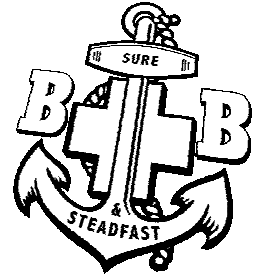


The Boys' Brigade – Glasgow Battalion



Christian Faith Programme Syllabus B

Under Brigade Regulations, the responsibility for Christian Faith within the Company rests with the parent Church to which the Company belongs. This also helps develop good working relationships with local Churches. Your minister, who is an officer in the Company, may wish to take an active role in supervision and assessment or this may be delegated to an elder, officer or other suitable person in the Church.

This syllabus provides a resource under Bible Knowledge in the Community Area of the Company Section Discover Programme.

The resources are provided on a four-year cycle: -

- A. Jesus – Teacher and Healer
- B. God's Young Church
- C. Preparing the Way – God's Men
- D. Key Events in the Life of Jesus

The following syllabus is for *"God's Young Church"*. Notes to support this are attached, as are specimen examination papers at three levels, however, the final programme followed and methods of assessment should be agreed by the individual company and their parent church, according to local needs.

Where new programmes, assessment methods or resources are developed locally, it would be helpful if these could be shared with the Battalion Office so that local successes can be shared more widely with other companies in the Battalion and we can expand our resources for everyone in the years to come.

As with all Brigade awards, assessment should take account of individual Boy's circumstances and appropriate alternative means of assessment may be advisable.

Christian Faith Programme – God's Young Church

Last year's syllabus focused on Jesus' activities as both teacher and healer as these are related in the Gospel according to Luke. But it is Luke himself who tells us that what is contained in his Gospel is a record only of what Jesus "began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). The clear inference is that the story did not end with the events recorded in the Gospel, but that Jesus would continue to act and to teach through his followers even after his death and resurrection. Before leaving them Jesus had amazed his disciples by promising them that those who had faith in him would do even greater things than he was doing (John 14:12) and in Acts of the Apostles, Luke proceeds to tell the story of how that promise was fulfilled through the birth and subsequent growth of the Church as it spread from its early beginnings in Jerusalem through Asia Minor (present -day Turkey) and Greece to Rome itself.

This year's syllabus turns the spotlight on a few of the significant events and people involved in that process, the beginning of a movement that has grown - and continues to grow - and spread to every corner of the world.

The following are passages and topics selected for study this Session:

1	Acts 2:	1 - 24	The Church is born - How it all began.
2	Acts 4:	1 – 24	The courage of the early Christians
3	Acts 6:	1 – 15	Stephen, the first Christian martyr
	Acts 7:	54 – 8 : 1	
4	Acts 9:	1 – 9	A famous convert
5	Acts 9:	10 - 30	Two brave disciples
6	Acts 10:	1 – 33	Peter's strange vision
7	Acts 15	1 – 22	A major decision
8	Acts 27	9 – 28:1	A dangerous journey
9	Acts 28	11 - 31	Rome at last

1 ACTS 2: 1 – 24 – THE CHURCH IS BORN -HOW IT ALL BEGAN

In the previous chapter Luke relates the seemingly impossible task Jesus gave His disciples. They are to bear witness to him not just in Jerusalem (a difficult enough task in the light of recent events) but in all Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth. But they are also told that they are to stay in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49) and that they will receive the power they need to see it through. The events related in this passage are interpreted by Luke as the fulfilment of that promise and the power they receive is identified as the power of God's Spirit – a power that is as mysterious and irresistible as wind and fire (long established symbols of God). Many of the spectators are confused by what they hear and see and conclude that the disciples are drunk. But, as happens on other occasions, it is Peter who steps forward to set the record straight. What they have witnessed, he claims, is unmistakable evidence of the presence and power of God's Spirit, and, as such, not only the fulfilment of Jesus' promise but the ancient prophecy of Joel. The disciples (henceforth to be described as apostles – the men who Jesus had "sent" into all the world) were now equipped and ready for the momentous task entrusted to them.

GRADE 3: QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

How can the church bear witness more effectively today?

2 ACTS 4: 1- 24 - THE COURAGE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

Critics of the Church often claim that religion is a soft option for those unable to stand on their own two feet. The picture Jesus painted was very different. He claimed that life would be more and not less demanding for his followers. If he had to contend with opposition and persecution, so too would they, and this episode shows how quick Peter and John were to learn that lesson. The Jewish authorities who had led the opposition to Jesus and secured his death were unlikely to take kindly to the growing popularity and success of his followers, and it should come as no surprise that they lost no time in trying to curb their activities. It must have been an awe-inspiring experience for these two Galilean fishermen to appear before the Supreme Court (the Sanhedrin) of the Jews in Jerusalem (the Court that had so recently condemned Jesus to death) but the vigour with which they defended themselves contrasts vividly with Peter's cowardly denial of Jesus on the night of His arrest. It was their outspoken courage that impressed the authorities and secured their release on this occasion, and their final insistence that their first duty was to God and not to any human authority has remained an important guiding principle of Christian conduct.

