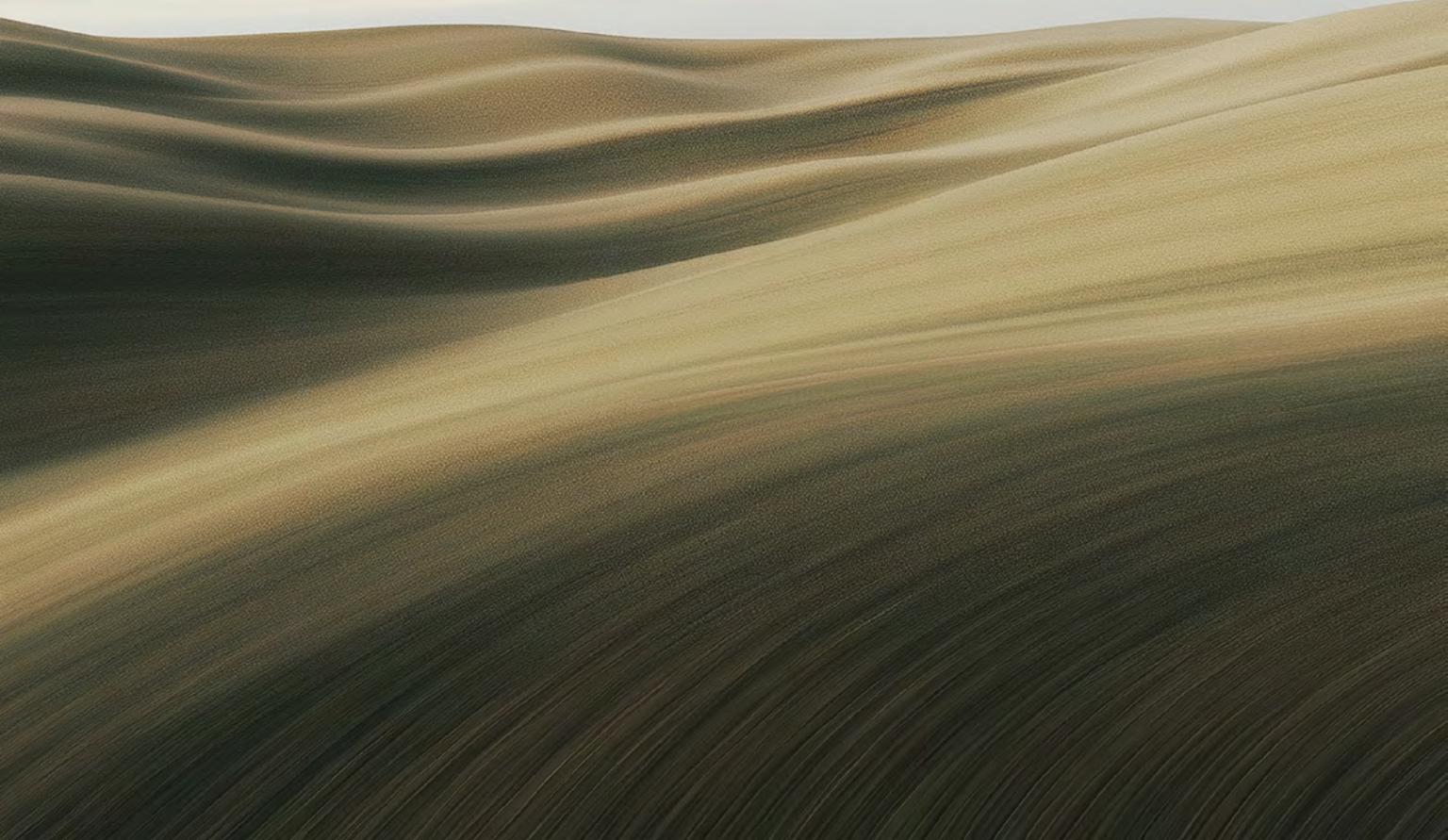


Acts.



Acts.



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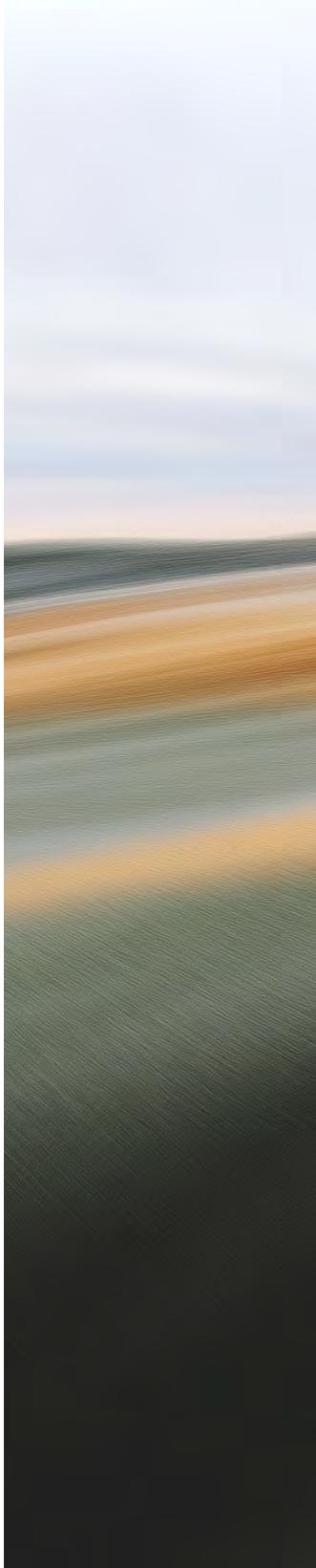
INTRODUCTION TO THIS STUDY OF ACTS

When you open the New Testament and turn to the fifth book, you read a dynamic adventure story. In many of our paper and digital Bibles, this epic story is simply called Acts. Yet the early church gave the book its full name, calling it The Acts of the Apostles. The name reflects the main characters of the story—primarily the Apostles Peter and Paul, as well as James, John, and Philip. Yet when we read the story, we see another character emerge, a more dominant and powerful one—the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 57 times in the Book of Acts and He is much more than a supporting actor or side character. From the opening to the closing chapter, the Holy Spirit is the prime mover and main character of this epic story. Perhaps an equally appropriate title could be The Acts of the Holy Spirit where we see the personal and sovereign God working powerfully through His apostles and His church.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STORY

The story of Acts was recorded by Luke, a physician and personal friend of the apostle Paul. In fact, Luke accompanied Paul as he planted churches on his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 15–21). Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts as two volumes of a single work. The first volume, the Gospel of Luke, provides a detailed account of the birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The second volume, Acts, tells the story of Jesus' further ministry through the establishment and expansion of His Church. Luke addressed these writings to his acquaintance, Theophilus who was believed to be a Gentile of some influence. Luke was divinely inspired to record the birth and growth of the church so future generations would trust the Holy Spirit's power and participate in His ongoing work among the nations.

The timeline of Acts covers a period of about 30 years which begins with the ascension of Jesus into heaven (33AD) and concludes with the Apostle Paul's house arrest in Rome (about 62AD). Luke writes as both a historian and theologian. As the historical events of Acts unfold, we are given a detailed record of the





expansion of the early church from Jerusalem to Rome. Theologically, we are taught much about the nature of God and His sovereign goodness. Furthermore, the theological history provides a strong apologetic to defend Christianity among Gentile and Jewish critics. In fact, there's a reasonable theory that Luke wrote Acts as testimonial evidence for Paul's upcoming trial before Caesar.

A STORY OF TRANSITION

The Book of Acts serves as a bridge in God's story in the following ways:

From	To
From the life of Jesus with His disciples	To the life of the Spirit through His disciples
From the New Testament Gospels, giving the Church a record of Jesus' teaching and ministry	To the New Testament Epistles, giving the Church doctrine and ongoing instruction
From exclusively Jewish believers gathered in Jerusalem	To Gentile and Jewish believers gathered together around the world
From Jerusalem, the seat of Jewish life and faith	To Rome, the seat of world power among the Gentile nations
From the birth and infancy of the church	To its growing maturity and emerging structure
From apostolic leadership planting churches	To a plurality of local elders leading churches
From the micro to the macro, from the Upper Room	To Caesar's Palace, and from Jerusalem to the "ends of the earth"

Throughout the book itself, the focus shifts from the pioneering work of the Holy Spirit through the miracles of the apostles to the establishing work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God and the growth of the church.

