying yield your life to God and let Him do amazing things through you.

v. 13 - The miracle was meant to glorify Jesus. Whenever the Spirit moves it is for this purpose. It's not to glorify us.

v. 14 -- Peter reminds the people that they are all guilty in the death of Christ. None of us are off the hook. Our sins put Jesus on the cross, but His love was what held Him there.

v. 15 -- Peter and John are fulfilling their mission as witnesses. They are telling people that Jesus is alive.

v. 16 -- Peter's faith was in the name of Jesus. Peter's faith also came through Jesus.

What is faith? "...the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1, NASB & NIV) Basically, it's being confident of what we cannot see. Peter and John were sure that Jesus had kept His promise and that the Spirit was with them. They were certain that Jesus still healed people. They prayed that this man would be able to walk, and they were sure that it would happen.

That's all well and good. But do we really need faith today? YES! Even more than Peter, we need faith in Jesus because we have not seen Him.

WE NEED FAITH BECAUSE:

1. WE CANNOT SEE GOD NOW.

- "For we walk by faith, not by sight." (II Corinthians 5:7)

- "Jesus said to Him, 'Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are those who did not see, and yet believed.'" (John 20:29)

- "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I have also been fully known." (I Corinthians 13:12)

- "And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." (I Peter 1:8-9)

2. WE CANNOT BE SAVED WITHOUT IT.

- "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:9-10) Salvation is by grace, through faith. And even faith is a gift from God.

3. WE CANNOT PLEASE GOD WITHOUT IT.

- "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6)

4. BUT WE CAN DO ANYTHING WHEN WE HAVE IT.

- Without faith it's impossible to please God. But with faith, nothing is impossible.

- "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

- Remember the boy possessed by the demon in Mark 9. The disciples couldn't cast it out. His father said to Jesus, "'If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.' And Jesus said to him, "'If you can?" All things are possible for him who believes.' Immediately, the boy's father cried out and said, 'I do believe. Help my unbelief.'" (Mark 9:22-24)

- "Truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you." (Matthew 17:20)

So, yeah, faith is pretty important to the Christian walk. But how much faith do you have? Have you seen God moving in your life? Do you really believe that He can? I'm not saying that we can ask for what we want. We have to ask according to the Father's will. But we need to ask!

- Cite the example of Amy Carmichael praying for blue eyes as a child, only to realize as an adult that God gave her brown eyes to blend-in on the mission field.

We don't know what God's will is all the time. But we need to be asking. We need to know that our God is a big God. We need to know that He has no limits. What are you struggling with today? Tough situations at home? Addiction? Physical ailment? Pray!

- "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." (John 14:14)

- "You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives so that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:2-3)

Read **ACTS 3:17-26**.

v. 18 -None of what happened to Christ took God by surprise.

v. 19 - Repentance is key to being restored and refreshed.

Read **ACTS 4:1-4**.

v. 4 - Around 1,880 men got saved that day (since 5,000 is listed as the new total of believing men.)

- But what about Peter and John? They'd been arrested by the priests and Sadducees. These were the same rulers who killed Jesus just a few months earlier. Now they had two of His disciples in their hands. What were they going to do? You'll have to wait until your small group activity time to find out!

Wednesday Morning

Title: The Heroes Reminded

Text: Acts 4:32 - 5:16

Topics: Barnabas and charity; Ananias, Sapphira and deceit; the fear of the Lord

Main Points: As exemplified by Barnabas, Spirit-filled heroes are selfless and focused on the needs of others. (Philippians 2:3-4) As illustrated through Ananias and Sapphira, "with great power comes great responsibility." Those who have received the Spirit are held to a much higher standard, because lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. (Acts 5:3-4) How often do we play similar games with the Lord, using "holiness" and "spirituality" as paths to self-recognition or self-glorification? When we do so, we forget just Who it is that we serve; we forget the fear of the Lord. Once the Jerusalem believers are brought back to a place of reverence, God begins to work in even more amazing ways. (5:12-16) Perhaps a holy fear is what is missing in the church today. After all, seeking to glorify ourselves is simply a dead end street.