GRADE 3: QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Should Christians be prepared to obey God rather than men? Are there circumstances in which it is still dangerous for Christians to follow Peter and John's example?

3 ACTS 6: 1–15; 7: 54 – 8:1 – STEPHEN THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

The official opposition Peter and John experienced in Jerusalem was no isolated example, nor was the outcome always as satisfactory as it was in their case. The story of Stephen makes that clear.

The opening verses underline the continuing success of the new movement but also indicate some of the problems that accompanied it. Even in those days some people felt they were not getting a fair deal from the Church and the young Church was faced with the need to create new structures to cope with the developing situation. Stephen was one of seven men appointed but it was not long before his popularity and success aroused the hostility of some influential members of the Jewish community. Like Peter and John, he was arrested and brought before the Council. His long speech (too long to be included in the passage prescribed) was typically bold and outspoken but on this occasion the authorities were so incensed that Stephen was subjected to what appears to have been an officially unauthorised public lynching. The appropriate punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning but there is no evidence to suggest that the necessary procedures were observed in this case.

Stephen is remembered as the first Christian martyr (the word martyr is derived from a Greek word meaning “witness”), and, as such, he was the first of many to bear this extreme form of witness to their faith.

The account ends with a significant reference to Saul’s (Saul who later became Paul) presence and attitude. Many believe that Stephen’s death had a profound effect on him and was a major factor in his later conversion to Christianity. It is the first mention of the man whose story is to dominate the remainder of Acts.

GRADE 3: QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Is there any cause worth dying for? Is it reasonable to expect a person to put his life on the line for his faith?

4 ACTS 9: 1-9 – A FAMOUS CONVERT

A convert is literally someone who has done an about-turn. No one fits the description better than Saul of Tarsus, better known by his Christian name, Paul. Humanly speaking, he is the hero of Acts and this passage relates the circumstances which led to his dramatic change of direction and his unique contribution to the spread of Christianity through his three great missionary journeys. The familiar story tells of how Saul’s journey from Jerusalem to Damascus – a journey undertaken with the expressed intention of rooting out and destroying the Christian community in that city – was unexpectedly interrupted by an encounter with the risen Christ. There is no need to dwell on the nature of the experience. It is sufficient to recognise that it stopped him in his tracks and effectively changed the whole direction of his life.

Reflecting on his experience in later years he stated quite simply “in the end he (i.e. Jesus) appeared even to me” (1 Cor.15:8). It was an experience that was to transform an arch-enemy of the faith into one of its doughtiest champions.

GRADE 3: QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What influences encourage people to become followers of Jesus today?

5 ACTS 9: 10-30 - TWO BRAVE DISCIPLES

Saul emerged from his traumatic spiritual experience on the road to Damascus, blind and helpless. Others were needed to pick up the pieces and point him in the right direction. That is the process described in this passage in which Ananias and Barnabus (later to be Paul's companion on the first of his great missionary journeys) plays a leading role in rehabilitating Paul and integrating him into the life of the Christian community.

Not surprisingly, the news of Paul's conversion was received with great suspicion in Damascus. His reputation had gone before him. Many in Damascus found it difficult to accept that his change of heart was genuine and Ananias found himself under orders from God to take the initiative in establishing contact with him. What could have been an extremely hazardous assignment proved pleasantly rewarding as "brother" Saul was baptised as a mark of his acceptance in to the Church.

Now firmly identified with the Christian community, it is to Paul's credit that he lost no time in publicly acknowledging his new- found faith in the synagogues - a course of action which not surprisingly gave rise to fierce opposition from his fellow-Jews and led to his having to be smuggled out of Damascus and returned to Jerusalem. When he arrived, the members of the Christian community there were no less suspicious than their counterparts in Damascus. But thanks to Barnabas, their fears were allayed and only the growing opposition of the Jewish community necessitated a temporary withdrawal to his native Tarsus.

GRADE 3: QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What help and encouragement could you give to someone who wants to belong to the Church?