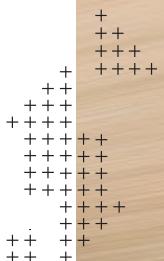
CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

Acts opens with the apostles gathered around the risen Jesus on the Mount of Olives inquiring about when God will fulfill His Kingdom promises to Israel. Jesus responds with a commission, instructing them to focus on a new Kingdom assignment rather than the Kingdom's timing. He told them they would be His witnesses locally, regionally, and globally after the Holy Spirit comes upon them in power. Acts is the story of the Apostles' embrace of that Kingdom assignment. It primarily focuses on the witness and ministry of Peter, James, John, and Philip. Yet one-third of the way into the book, we are introduced to Saul of Tarsus, who would become known to us as the Apostle Paul, a significant figure in the story of the first-century church. The Apostles, however, are not the main focus of the story. The Holy Spirit is the central personality in the book of Acts. He is promised in chapter 1, comes in chapter 2, and moves through His people, the church, from chapters 2-28.

MOVEMENT IN THE STORY

In Acts 1:8, Jesus references His Great Commission previously given in Matthew 28:18-20, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). These are His last words to His disciples before His ascension and His disciples obeyed them. Acts 1:8 outlines the movement of the story in the book of Acts.

1. **Local:** Jerusalem (Acts 1:1-6:7) - The arrival of the Holy Spirit and launch of the church by the apostles in Jerusalem.
2. **Regional:** Judea and Samaria (Acts 6:8-9:31) - The scattering of the church from Jerusalem following the death of Stephen.
3. **Global:** Ends of the Earth (Acts 9:32-28:31) – Paul's four missionary journeys. (Paul's fourth journey was as a prisoner of the Roman empire bound for a trial before Caesar.)





SEVEN PROGRESS REPORTS

One way to track the movement of the story in Acts is to look at the progress reports given by Luke at the end of each major section.

1. “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (2:47).
2. “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (6:7).
3. “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers” (9:31).
4. “But the word of God continued to spread and flourish” (12:24).
5. “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (16:5).
6. “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (19:20).
7. “He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (28:31).

WALKING THROUGH THE STORY TOGETHER

Adapted

Bailey, Mark and Constable, Tom, *Nelson's New Testament Survey* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 197.

As we study the book of Acts, individually and in our small groups, allow the Holy Spirit to use His inspired Word to:

- Amaze us with the power and goodness of God, who has come to live in and through His people.
- Teach us the habits of a healthy church community.
- Show us the essential and vital nature of living in that community.
- Demonstrate what an effective witness looks like in an unbelieving world.
- Trust God as we see Him work His sovereign purposes in all circumstances.
- Help us see that we are part of a bigger Kingdom story.
- Gain a big vision of living locally and globally as Jesus' church.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

The Acts Study Guide is laid out in weekly lessons with resources for daily engagement to help us grow together.

Each lesson includes the following:

- The scripture passage for the week
- Discussion questions to help you process the passage in personal and small group settings
- Daily readings to guide your study throughout the week

Additionally, there are several articles throughout the guide that provide important context to aid you in your study.

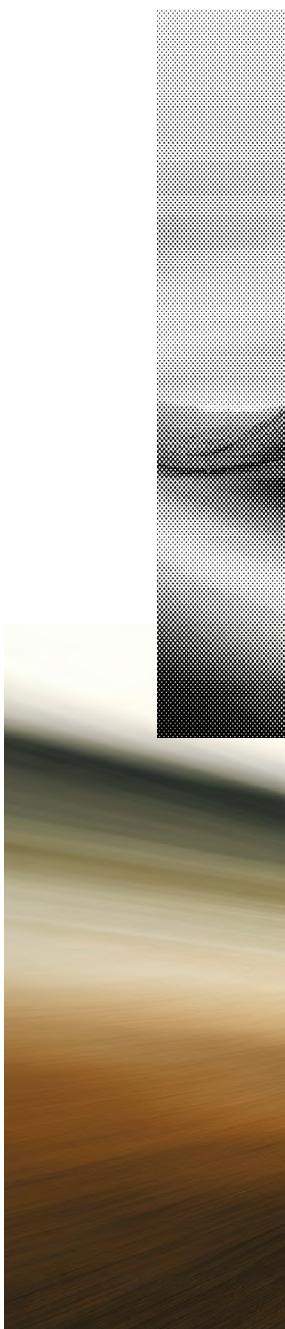
The appendices include helpful maps that link geography with key first-century events that shaped the early church. You'll also find a valuable resource designed to equip followers of Jesus in sharing their faith.

Use this guide wherever you study the Book of Acts—in your personal time with God, in small group meetings, and in corporate worship. Discover how the formation and experiences of the early church can guide and encourage you today.

NEED HELP?

This study guide and included bookmark are designed to help you understand and apply the Scriptures accurately to your life. The Inductive Bible Study Method is an effective tool in accomplishing that goal. This method equips you to make key observations in a passage of scripture, interpret it within its proper context, and then apply it to daily life.

For a brief introduction to the Inductive Bible Study Method, The Training Center of Fellowship Bible Church has prepared helpful videos to get you started. You can watch them at fellowshipnwa.org/acts or simply scan the QR code with your smart phone camera to access the link.



Additionally, The Training Center offers Personal Bible Study, a class that goes much deeper into this method of study. If you have not yet taken this class, we encourage you to do so to experience the riches that come from intentional exploration of God's written Word.

Visit trainingcenternwa.org/events to sign up for the next available Personal Bible Study class or contact our Training Center team at training@fellowshipnwa.org for more information.

DISCUSSION GUIDE SUGGESTIONS

This guide helps small groups engage in discussion. Use discretion in determining which questions will work best and be most beneficial. You will likely find a few questions for each lesson that will prompt your group into deeper discussions. You can even create questions of your own. The prompts begin with broad “getting to know one another” questions and lead into deeper observations of the passage, application thoughts, and prayer suggestions. Blessings to you and your group as you journey together through of the Book of Acts.



ACTS RESOURCES

Scan this QR code to view more resources or visit online at fellowshipnwa.org/acts.

VISUAL THEME

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN MOTION

The visual theme of this study aims to capture the unstoppable energy of the Holy Spirit's work in the early church, as depicted through dynamic, motion-blurred landscapes that sweep across vast terrains, symbolizing the rapid spread of the Gospel. Whimsical, radiant imagery infuses the scenes with a sense of divine joy and wonder, reflecting the miraculous acts of faith and community growth. Abstract iconography, such as flowing arrows, multiplying crosses, and rippling dots, mirrors the exponential expansion of believers and the apostles' far-reaching influence. This visual language blends the ethereal with the tangible, evoking a powerful sense of divine momentum and spiritual awakening in the early Christian mission.

IMAGERY

The imagery style, inspired by the Book of Acts, captures the dynamic expansion of the early church through vivid, evocative imagery. Motion and directional blur in landscapes convey the swift, Spirit-driven momentum of the early Christian movement. Whimsical elements reflect the miraculous, joyful nature of the Holy Spirit's work, balanced with awe and divine purpose. The imagery evokes the rapid spread of the Gospel, blending realistic and fantastical elements to create a visually striking representation of faith, community, and divine guidance in the early church.



ICONOGRAPHY & GRAPHICS

The iconography is themed around multiplication to emulate the establishment of the early Church as described in the Book of Acts. This visual representation highlights the rapid spread and growth of the Christian faith, mirroring the apostles' efforts to expand their community. This thematic choice not only reflects the numerical growth of believers but also emphasizes the exponential increase in faith and the ripple effect of the apostles' teachings, capturing the essence of the early Church's mission.



PASSAGE INSIGHTS

WEEKLY PASSAGES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

DAILY READINGS





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Acts.

ACTS 1:1-11

+ In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

+ What Christian leader inspires you? Why? What questions would you want to ask him or her over a cup of coffee?

After His resurrection, how did Jesus spend His time with the apostles? What specific commands did He give them?

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:8? How might this be comforting to the apostles as Jesus was about to depart?

How does this passage connect to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20? What does the phrase “to the ends of the earth” show us about God’s heart for all people?

The disciples are told to wait for the Holy Spirit. Why do you think waiting was an important part of God’s plan? How does this apply to our spiritual lives today?

Acts 1:8 calls us to be Christ’s witnesses. What does this look like to be a witness for Jesus in your workplace, community, or family?

DAILY READINGS

1. GENESIS 12:1-9
2. PSALM 96:1-13
3. MATTHEW 28:16-20
4. LUKE 24:36-53
5. ROMANS 10:8-21
6. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21
7. ACTS 1:1-11

ACTS 1:12-26

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.¹³ When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)¹⁶ and said, "Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.¹⁷ He was one of our number and shared in our ministry."

¹⁸ (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.

¹⁹ Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

²⁰ "For," said Peter, "it is written in the Book of Psalms:

 "May his place be deserted;

 let there be no one to dwell in it,'

and,

 "May another take his place of leadership.'

²¹ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us,²² beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

²³ So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.²⁴ Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When you were growing up, how did you and your friends choose teams for
+ kickball, tag, or other such games?

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| Read verse 14 carefully. What were the two things they were doing? How is that
| relevant to us today?