Wednesday Evening

Title: The Heroes Suffer, Part I

Texts: Acts 5:17 - 7:60

Topics: The Apostle's flogging; Stephen's stoning; persecution today

Main Points: Following Christ means suffering with Him. In this passage, the apostles are divinely freed from jail not so they can escape to safety, but so that they can continue teaching and eventually receive a flogging. After enduring this punishment from the rulers,

they rejoice that they have "been considered worthy to suffer shame for [Christ's] name." (Acts 5:41) Such an attitude can only come from the Holy Spirit.

The same can be said of Stephen's actions. "A man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5), his public witness soon brings him before the same hostile council. Instead of dumbing down his message, Stephen first charges the rulers with murdering the Christ. He then proclaims Jesus' deity by describing his vision of the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. This revelation, granted by the Holy Spirit, leads directly to Stephen's death, but not before he has the opportunity to imitate his Savior in praying for his executioners. On the same day, a great persecution arises against the entire church. And another of Jesus' promises comes to pass: "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you..." (John 15:20) If we are truly Jesus' followers then we should be encountering the same sort of opposition that He faced. Are we?

On another note, Stephen's martyrdom reminds us that true heroism always requires the death of us. In all probability, not many of us will have the opportunity to physically die for Christ. However, we all have the chance to die for Him spiritually each and every day. (Luke 9:23-24, Romans 6:11, Galatians 2:20) Let us determine now to put to death the old self, so that Christ can live in us and through us.

Additional Notes

Read **ACTS 5:17-33**.

v. 20 - The apostles were not freed to escape suffering. They were freed so that they could continue teaching and, consequently, undergo suffering. Sometimes God leads us into situations that include suffering. But it is always for His glory.

v. 28 - Were the religious leaders beginning to realize their own guilt? Had they known it all along?

v. 29 - "We must obey God rather than men." This is referring to situations where God's commands directly contradict man's. And if we must disobey man's laws, then we should be ready for consequences.

v. 33 - The leaders could not handle anyone referring to Jesus as exalted at the right hand of God. They also had a problem with His resurrection, and with the apostles claiming to have the Holy Spirit.

Read **ACTS 5:33-42**.

v. 39 - Gamaliel seems pretty wise to me. After a mere man dies, his followers scatter.

v. 40 - "flogged them" -- probably 39 times with a rod. No light punishment. People sometimes died from it.

v. 41 - That's amazing. They have just been beaten, yet they are rejoicing. Probably not happy. Probably not jumping around. Probably really hurting. Yet, they are joyful for they have been drawn closer to Christ. He has counted them worthy to suffer with Him.

- "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." (I Peter 4:12-13) (Maybe read through v. 19.)

- The Apostle Paul once said that he wanted to know Christ, "and the power of His resurrection, and **the fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection of the dead." (Philippians 3:10-11)

Read **ACTS 6:1-7**.

- As number of believers grew, it became harder to care for the needy among them. Greek widows were being overlooked. This could have become a divisive issue. But the apostles handled it with wisdom. Delegation is a good thing!

v. 3 - Even those with small jobs must be of good reputation, full of the Spirit, and full of wisdom. If you serve in the body of Christ, that is what is required of you.

v. 5 - Stephen was "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit". We need both in our lives, and we can't really have One without the other.

- Note the introduction of Philip in this verse. We'll talk more about him later.

Read **ACTS 6:8-7:1**.

v. 8 - We need grace, not just power by itself. We need both love and truth when we defend the faith.

v. 10 - Do you know the Word? Can you defend your faith? Can you answer the arguments against Christianity? Ask for the guidance of the Spirit and for His wisdom in situations like that.

v. 11-15 - False witnesses. Charges about attacking the Law. Charges regarding the destruction of the temple. Sound like any One else you know?

v. 15 - Stephen was so full of the Spirit, that his actions looked like Jesus' actions. The Spirit wants to transform each of us to more fully bear the image of Christ. (See Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10.) Stephen was so focused on heaven, that he started to look like he was already there. How old of a Christian was this guy? A couple months? A few years? What an awesome testimony!