6 ACTS 10: 1-33 - PETER'S STRANGE VISION

As already noted, Jesus followers (the apostles) were under orders to bear witness to him not just in Judea and in Samaria but "to the ends of the earth". The preceding chapters contain ample evidence that the young Church was on the march and was already becoming something of a success story. But if, indeed, its witness was to be to the "ends of the earth", the staggering implication was that not only Jews but Gentiles (non-Jews) must be included. To many Jews (even those who had become followers of Jesus) that was a revolutionary idea. They had grown up believing that they were in a special and exclusive sense a "chosen people" and that, as such, they enjoyed a special relationship with God which set them apart from all other people. As part of that exclusive relationship, their eating habits were governed by various dietary laws which prevented them eating certain foods and socialising with Gentiles who did not share their inhibitions. As a Jew, Peter, like many other early Christians, shared these views. An invitation to visit Cornelius, a Roman centurion, would therefore have presented Peter with a major dilemma had it not been for his vision and the resulting conviction that he must not call any man "profane or unclean". It was a moment of truth for Peter and to have far-reaching consequences for the Church and its mission – consequences which were to be teased out more fully at Jerusalem as related in the next passage.

GRADE 3: QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What kind of people does the Church discriminate against today?

7 ACTS 15: 1-22 - A MAJOR DECISION

The conditions of membership of any body or organisation are invariably a bone of contention, and it became a major problem for the Church as its influence spread into the non-Jewish world. The previous passage showed how Peter came to terms with the situation and the intervening chapters (which tell the story of Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey from Antioch) further underline the urgency of the problem and the importance of working out a satisfactory solution to it.

The problem, as stated in the opening verse, was that there were those who insisted that Gentiles (non-Jews) who wished to be accepted as members of the Church must first become Jews and commit themselves to keeping all the requirements of the Jewish Law. What follows describes the debate which took place at a meeting in Jerusalem when Peter, Paul and Barnabas joined forces in an effort to persuade their fellow-leaders that, in their experience, God was treating Jew and Gentile alike and that the Church had no right to impose conditions which God himself apparently did not recognise. Their argument was accepted and the decision reached cleared the way for a rapid expansion of the Church in the predominantly Gentile communities of the Roman Empire.

GRADE 3: QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Does the church still impose unnecessary conditions on those who want to follow Jesus today?

8 ACTS 27:9 – 28: 1 - A DANGEROUS JOURNEY

This passage focuses attention on the hazardous nature of Paul's journey to Rome – a journey which was to set the seal on his endeavours to bring the Gospel to the very heart of the Empire.

The outstanding feature of this episode is clearly the remarkable courage and amazing power of leadership displayed by Paul in what was a physically dangerous and spiritually demanding situation. In both respects his conduct compared favourably with that of his travelling companions and demonstrates how a man's faith can have important practical consequences, affecting the way in which he responds to challenging situations when they arise.

GRADE 3: QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Can you identify situations in which your own or someone else's faith in God has been a source of practical help?

9 ACTS 28: 11-31 – ROME AT LAST

Given his passionate commitment to the spread of the Gospel, it is not surprising that Paul cherished a long-standing desire to visit Rome. It stood at the heart of the Empire and exerted an unprecedented influence over the Mediterranean world and beyond. In the event, the circumstances surrounding his visit were less than ideal. Following his arrest and trial before the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, Paul had exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to the Emperor. The Roman Governor had no alternative but to comply with his request and to arrange for his transfer to Rome despite his misgivings about the merits of the case. It was therefore, as a prisoner awaiting trial, that Paul eventually set foot in Italy after a long, hazardous voyage. In that otherwise hostile environment, it is little wonder that he was greatly encouraged by the welcome he received from a deputation of the Christians in Rome who came out to greet him and to accompany him on the last stage of the journey. It was a thoughtful gesture and it clearly encouraged Paul to have the company and support of kindred spirits at such a time.

The final outcome is not recorded in Acts. The fact that he remained under house arrest for a further two years or more suggests that the Roman authorities did not feel threatened by the charges brought against him. Paul for his part continued to make the most of his opportunities and his tireless efforts to woo and to win the hearts of the Jewish community in Rome for Christ are a fitting climax to the story. Luke had achieved his purpose. The Gospel had travelled from the comparative obscurity of Jerusalem to Rome – an achievement of unimaginable potential.

There is some evidence to suggest that Paul was finally tried and acquitted, and therefore free to fulfil his ambition to visit Spain, and even return to the scenes of some of his former triumphs. Whatever the immediate outcome, there is universal agreement that Paul eventually shared the fate of Peter and died a martyr's death during the persecution that was initiated by Nero in 64 A.D.

GRADE 3: QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Can you identify situations in which it is still important for the followers of Jesus to have the support and encouragement of other Christians?