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| In verses 18-22, what proposal did Peter make to the church? Why might some be
| surprised by Peter being the leader?

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|
| What is the prayer offered in verse 24? Why is prayer important in our decision-
| making process?

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|
| How did the Lord guide the selection of the 12th apostle? How does the Lord guide
| us today?

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|
| What can we learn about making big decisions from this passage? What
| has been your experience in making wise decisions in the home, workplace,
| relationships, etc.?

DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 27:1-14
2. NEHEMIAH 1:1-2:8
3. LUKE 6:12-26
4. JOHN 15:1-17
5. ROMANS 12:1-21
6. 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13
7. ACTS 1:12-26

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ACTS 2

THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT

New Testament scholar Darrell Bock tells his students that Luke 3:16 should be as well known to us as John 3:16. Luke 3:16 says, “John answered them all, ‘I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’” Why would Dr. Bock compare Jesus bringing the Holy Spirit to Jesus bringing eternal life? This question takes us to the heart of the salvation story and the significance of Pentecost in Acts 2.

The Hebrew prophets promised that the Spirit of God would accomplish this salvation. God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel in describing Israel’s return from exile, saying, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:26-28). Notice that the presence of God’s Spirit will enable the people to finally obey God and dwell with Him. And again in Ezekiel 37:14a, “I will put my Spirit in you and you will live...”

The prophet Joel wrote, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28-29). It is from this passage that Peter quotes to explain what was happening at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21). The event was promised by the Old Testament prophets, by John the Baptist, and finally by Jesus Himself



in Luke 24:49, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Theologian J. I. Packer said that the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives centers on the word “presence.” The Holy Spirit makes God present with each of us. He fulfills Jesus’ promise to “be with us always, to the very end of the age.” In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote that the Spirit is “...a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory” (1:14). The Holy Spirit brings a glimpse today of what our eternity with God will be like.

Life with God is not just a future reality. For those with faith in Christ, life with God begins now. A life of encouragement, transformation, empowerment for ministry, new understanding, and love is available to believers today because the Holy Spirit is among us. This is the hope Israel clung to. The coming of the Spirit means that God dwells among His people as He will one day dwell in the New Jerusalem.

The Birth of the Church

The second chapter of Acts introduces us to the birth of the church. This birth is marked by four events. First, those who gathered were filled with the promised Holy Spirit. Second, the Holy Spirit miraculously enabled some to speak in “other tongues” (languages). As a result, this diverse group of believers, gathered from the Graeco Roman world, understood what was spoken in their own language. Third, Peter addressed the crowd providing clarity and context to the experience and issued a call for repentance. Fourth was the amazing response of 3,000 people being added to their number that day.

What the Old Testament prophets longed for—the indwelling of God’s Spirit—was realized with the believers gathered at Pentecost. Luke, a careful historian, records this moment not only as the continuation of God’s redemptive plan but also as the inauguration of a new reality: the Church empowered by the Spirit. This same Holy Spirit continues His work in believers today—convicting, guiding, equipping, and assuring us of the hope we have in Jesus. Just as the early church was born through the power of the Holy Spirit, so too are we invited to live Spirit-empowered lives that point others to Christ and to participate in the unfolding story of God’s redemption.



The background of the page is a soft, out-of-focus photograph of a landscape. In the foreground, there are rolling hills with a mix of green and brown vegetation. The middle ground shows a valley with a body of water and distant hills. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. A prominent vertical bar on the left side of the page has a halftone dot pattern, transitioning from black at the top to white at the bottom.

PASSGE INSIGHT

THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT

ACTS 2

ACTS 2:1-41

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

²² "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him:

"I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.

²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest in hope,
²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
you will not let your holy one see decay.

²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

²⁹ "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

03 “The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand

³⁵ until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet.”

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| If you could speak another language, which would you choose? Why?

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| What signs and wonders accompany the arrival of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4?

| What do these supernatural events communicate about God's presence?

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| How did the God-fearing Jews visiting Jerusalem react when they heard followers
| of Jesus speaking in the tongue of their own language? How do you think you
| might have responded? What did they hear the Apostles saying?

|

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| How would you answer the all-important question asked in verse 12? Why is this
| significant in the context of the gospel and the mission of the Church?

|

|

| In Acts 2:14-40, what are the key points of Peter's message, and how does he
| make Jesus' resurrection central?

|

|

| The arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost marked the beginning of a new era for
| God's people. How can we live empowered by the Holy Spirit and participate in
| God's mission today?

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DAILY READINGS

1. NUMBERS 11:16-30
2. MATTHEW 3:1-17
3. JOHN 16:5-15
4. ROMANS 8:1-17
5. 1 PETER 1:13-2:12
6. ACTS 2:1-13
7. ACTS 2:14-41

ACTS 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common.⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

As a group, list 4-5 attributes of a healthy church. What should a thriving church look like?

According to verse 42, what four things did the early believers devote themselves to? Why are these important?

The early church was marked by unity and shared life. How do we foster these values today in the church? What are barriers to these being lived out in the modern church?

The early church demonstrated extravagant generosity. How can we express this type of care and benevolence in our lives today?

Verse 46 describes meeting in both the temple and homes. Why is it important for the church to gather in both large and small groups?

“Healthy things grow.” If this is true of the church, how do we see it in the early church? How should we see it in churches today?

DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 133:1-3
2. MATTHEW 5:1-16
3. LUKE 6:27-49
4. JOHN 13:34-35
5. JOHN 17:1-26
6. HEBREWS 10:19-39
7. ACTS 2:42-47

ACTS 3:1-26

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!”⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong.⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God,¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Peter Speaks to the Onlookers

¹¹ While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade.¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

¹⁷ “Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.

¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

²⁰ and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹ Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.’ ²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.’

²⁴ “Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. ²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ ²⁶ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

NOTES

When have you ever experienced or witnessed an act of kindness that completely changed someone's life? What made it so impactful?

What stands out to you about Peter's response to the man's request for money?
What does this reveal about Peter's faith?

How did the crippled man respond to Peter's words?

What was the reaction of the onlookers in verses 9 and 10? How did Peter speak to this crowd that suddenly gathered?

What was the “call to action” in Peter’s message to the crowd? How is this challenge relevant for us today?

Like Peter and John, we encounter people in need almost daily. In what ways can you extend Christ's love and power to those around you?

DAILY READINGS

1. EXODUS 4:1-17
2. 1 KINGS 17:1-24
3. PSALM 103:1-22
4. MATTHEW 9:1-34
5. LUKE 7:1-23
6. JOHN 5:1-30
7. ACTS 3:1-26

ACTS 4:1-22

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.³ They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵ The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family.⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed,¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.¹¹ Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.'

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it.¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When you think of the word “boldness” what comes to mind? Who is someone you
| admire because of their boldness?

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| Who arrested Peter and John and why were they upset with them (see Acts 3)?

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| When asked about the power behind the miracle and the message, Peter
proclaimed Jesus as “the source.” In verses 10-12, what does Peter articulate
about the person and work of Jesus?

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| What does verse 12 teach about salvation? Why is this important in today’s world?

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| According to verse 13, what observations did the rulers and elders of the people
make about Peter and John? How does this encourage us as we minister
to others?

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| How did Peter and John respond when asked to stop speaking about Jesus? How
would you respond?

DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 40:6-17
2. MATTHEW 10:16-42
3. MARK 13:1-23
4. LUKE 12:1-12
5. ROMANS 8:31-39
6. 2 TIMOTHY 1:1-18
7. ACTS 4:1-22

ACTS 4:23-37

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

"Why do the nations rage

and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one.

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"),³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When you think about Christian unity, what factors do you believe bring
| believers together?

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+ What is the reaction by believers as Peter and John explain their miraculous
| release from jail?

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| Read carefully the prayer in verses 24-30. What does this prayer reveal about
| their view of the persecution they were facing?

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| Reflect on the important statement from their prayer found in verse 28. How does
| this inform us about God and His plans?

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| The believers don't pray for their persecution to stop but instead for boldness
| (verse 29). What does their example teach us about how to pray in difficult times?

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| What kind of difficult situations lead you to pray? How do these experiences shape
| your faith?

DAILY READINGS

1. 2 CHRONICLES 20:1-30
2. MATTHEW 6:5-24
3. LUKE 11:1-13
4. EPHESIANS 3:1-21
5. COLOSSIANS 1:3-14
6. ACTS 4:23-31
7. ACTS 4:32-37

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ACTS 5

ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA

In Acts 4:32, Luke records that “all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” In chapter 5, we encounter the deceitful actions of Ananias and Sapphira regarding their personal offering to the church. They deliberately withheld a portion of the proceeds from a sale of their land and brought the rest to the apostles.