Summarize ACTS 7:2-50.

Read **ACTS 7:51-60**.

v. 51-53 - Stephen has just shown how righteous men have been persecuted and oppressed throughout Israel's history. Now he states that the current leaders of the nation are doing the same thing, only worse. They have killed the Righteous One Himself. They have failed to keep His law.

v. 55 - The Spirit gives Stephen peace in all this. He also grants him a supernatural vision ... which leads to his demise.

v. 56 - This is a clear statement of Jesus' deity. (See Daniel 7:13-14.) The Son of Man = Jesus.

v. 57 - What finally pushed the leaders over the edge was this statement of Jesus' divinity. Stephen died for his belief that Jesus is the Christ.

v. 58 - When a condemned man was stoned, he was stripped and then pushed off a nine foot platform. One very large rock was dropped on his head or chest by the official witnesses. Then others threw smaller rocks at the condemned until he perished. (Source: Charles Ryrie's notes on the NASB.)

- Note the introduction of Saul in this verse.

v. 59 - Stephen's cry to heaven echoes Christ's in Luke 23:46. He addresses Jesus as God, and trusts Him to receive his spirit. Stephen holds fast to Christ's divinity to the very end.

v. 60 -- He prays for the forgiveness of his executioners, just as his Savior did. (Luke 23:34) Then Stephen "fell asleep." His body died, but he woke up in heaven.

- What a great death! To imitate his Savior to the end. To be so full of the Spirit, that quotes from Jesus just flowed out of him.

But what about us? We may never have the chance to die physically for our belief in Christ. But we are called to die spiritually each and every day.

- "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he will find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My

words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:23)

- "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (Galatians 2:20)

- "...You are not your own. For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

- "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:11)

Thursday Morning

Title: The Heroes Scatter

Text: Acts 8:4-40

Topics: Philip's missions to the Samaritans and to the Ethiopian eunuch

Main Points: As noted earlier, Stephen's martyrdom leads to a great persecution of the Church at the hands of a new bad guy, Saul. However such oppression only results in the spread of the gospel throughout Judea and Samaria. This progression is just as the Lord foretold. (Acts 1:8, 8:1) Philip demonstrates that the kingdom of God transcends racial and cultural barriers when he reaches out to the despised Samaritans. Simon the magician illustrates once again the folly of attempting to turn the work of God into personal profit. The Ethiopian eunuch reminds us that many people are just waiting for someone to explain the good news to them, and that there are no coincidences with God. And the Spirit shows-off the fact that mere geography is no obstacle to His work. In fact, we have an instance of Biblical teleporting right here. Take that, Night Crawler and the X-Men!

Thursday Evening: Decision Day?

Title: From Villain to Hero

Text: Acts 9:1-31 (see also Acts 22:1-21 and Acts 26:1-23)

Topics: Saul's conversion; Ananias' witness; Saul's preaching and escape

Main Points: If there's a human super-villain in the Book of Acts, it is Saul of Tarsus. Like a wild animal, he ravages the church and breathes murder against the disciples. And yet, Saul's life is radically changed forever when he personally encounters the risen Christ. The same can be true in our experience. No matter what we've done, who we've hurt or how we've failed, the Lord still desires to redeem our lives for His kingdom. Like Saul, those that God calls are chosen instruments for His purposes. And once we have encountered Christ, everything should change. Immediately after his baptism, Saul is in the synagogues "proving that this Jesus is the Christ." (Acts 9:22) If we've also been transformed into the men and women that God intends us to be, then we need to start allowing Him to use us for His kingdom. Finally, we must remember that no one is beyond God's grace. Like Ananias, if God

calls us to speak the truth to those we deem impossible or even threatening, then we'd better suck it up and do it. In the Lord's hands, the results can change the world.

NOTE: This lesson is an excellent opportunity to make a formal gospel presentation and to invite the students to respond. As the Lord leads, this session could be followed-up with an extended period of small group counseling and reflection.

Additional Notes

INTRO: Who's your favorite Super Villain? The Joker? Lex Luthor? Dr. Doom? The Green Goblin? What makes these characters so evil? What do they value? What are they living for? (Basically, themselves or their own agendas.)