Ananias and Sapphira missed the point of the incredible things God was doing in the first-century church. By misrepresenting themselves before God and His people, they underestimated the depth of God’s disdain for hypocrisy. Jesus warned His followers of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Luke 12:1) who pretended to be more righteous than they actually were. It seems that, like the Pharisees, Ananias and Sapphira made a good show, pretending they were giving their all as they placed their offering at the apostles’ feet. Though they were not required to give the entire profit from the sale of the property, they misrepresented it as such. What is more, they conspired with one another in doing so.

Peter asserted that in lying to the church, they were lying to the Holy Spirit, and in lying to the Holy Spirit, they were lying to God. The apostles likely still felt the sting of Judas' deception who, according to the Apostle John, "was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it" (John 12:6). Peter also attributed Ananias and Sapphira's duplicity to Satan's influence, but they willingly cooperated with full knowledge of deception. Their decision led to disastrous consequences. They justified. They lied. They died. The likelihood of their continued hypocritical influence was snuffed out before they could take another step or say another word.

As a result, great fear seized the whole church and anyone else who became aware of their misdeeds. Why? They were fully reminded that toying with God and His church was unwise. As followers of Christ, our faith is expressed through words and deeds and reflects Him. We should never take the privilege and responsibility of being part of His body lightly. Those who are associated with Jesus' Church are accountable for their actions. As Paul reminded the Corinthians, "You are not your own, you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20). We belong to Him.

This story should cause us to shudder and tremble. At times we all fall short and fail to authentically represent Christ and His church. We all have a limitless capacity for self-deception. However, an awareness of His presence and understanding that our actions have consequences will guide us into a healthy relationship with God and His church.

Perhaps this was not the first misstep of Ananias and Sapphira. Though the Scriptures do not reveal other instances of their willful disobedience or deception, their pretense could have been representative of a pattern of hypocrisy. As the saying goes, "You don't suddenly go wrong; you're suddenly found out." In any case, God ended the charade and got everyone's attention.





PASSAGE INSIGHT

ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA

ACTS 5

ACTS 5:1-16

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹ Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

¹⁰ At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

¹² The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.

¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Can you recall a time from your childhood when you stole something or told a lie
| about money or possessions?

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| How was the early church expressing extravagant generosity? How did Ananias
+ and Sapphira follow those within the community, and where did they go wrong?

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| How did Peter confront Ananias, and then Sapphira? What did Peter reveal about
| the nature of the sin?

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| What was the consequence of the sin? What does the passage reveal about the
| severity of the sin in God's eyes? In what ways do we minimize the seriousness of
| sin in our world?

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| The first-century Apostles were empowered to do many miraculous things. How
| did the work of God through them affect those inside and outside of the church?

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| In what ways can you apply this passage to your life today?

DAILY READINGS

1. LEVITICUS 10:1-20
2. JOSHUA 7:1-26
3. PSALM 15:1-5
4. MARK 7:1-23
5. 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-13
6. ACTS 5:1-11
7. ACTS 5:12-16

ACTS 5:17-42

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.²⁰ “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”

²¹ At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles.²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported,²³ “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.”²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

²⁵ Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.”²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

²⁷ The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.²⁸ “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross.³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.

³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸ Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

⁴⁰ His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When was a time you felt intimidated by an individual or group of people?

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| What range of emotions do you suppose these apostles experienced from being arrested, released, and then sent back?

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| How hard do you think it was for them to obey the angel and go into the temple, knowing the Jewish leaders who had just jailed them would be there?

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| Peter and the apostles boldly declare in verse 29, "We must obey God rather than men." What are some situations where this principle might apply today?

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| What advice does Gamaliel give to the Sanhedrin in verses 33-40? How does his reasoning reflect both wisdom and a lack of spiritual understanding?

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| When have you faced opposition for your faith in Jesus? How can you learn from the apostles' response in this passage?

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DAILY READINGS

1. DANIEL 3:1-30
2. PSALM 34:1-10
3. MARK 8:27-38
4. JOHN 15:18-27
5. 2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-18
6. 1 PETER 4:12-19
7. ACTS 5:17-42

ACTS 6:1-7

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When a problem is encountered: what is your typical response?

- | Fix: You get energized and want to come up with a solution.
- | Ignore: You act like it is not there.
- | Run: You get overwhelmed and want to run away.
- | Melt Down: You get stressed out and are unable to properly function.

+ What was the problem that arose in Acts chapter 6? What did the Apostles propose as a solution?

| Why did the Apostles advocate for empowering a new team to handle the issue as opposed to just solving it themselves? Did the solution work?

| What were the qualifications of the new servants? Why is it important for there to be appropriate levels of qualification that match the assigned roles in the church?

| We are called to serve the Lord through His church. How does this passage highlight the importance of serving to meet the needs of people? Where are you serving people?

DAILY READINGS

1. EXODUS 18:14-27
2. LUKE 10:1-24
3. LUKE 21:5-24
4. ROMANS 8:18-30
5. 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13
6. HEBREWS 11:1-31
7. ACTS 6:1-7

ACTS 6:8-8:8

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen.¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”

¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

7 Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?”

² To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran.³ ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’

⁴ “So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.⁵ He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.⁶ God spoke to him in this way: ‘For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated.⁷ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,’ God said, ‘and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.’⁸ Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after

his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

⁹ “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

¹¹ “Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. ¹² When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. ¹³ On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. ¹⁴ After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵ Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶ Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

¹⁷ “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. ¹⁸ Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’ ¹⁹ He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

²⁰ “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. ²¹ When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. ²² Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

²³ “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴ He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵ Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. ²⁶ The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

²⁷ “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us?’ ²⁸ Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹ When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

³⁰ “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. ³¹ When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: ³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

³³ “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’

³⁵ “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

³⁷ “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ ³⁸ He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

³⁹ “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. ⁴⁰ They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ ⁴¹ That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. ⁴² But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

⁴³ You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek

and the star of your god Rephan,

the idols you made to worship.

Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

⁴⁴ "Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵ After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, ⁴⁶ who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

⁴⁸ "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

⁴⁹ "Heaven is my throne,

and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me?

says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be?

⁵⁰ Has not my hand made all these things?"

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it."

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

When he had said this, he fell asleep.

8 And Saul approved of their killing him.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Who is the best “Stephen” or “Stephanie” you have ever known? Tell about him
| or her.

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| As Stephen retold the history of the Jews, how did he highlight their pattern of
| opposition to God and His plan for them?

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| What shift in focus does Stephen make in Acts 7:51-53 as he transitions to
| accusations against the audience?

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| Why would this make the Jewish leaders so mad at Stephen? What does this
| reveal about their hearts?

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| How does Acts 8:1 connect with Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8?

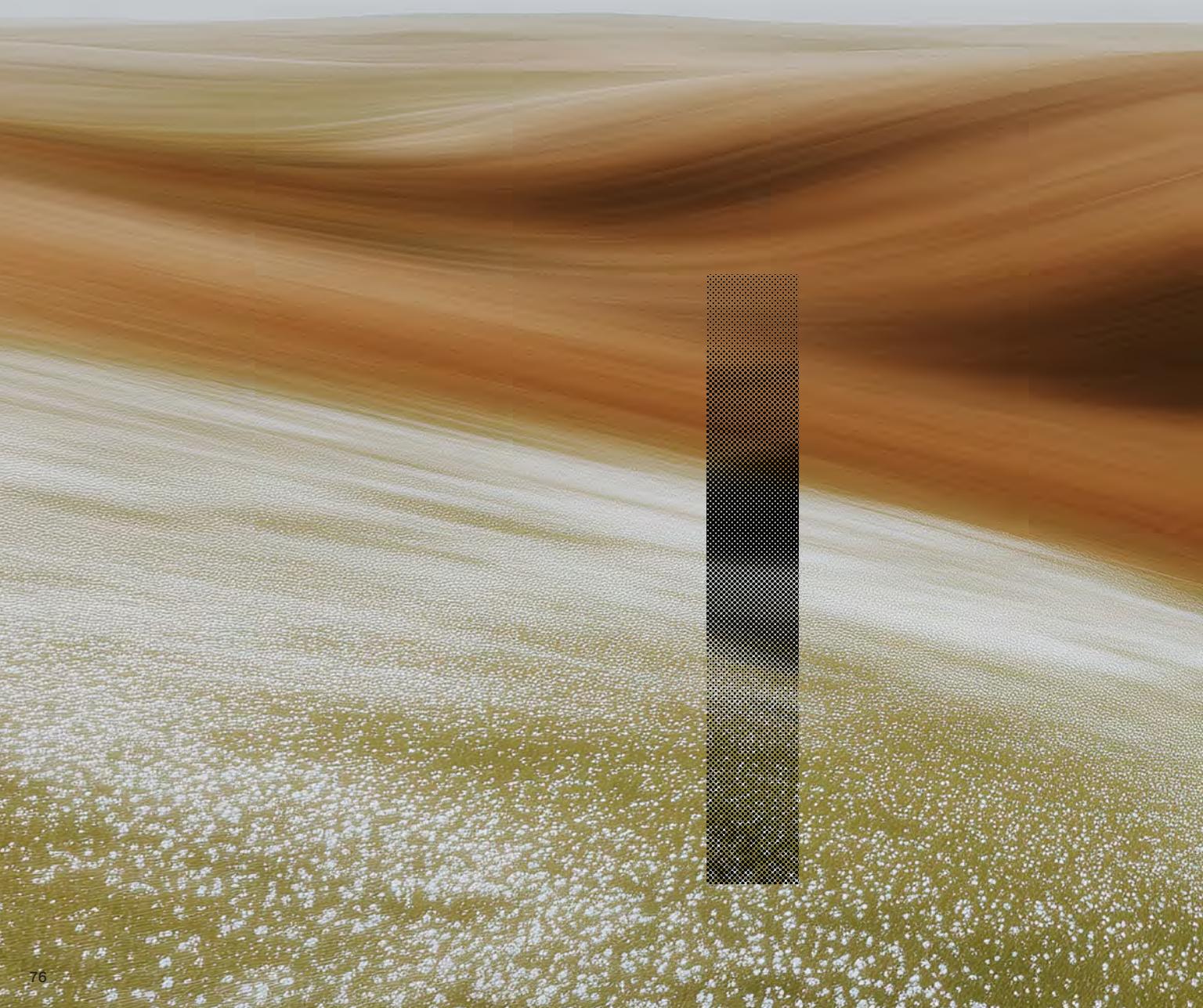
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| What does this passage teach us about the role of suffering and persecution in
| God’s greater plan?

DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 31:1-24
2. JOHN 16:16-33
3. ACTS 6:8-15
4. ACTS 7:1-16
5. ACTS 7:17-38
6. ACTS 7:39-53
7. ACTS 7:54-8:8



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ACTS 8

SAMARIA, SECOND GENERATION LEADERS, & THE HOLY SPIRIT

At this point in history, the geographic landscape of Israel was divided into three main regions. To the north was Galilee, to the south was Judea, with Samaria sandwiched between the two. By the time of Jesus, the Samaritans were a distinct ethnic and religious group, often at odds with the Jewish people. Once the capital of the Northern Kingdom, Samaria was rich with historical and spiritual meaning. But now Samaritans were known as half-breeds due to a gene pool that was a mixture of Jews and foreign people groups who intermingled and produced a diverse culture and plethora of religious practices. The Jews viewed them as impure because of their mixed heritage and different beliefs.

Despite this division, Jesus showed love and compassion toward the Samaritans. One of Jesus' most well-known teachings is the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In this story, a Samaritan helped a wounded Jewish man when others refused. Through this parable, Jesus taught that love and kindness should extend beyond ethnic and religious barriers. In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well and engages in a deep conversation with her. He reveals that He is the Messiah and offers her "living water" — a symbol of eternal life. This interaction broke cultural norms, as Jewish men typically did not speak to Samaritan women. Jesus' message here emphasizes that salvation is for all people, not just the Jews.

In Acts 8:1-2, the spread of the Gospel comes in the form of persecution, forcing Jewish believers out of Jerusalem. They headed to the regions of Judea and Samaria – fulfilling the second part of Jesus' command found in Acts 1:8.

To escape persecution in Jerusalem, Philip (not the apostle), a Greek-speaking Jew, fled to Samaria where he preached the Gospel with great effect resulting in an explosion of joy within the city.

Acts 8:14-17 describes the apostles in Jerusalem responding to news of Samaritans receiving the Word of God. They send Peter and John to affirm Philip as a second-generation leader within the church and pray for the Samaritan believers to receive the Holy Spirit. Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritans and prayed. We are not told how, but there was undeniable evidence of their receiving the Holy Spirit. This passage highlights the Holy Spirit's role in confirming the authenticity of faith. The Holy Spirit's arrival demonstrates God's acceptance of the Samaritans, empowering them for ministry, and underscores the extent of God's grace.

The external demonstration of the Spirit's reception provided confirmation and assurance for believing Samaritans that God's Spirit is now at work in all believers – Gentiles, mixed races, and Jews. This passage has been at the center of controversy among Bible scholars for years. Is the manner by which the Samaritans received the Spirit a pattern for all believers, or is this a special situation? Is it descriptive, in that we are given a simple description of a happening? Or is it prescriptive, specifically teaching that something should happen?

Biblical scholars have debated from both points of view. Some interpret this passage as normative and hold the view that a visible manifestation of the Spirit (Baptism of the Spirit) is subsequent to believing and receiving the Holy Spirit. Others contend this was a special circumstance, in a special moment, because the Samaritan believers were not considered legitimate by the Jews. They were given a recognizable experience when Peter and John placed their hands on them, which signaled to all they were now included among God's people.

For the purposes of this study, what can be stated as normative is the Holy Spirit enters a person's life at the moment he/she believes and receives Jesus Christ as Lord. This is a life-changing event often marked by a significant spiritual experience.





PASSAGE INSIGHT

SAMARIA, SECOND GENERATION LEADERS, & THE HOLY SPIRIT

ACTS 8

ACTS 8:9-25

Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God."¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery.¹² But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰ Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

²⁴ Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

²⁵ After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When you were growing up, who was your favorite superhero? Why do you think
| we are enamored by people with special powers or abilities?

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| Who was Simon the Sorcerer? What were his powers? What did others think
| of him?

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| What happened in Samaria when Philip came to preach the gospel? What
| happened to Simon the Sorcerer?

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| Why did Peter and John come to Samaria? What significant blessing did they give
| to the new believers? Why is the Holy Spirit so important in our lives?

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| How did Simon the Sorcerer commit sin in his thinking and actions regarding the
| power of the Holy Spirit? What did Peter say to rebuke him?

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| In your walk with Christ, when have you experienced the Holy Spirit working in and
| through you?

DAILY READINGS

1. 2 KINGS 5:1-27
2. ISAIAH 55:1-13
3. MATTHEW 7:15-29
4. MARK 10:17-31
5. GALATIANS 5:13-26
6. JAMES 4:1-17
7. ACTS 8:9-25

ACTS 8:26-40

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”³⁷ ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Acts 8:37

Some manuscripts include here:

“Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ The eunuch answered, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| If you could travel overseas, to which country would you like to go?

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| What do we learn about the Ethiopian eunuch, and what was he doing when Philip met him (verses 27-28)? Use commentary or study Bible notes if helpful.

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| How does the Holy Spirit guide Philip, and what does he do? How did Philip explain the good news about Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch?

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| The eunuch was reading Isaiah but needed guidance to understand it. How does this highlight the importance of discipleship and having someone to teach us in our faith?

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| Why do you think the Holy Spirit led Philip to this specific man? What does this say about God's concern for an individual?

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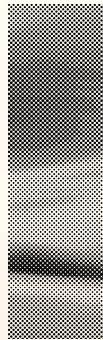
| Philip was prepared to share the gospel when the opportunity arose. How can you better equip yourself to explain your faith when the moment comes (see 1 Peter 3:15)?

DAILY READINGS

1. ISAIAH 53:1-12
2. LUKE 15:1-10
3. LUKE 15:11-32
4. JOHN 4:1-26
5. ROMANS 6:1-14
6. 1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23
7. ACTS 8:26-40

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ACTS 9

SAUL'S "CONVERSION"

Saul of Tarsus was a man of deep conviction, confidence, passion, and zeal. He was raised in a commercial city visited by travelers, trained in the best schools in Jerusalem, and honored among his peers as a rising leader. Indeed, the future appeared bright for young Saul.

In his early 20's, Saul accepted a commission to eradicate an upstart movement which boldly claimed that the awaited Messiah of Israel had not only come but also had been violently killed by the Romans. Initially those making this claim were largely centered in Jerusalem but steadily moved outward to surrounding areas. They were committed to publicly declaring that this Messiah had not only been crucified but had risen to new life and ascended to the right hand of Yahweh in Heaven.

For Saul, the belief that the promised Messiah had come in the person of Jesus and that He arose from the dead was blasphemous. He recognized that Israel remained under foreign oppression precisely because of their failure to honor God. This upstart group with their "misguided message" could not be allowed to bring further dishonor to God. As he states in his own testimony in Acts 26:9-10a "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did..."

God's people ignored Him, resulting in conquest by the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and finally Romans. If Israel was to experience true freedom again as a

nation, they would need to demonstrate wholehearted zeal and uncompromising faithfulness to God as revealed in the Old Testament.

As Saul traveled north to Damascus, Syria, perhaps all of these things were on his mind. On that dusty road, the unthinkable occurred: “Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’” (Acts 9:3b-4).