Read **ACTS 9:1-2**.

v. 1 - Saul is a bad guy. A super villain. His passion to destroy Christ's followers is unparalleled. It's what he lives and breathes. Remember Acts 8:3 -- "But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."

v. 2 - Damascus was 150 miles north of Jerusalem.

- "The Way" = An early name for Christianity. Jesus claimed to be the only way to the Father. (John 14:6) So people started calling His disciples those belonging to the Way.

Read **ACTS 9:3-9**.

v. 3 - We know from Acts 26:13 that it was midday when this happened and that the light was brighter than the sun. Christ Himself actually appeared to Saul. (See Acts 22:14 & 26:16.)

v. 7 - When God is at work in your life, it may not make any sense to those around you. Don't worry about what they think.

Read **ACTS 26:9-18**.

v. 14 - "kick against the goads." -- If you are fighting God's moving in your heart, you're only hurting yourself. Don't resist Him. He is God and King.

- "Therefore just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.'" (Hebrews 3:7)

v. 16 - Christ appeared to Saul for a reason. Yes, He loved Saul and wanted to save him. But He also wanted to use Saul. He had created him for a very specific purpose. Paul later puts it this way... "But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood." (Galatians 1:15) And Jesus says of Paul, "He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings and the sons of Israel." (Acts 9:15)

- God has also created us for specific purposes. He has blessed us with gifts and abilities that He wants to use for His kingdom. He wants to give us spiritual gifts as well.

- Paul later says of every believer, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

- Perhaps God is calling you to enter into a relationship with Him today. He's calling you because He loves you. You are His creation, and He wants to spend eternity with you. He is also calling you because He has an adventure planned for you. He doesn't want you to waste your life. It doesn't matter what you've done, who you've hurt, or how you've failed. Stop fighting Him, and receive Him tonight.

A - Admit that you're a sinner. **B** - Believe that the risen Christ can and will save you. **C** - Confess Jesus as Lord and King of your life.

GOSPEL VERSES:

Romans 3:23 -- "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Missing the mark. **Romans 6:23** -- "For the wages of sin is death." **Hebrews 9:22** -- "And according to the Law, one may almost say all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness." **I John 2:2** -- "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." **Romans 5:8** -- "But God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." **Romans 10:9-10** -- "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation."

Read **ACTS 9:10-19**.

v. 10 - Ananias was available. We should be too when the Spirit speaks.

v. 13 - It can be scary to reach out to those who are threatening. But they need it the most. If the Lord calls us, we better go.

v. 15 - We don't know what the Lord wants to do in the lives of those around us. Imagine if Ananias had disobeyed God's prodding. We might be without half of the New Testament! (Obviously, God is sovereign, but still...)

v. 16 - There's that suffering again. When God calls us, He doesn't promise it will be easy. But it will be the purpose for which we were made.

v. 17 - Ananias calls Saul "brother." He reaches out to him. He refers to him as a family member. What an act of vulnerability! Are we willing to share our lives with those who seem unlovable, hostile, or hardened to the truth?

- We must remember that no one is beyond God's grace. Like Ananias, if God calls us to speak the truth to those we deem intimidating or impossible, then we'd better suck it up and do it. In the Lord's hands, the results can change the world.

Read **ACTS 9:19-31**.

v. 20 - Immediately, Saul started proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God. Just days earlier he was arresting people for saying that. In fact, he had watched Stephen die for just such a confession.

v. 22 - Pray for strength from the Spirit. He will grant it as you work for the kingdom. Note how God used Saul's Scripture training to prove that Jesus is the Christ.

v.27 - Good 'ol Barnabas. If he hadn't taken hold of Paul and brought him before the apostles ... well, who knows where this new convert might have ended up? (Once again, God is sovereign...)

v. 31 - The church needs both the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

- The main point of this passage is that Saul was radically changed. People were amazed at the 180 degrees turn in his life. He was almost the opposite of who he had been before.