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” (Acts 9:5b). Could it be? Could this Jesus he had been persecuting be the Messiah? Could everything Saul thought he knew about this upstart movement be wrong?

Now was not the time for such questions, however. As suddenly as Saul’s sight had been awakened by the brilliant appearance of Jesus, he was left in darkness without sight. This powerful man on the rise now had to be led by the men traveling with him to Damascus. Although he had reached the intended destination, the journey took him to an unexpected calling and purpose.

Saul had been chosen by God to be an instrument to carry the good news of Jesus to the nations and to suffer much for this cause. In the home of Ananias, a disciple of Jesus, Saul received a confirmation of this commission. “Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized...” (Acts 9:17b-18).

Perhaps no one was more qualified for this important mission than this man, Saul of Tarsus. Not only was he highly educated, he also worked with his hands as a tent maker and could relate to all kinds of people. He was a Roman citizen with the ability and opportunity to connect with travelers from all over the Empire. He would need all these skills and attributes for his unique calling.

Saul’s training in the Hebrew Scriptures enabled him to explain how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah to both Jews and Gentiles. As Saul’s eyes were opened, so too would he open the eyes of Israel and the nations to see that Jesus is the risen Messiah, the true light of the world.



ACTS 9:1-19

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

NOTES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Have you ever had a life-changing moment that completely altered
| your trajectory?

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| Who was Saul and what was his mission as he traveled to Damascus?

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| What happened to Saul? Who appeared to him and what did He say?

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| Who was Ananias? What did the Lord tell him? Why was he hesitant to obey?

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| How was Saul's life changed by the encounter on the road to Damascus? What
| evidence does the passage offer that he was transformed?

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| How does the passage remind us that no one is beyond the redemptive love of
| God? Who are you praying for that would be a shocking redemption story?

DAILY READINGS

1. EXODUS 3:1-4:15
2. PSALM 40:1-17
3. EZEKIEL 36:22-38
4. MARK 5:1-20
5. LUKE 19:1-9
6. JOHN 9:1-41
7. ACTS 9:1-19

ACTS 9:20-31

At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?”²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

²³ After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him,²⁴ but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.²⁸ So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.²⁹ He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him.³⁰ When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| What is one significant change that you hope to make in your life this year?

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| What was the focus of Saul's message? How did people react to their
| former enemy?

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| Why did the disciples mistrust Saul in Jerusalem? How did Barnabas help the
| apostles accept Saul and why was this so important?

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| In what ways is Saul's experience in Jerusalem ironically similar to that of Stephen
(refer to week 11, page 68)?

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| How did God use Saul's past to powerfully share about Jesus?

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| How have you seen the Lord use your life before Jesus to impact others for
| the gospel?

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DAILY READINGS

1. 1 SAMUEL 16:1-13
2. JEREMIAH 1:4-19
3. ROMANS 15:14-21
4. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11
5. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58
6. 1 TIMOTHY 1:12-20
7. ACTS 9:20-31

ACTS 9:32-43

As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda.³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years.³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up.³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor.³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive.⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Have any of you ever experienced something in the spiritual or natural realm that
| you would consider to be a miracle? If so, share with the group.

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| What do you think was the purpose of miracles in the early church?

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| Read Acts 9:32-35. Describe this first miracle. Who was healed? What was the
| infirmity? Where did this happen? How did this happen? What was the result?

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| Read Acts 9:36-43. Describe this second miracle. Who was healed? What was
| the infirmity? Where did this happen? How did this happen? What was the result?

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| By what means where these two people healed? Do you believe God still heals
| people today? Why?

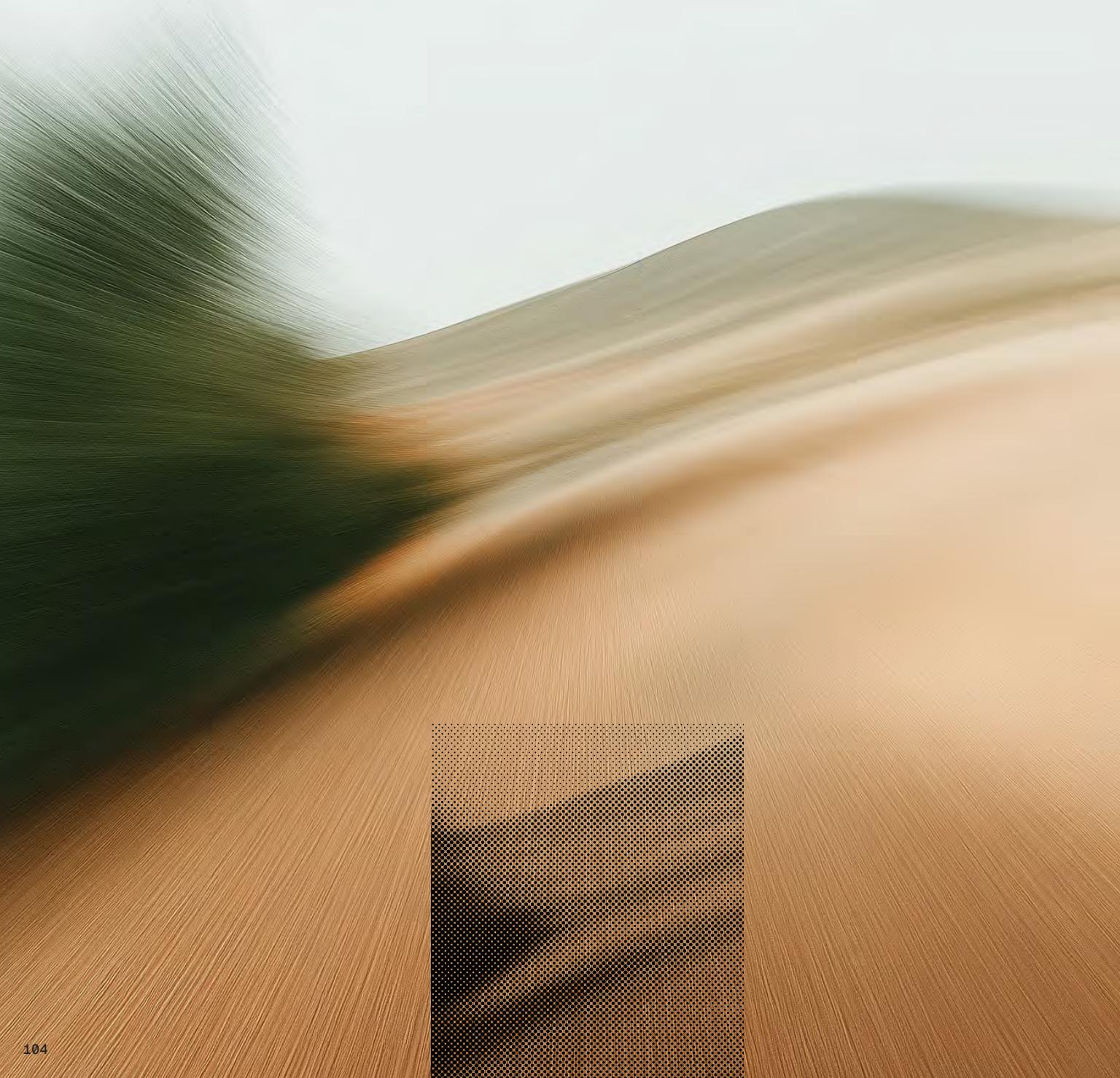
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| When it comes to miracles and healing, how should we pray today? Is there anyone
| we can pray for right now?

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DAILY READINGS

1. 2 KINGS 4:8-37
2. PSALM 30:1-12
3. JOHN 11:1-44
4. MARK 2:1-17
5. MARK 5:35-43
6. JAMES 5:13-18
7. ACTS 9:32-43





ACTS 10

A GOSPEL FOR ALL PEOPLES: EXPANSION TO GENTILES

Acts chapter 10 holds a significant position in the story of salvation, particularly for people of non-Jewish descent. It is the story of Cornelius, a Roman centurion in need of a savior, and Peter, a disciple in need of God's redemptive vision for all people.

Though not Jewish, Cornelius was a devout man who feared God, gave generously to those in need, and prayed regularly (Acts 10:2). He was pious and well thought of among the Jews (Acts 10:22). In response to his prayers, God sent an angel instructing Cornelius to call for Peter.

In God's sovereign timing, Peter received a vision of a sheet filled with unclean animals, accompanied by God's command: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15). As Peter was wondering about the meaning of this vision, messengers arrived inviting him to Cornelius' home.

Upon arriving, Peter declared to all within the house that Jesus is Lord of all and that "everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name" (Acts 10:43). As he was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and all who heard the message of salvation. The Jewish believers who came with Peter "were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues (other languages) and praising God..." (Acts 10:45-46). This event was groundbreaking—it proved that Gentiles could receive the Holy Spirit.

Cornelius' conversion confirmed an important truth for Jewish believers—and the world—that God's offer of salvation through Jesus is for all people. For Peter and the early Jewish believers who had long seen themselves as God's chosen people, this required a radical transformation of thought. They had grown up believing that Gentiles were outsiders. Yet now, through Christ, God was creating a larger family.

The Apostle Paul would continue to emphasize this truth to the early church. Ephesians 2:14 states, "For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility." Galatians 3:28 declares that in Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Gentile." Through the Spirit, God was fulfilling His promise to bless all nations through Abraham (Genesis 12:3), forming one unified people in Christ, breaking down ethnic and religious barriers.

The story of Cornelius and Peter is one of conversion and expanded vision. Jesus had commanded His followers in Matthew 28 to "go and make disciples of all nations," and Acts 10 marks a pivotal moment in the fulfillment of that mission. This encounter confirmed that the message of salvation through Jesus is for everyone, regardless of background, culture, or tradition. What happened in Cornelius' home was more than a personal conversion—it was a breakthrough that reshaped the early church's understanding of who could belong in God's family.



PASSAGE INSIGHT

A GOSPEL FOR ALL PEOPLES: EXPANSION TO GENTILES

ACTS 10



ACTS 10:1-48

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.³ One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

⁴ Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.⁶ He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants.⁸ He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds.¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷ While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate.¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”

²² The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.”

²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. ²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.

²⁸ He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

³⁰ Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ ³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the

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17 baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39 “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross,⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.
46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said,⁴⁷ “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Can you think of a time when God challenged your perspective or beliefs?
| What happened?

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| Who is Cornelius, and what do we learn about his character and faith in
| verses 1-2?

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| How does God supernaturally connect this Gentile man and his family with the
| Apostle Peter?

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| Before Peter's rooftop vision, what concerns would he have had about meeting
| with a Gentile – and for that matter, a Roman officer?

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| Why do you think God used Peter's vision to prepare him (and others) for ministry
| to Gentiles?

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| What cultural barriers in your life may be preventing you from reaching out to
| others for the gospel?

DAILY READINGS

1. ISAIAH 49:1-7
2. DEUTERONOMY 10:17-19
3. PSALM 67:1-7
4. EPHESIANS 2:11-22
5. ACTS 10:1-8
6. ACTS 10:9-23
7. ACTS 10:23-48

ACTS 11:1-18

The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him³ and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

⁴ Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: ⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. ⁷ Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

⁸ “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

⁹ “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

¹¹ “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹² The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴ He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

¹⁵ “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

¹⁸ When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

What is a significant dream that you remembered when you woke up?

What complaint did the believers with a Jewish heritage bring against Peter?

What convincing evidence did he offer them to support his decision to welcome the Gentiles to the faith? How did they respond?

What additional information did Peter provide concerning the angels message to Cornelius in verse 14?

What does this passage teach us about holding on to our religious traditions and preferences? What does it teach us about reaching people who are different than us?

Have you ever been compelled out of your comfort zone to minister to someone different than you? Share your experience.

DAILY READINGS

1. NUMBERS 22:21-35
2. MATTHEW 8:5-13
3. JOHN 10:1-21
4. ROMANS 3:9-31
5. GALATIANS 3:15-29
6. EPHESIANS 4:11-16
7. ACTS 11:1-18

ACTS 11:19-30

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

²² News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

²⁷ During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)²⁹ The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea.³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| What is a favorite place you have visited and what is it known for? (Orlando is
| known for Disney, New Orleans is known for jazz, etc.)

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| To whom were the scattered believers initially sharing the gospel, and how did this
| change in Antioch? Why was this a big deal?

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| Why did the disciples in Jerusalem send Barnabas to Antioch?

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| What do we know about Barnabas from this passage and from Acts 4:36-37?
+ What role does Barnabas play in encouraging the new believers in Antioch?

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| Following the prediction of a famine by Agabus, how is the response of the church
| at Antioch like what we saw from the believers in Jerusalem in Acts 4?

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| Barnabas' name means "Son of Encouragement." Who has been an encourager in
| your life?

DAILY READINGS

1. ISAIAH 59:19-21
2. PSALM 2:8-12
3. PSALM 18:20-28
4. MATTHEW 9:35-38
5. LUKE 14:11-23
6. 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12
7. ACTS 11:19-30

ACTS 12:1-25

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.² He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.³ When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.⁴ After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

⁶ The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.

⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

⁸ Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him.⁹ Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

¹² When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

¹³ Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door.¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

¹⁵ “You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

¹⁶ But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷ Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

¹⁸ In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. ²⁰ He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king’s country for their food supply.

²¹ On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²² They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” ²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

²⁴ But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

²⁵ When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation when your only hope was prayer?

What happened to James and Peter? Who was the leader who was persecuting the church? Why do you think the Lord saved Peter but allowed James to be killed?

While Peter was in prison, what was the church doing? Why is this important? How were their prayers answered?

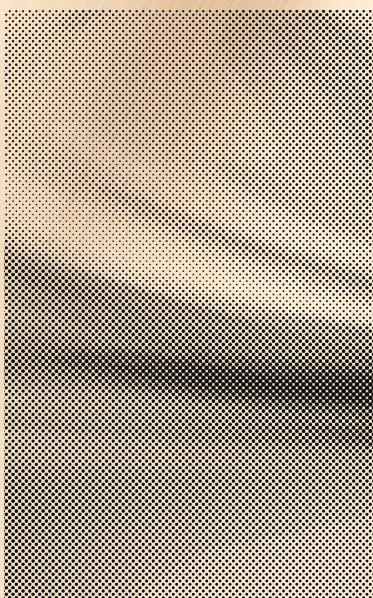
How are God's fingerprints all over the story of Peter's rescue? Why do you think the church had trouble believing it was true? Do you ever question that God would answer your prayer?

What happened to those who persecuted the church? To the guards? To Herod?

Charles Spurgeon said: "God's power is not limited by human circumstances. When we pray, we invite Him to work beyond what we can imagine." How can we be praying for God to work in a mighty way in our lives, our families, and our church?

DAILY READINGS

1. DANIEL 4:28-37
2. PSALM 91:1-16
3. PSALM 6:1-10
4. JOHN 6:1-15
5. JOHN 6:25-40
6. ACTS 12:1-19a
7. ACTS 12:19b-25





ACTS 13

THE SENDING OF MISSIONARIES & THE PATTERN OF GOSPEL PROCLAMATION

Acts 13 marks a major turning point in the history of the early Church. Up to this point, the gospel had primarily spread through the witness of apostles and scattered believers in response to persecution. But here, we see the intentional, Spirit-led commissioning of missionaries to take the gospel beyond the boundaries of Judea. What begins in the multicultural city of Antioch becomes a pattern for global missions: Paul and Barnabas are set apart, sent out, and strategically proclaim the gospel to Jews first, and then to Gentiles. This chapter initiates a rhythm that Paul would follow throughout his ministry—and one that echoes God's larger plan for redemption through Christ, reaching all nations and peoples.

Acts 13 opens in the city of Antioch with the selection of two of the church leaders by the Holy Spirit for missionary work: "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (v. 2). This moment is significant because it represents the first intentional sending of missionaries by a local church. The church in Antioch, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, models the New Testament church in prayer, worship, sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, and active participation in God's mission.

The act of laying hands on Paul and Barnabas was not just symbolic—it affirmed the authority and unity of the church behind this mission (see also Acts 6:6, 2 Timothy 1:6). This special commissioning is the first of many in church history where the work of missions is rooted in the local church and led by the Holy Spirit.

As Paul and Barnabas begin their journey, an intentional missional strategy unfolds. In each new city they visited — Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and beyond—Paul began by preaching in the synagogue to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. This pattern first appears in Acts 13:5: “They proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.” This was not merely a matter of convenience. Paul believed the gospel should first be offered to the Jews, as God’s covenant people through whom the Messiah had come (notice what Paul later wrote in Romans 1:16: “to the Jew first and also to the Greek”).

This approach continued throughout Paul’s journeys. In Thessalonica: “Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2). In Berea and Corinth, the synagogue remained his first stop (Acts 17:10; 18:4). Paul’s method underscores the theological conviction that the gospel fulfills Jewish expectation and is rooted in the Old Testament promises.

In Acts 13:46–47, when Paul and Barnabas face rejection from Jewish leaders in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, they respond boldly:

“It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”

This turning point is both strategic and theological. Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6 to show that God’s plan has always included the nations: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” The Gentiles’ positive response in verse 48—“when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord”—serves as evidence of God’s expanding kingdom beyond Israel.

This pattern—offer the gospel to the Jews, then turn to the Gentiles—would be repeated throughout Paul’s ministry (see Acts 18:6; 28:28). It also reflects the mystery now revealed in Christ: “This mystery is that through the gospel the

Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 3:6). God's redemptive plan, once revealed through a chosen people, was now breaking open to include all peoples, languages, and nations – just as Jesus had foretold in Acts 1:8.