- "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come." (II Corinthians 5:17)

- "Do not lie to one another since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him - a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." (Colossians 3:9-11)

- Remember that this renewing is an act of the Holy Spirit in our lives. (Romans 12:2, Titus 3:5)

So, is this renewal a reality in you and me? Does Christ make any difference in your life? Is the Spirit changing you at all? Do you look just like the world? It doesn't matter how young you may be. It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian. God wants to use us right now, right where we are. He is just looking for a man, woman, boy or girl who is willing to take a stand. A person whose heart is completely His. A person who wants to be used in a supernatural way. A person who wants to be a hero.

- "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His..." (II Chronicles 16:9)

Friday Morning

Title: The Heroes Multiply

Text: Acts 10:1 - 11:18

Topics: Peter's vision and Cornelius' conversion

Main Points: Many consider this passage to be one of the climaxes of the Book of Acts. The Gospel has now spread from the Jews, to the Samaritans, to a God-fearing Ethiopian, to a full-fledged Roman centurion. Peter himself sums up the main point of this session in his remarks to Cornelius: "God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him." (Acts 10:34-35) In other words, the gospel is universal. Salvation is available to all men. And Christ has paid for the sins of the entire world. (I John 2:2) Sadly, many of us today still cling to the idea that all Christians should look and act just like us. Like the circumcised believers back in Jerusalem, we miss the big picture of God's grace, and get caught-up in the little legalistic details (like hymns vs. choruses, tattooed vs. not, pre-trib vs. post-trib). We confuse uniformity with unity. And we attempt to limit how God can move and whom He can use. But just as Peter realized, when God decides to change a life, who are we to stand in the way?

NOTE: The following two sessions will be presented at 5-day camps only due to the extra length of their camp. However, insights from these lessons may be incorporated into 5-day camps. Particularly important is the conclusion of the last session, "The Heroes Depart," which closes off the week with the challenge to live a heroic, Spirit-filled life.

Friday Evening

Title: The Heroes Encourage

Text: Acts 11:19-30

Topics: Barnabas' encouragement of the church and of Saul; the Christians' care for one another

Main Points: One of the great unsung heroes of Acts is Barnabas. We've already seen how he earned the nickname "Son of Encouragement" by giving generously to meet the needs of others. (Acts 4:36-37) And we remember that out of all the believers in Jerusalem, he alone was willing to associate with a newly-saved Saul. (Acts 9:26-27) In this passage, Barnabas again reaches out to the former persecutor and invites him to join the work of the Lord at Antioch. Who knows? Without Barnabas' continuing support, the Apostle Paul might never have been used by God as dramatically as he was. Likewise, we don't know how crucial our words and actions toward the believers around us may prove. Let us make the most of every

opportunity to edify and strengthen our fellow saints. Indeed, "let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Finally, let our encouragement consist not merely of words, but also of deeds. (See I John 3:17-18.) Just as the Christians in Antioch joyfully chipped-in to support their famine-stricken brothers and sisters in Judea, so we should be looking for opportunities to put our brotherly love into action each day. As Paul would later write, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith." (Galatians 6:10)

Saturday Morning

Title: The Heroes Depart

Text: Acts 12:24 - 13:4

Topics: The call of Barnabas and Saul to the first missionary journey

Main Points: As we conclude our study in Acts, we find that the story is really just beginning. Barnabas and Saul are being sent out on their first missionary journey where they will face both deadlier threats and greater victories than ever before. So we too are embarking on an exciting new chapter in the same story. For, although "The Acts of the Apostles" ends with chapter 28, the Acts of the Holy Spirit continue on through us to this day. By God's grace, we believers are the new generation of heroes, the fresh faces of the Fantastic Faith-Full. Our mission is the same as those who went before us. So is our foe. But most importantly, the Spirit that guided Peter, the Spirit that teleported Philip, the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead, this is the same Spirit that resides in us. And the amazing promise that Jesus made regarding His followers holds true to us today...

"Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father." (John 14:12)

Do we really believe this promise? Then it's time to start living like it. It's time to be spectacularly Spirit-led. It's time to be fantastically faithful.

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith..."
(Hebrews 12:1-2)

to be continued...