Acts 13 is far more than a travel itinerary; it is the launching pad of a worldwide gospel movement. Through the Holy Spirit-led commissioning of Paul and Barnabas, the early church begins to truly embrace its mission to the nations. Through Paul's synagogue-first strategy, his commitment to honoring God's promises to Israel becomes the priority. As the mission faces opposition and pivots to the Gentiles, God's eternal plan unfolds in which He will gather to Himself people from every tribe and nation. The principles found in this chapter shape the remaining fifteen chapters of Acts – and remains the model as the Church engages in missions today.



PASSAGE INSIGHT

THE SENDING OF MISSIONARIES &
THE PATTERN OF GOSPEL PROCLAMATION

ACTS 13

WK 21 ACTS 13:1-12

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

⁶ They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹ Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰ “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹ Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.”

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹² When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When have you felt called by God to do something outside your comfort zone?
| What was that experience like?
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| What were the conditions of the church at Antioch? What had the leaders been
| doing when the Holy Spirit sent two of them on a mission?
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| Do you suppose Barnabas and Saul had any reservations about leaving the great
| work they were a part of at Antioch?
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| Why is it so important that they are being led by the Holy Spirit (verse 4) and filled
| with the Holy Spirit (verse 9) for this mission?
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| Why does Paul confront Elymas, and what happens to him? How does the
| proconsul respond after witnessing what happened?
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| Paul boldly confronted spiritual opposition. When is it right for us to take a firm
| stand in our faith as we encounter resistance to God's work?
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DAILY READINGS

1. 2 CHRONICLES 30:1-14
2. PSALM 111:1-10
3. PSALM 126:1-6
4. MATTHEW 13:1-23
5. LUKE 8:1-15
6. 2 TIMOTHY 4:1-18
7. ACTS 13:1-12

ACTS 13:13-52

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.¹⁴ From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down.¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak."

¹⁶ Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! ¹⁷ The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; ¹⁸ for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness; ¹⁹ and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance.²⁰ All this took about 450 years.

"After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet.²¹ Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years.²² After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

²³ "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴ Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

²⁶ "Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.²⁷ The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.²⁸ Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed.²⁹ When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.³⁰ But God raised him from the dead,³¹ and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

³² “We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors ³³ he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

“You are my son;
today I have become your father.”

³⁴ God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said,

“I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.”

³⁵ So it is also stated elsewhere:

“You will not let your holy one see decay.”

³⁶ “Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. ³⁷ But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

³⁸ “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

⁴⁰ Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

⁴¹ “Look, you scoffers,
wonder and perish,
for I am going to do something in your days
that you would never believe,
even if someone told you.”

⁴² As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

⁴⁹ The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹ So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| How do you deal with situations which require you to make a change of plans?

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| Where did Paul, Barnabas, and their fellow missionaries begin their ministry when
| they arrived in Pisidian Antioch? Why is this important?

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| How does Paul craft his message to be understood and effective for the audience
| in the synagogue with a Jewish background? What key moments in the history of
| Israel did he highlight?

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| How does Paul show that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament promises and
| prophecies? What is the culminating point of his sermon (verses 38-39)?

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| When the Jews rejected the message of Jesus, who did Paul direct his ministry
| toward? How did they respond? In the end, what happened to Paul and Barnabas?

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| Why are evangelism and global missions so important to the church today? How
| have you engaged in these important ministries?

DAILY READINGS

1. JEREMIAH 1:1-19
2. 2 SAMUEL 9:1-13
3. MATTHEW 4:18-25
4. JOHN 6:22-59
5. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31
6. ACTS 13:13-41
7. ACTS 13:42-52

ACTS 14:1-19

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed.² But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.³ So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.⁴ The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.⁵ There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.⁶ But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country,⁷ where they continued to preach the gospel.

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked.⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed¹⁰ and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:¹⁵ "Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way.¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| How do you normally respond to conflict or criticism by others?

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| What were some good things that happened as a result of the ministry efforts of
| Paul and Barnabas at Iconium and Lystra? How do you suppose they felt about the
| missions work as they got started in each place?

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| When and how did the trouble begin for these apostles in each city? What caused
| the crowd to turn against Paul and Barnabas in Lystra, and what happened
| to Paul?

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| How did the apostles respond to the opposition? What do you suppose it meant
| for Paul and Barnabas to “speak boldly” during times of opposition (verse 3)?

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| How do these stories about Paul and Barnabas help Christians today understand
| opposition to the gospel and suffering for the sake of Jesus?

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| How does this lesson stir you to more frequently and earnestly pray for the global
| workers sent from your church? Take time to do that now.

DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 62:1-8
2. PSALM 141:1-10
3. 1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5
4. 1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-16
5. 2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17
6. 1 PETER 4:12-19
7. ACTS 14:1-19

ACTS 14:20-28

But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

²¹ They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. ²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. ²⁴ After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵ and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

²⁶ From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷ On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Growing up, did you ever quit something because it was too difficult? What was it
| and why did you drop out?

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| What did Paul do after being stoned and left for dead at Lystra? Why is it important
| to not let difficulty stop us from fulfilling our purpose in Christ?

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| What was the message that Paul and Barnabas gave to the disciples in the cities
| they revisited at the end of this first missionary journey (verses 20-28)? What was
| the encouragement? What was the warning?

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| What kind of leadership structure did Paul establish in the churches? Why do you
| think this was important for then and now? What do these passages say about
| church leadership (1 Timothy 2:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)?

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| What did Paul and Barnabas do upon returning to Antioch and completing the first
| missionary journey (verses 26-28)?

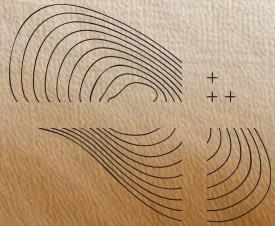
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| What is one lesson you can apply from this passage this week?

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DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 22:25-31
2. JOHN 17:1-26
3. GALATIANS 6:9-10
4. COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:5
5. TITUS 3:3-8
6. JAMES 1:2-4
7. ACTS 14:20-28





ACTS 15

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL: A TURNING POINT IN CHURCH HISTORY

As the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea into Gentile nations, a significant conflict arose in the early church centered around how Gentiles should enter the Christian community. Should they be required to follow the Jewish law, including circumcision? Or could they simply come without adhering to Jewish laws and customs? Both groups agreed that Gentiles are part of God's plan but a resolution for this conflict would be critical for the unity and growth of the early church.

The tension came to a head in a city named Antioch. Some men from Judea, representing the law-keeping faction, debated Paul and Barnabas. The issue had grown so contentious that an appeal was made to get help in settling this matter once and for all. This resulted in a gathering known as the Jerusalem Council between those ministering to the Gentiles (Paul and Barnabas) and the Jewish leadership (represented by Peter and James). It took place around 49 AD in Jerusalem and marked a pivotal moment in the formation of the early church.

For the reader of Acts, the Jerusalem Council signals a major narrative shift in the book. Following the pattern set in Acts 1:8, the first twelve chapters focus on the church's growth in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. From Acts 13 onward, the gospel begins to spread to the ends of the earth. After chapter 15, Peter and the Jerusalem church fade into the background while an account of Paul's missionary journeys comes to the forefront. Before the gospel can spread further, one crucial question must be answered: How can Gentiles enter the church?

The meeting began well. Paul and Barnabas were warmly welcomed by the church and its leaders (Acts 15:4). But the conflict quickly surfaced. After much discussion, Peter stood to speak. He recalled “the early days,” referring to his experience with Cornelius, a Gentile who received the gospel (Acts 10). Though only five chapters back in Acts, a full decade had passed since that event. Peter reminded them all that Gentiles are “saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus,” not through the law. At this, the room fell silent (Acts 15:11–12).

Paul and Barnabas then shared stories of God’s miraculous work among the Gentiles. Finally, James, the half-brother of Jesus, and a respected leader of the Jerusalem church, spoke up. Known as “James the Just” for his strict adherence to the Jewish law, he was likely expected to side with the law-keeping group. But instead, quoting Amos 9:11–12, James declared his judgment: “We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).

With that, the decision was made. Gentile believers were not required to follow the Jewish law to be part of the church. God’s grace is sufficient for Jew and Gentile alike.

A letter was written to communicate the council’s decision, urging Gentile believers to be considerate of their Jewish brothers and sisters by avoiding certain practices that could cause offense. This letter, carried to Antioch by trusted messengers, is the only formal decree recorded in the book of Acts.

The importance of this moment cannot be overstated. The Jerusalem Council provided a powerful example of resolving conflict in the church:

- Believers welcomed one another in fellowship.
- They shared stories of how God was changing the lives of people.
- They gathered to discuss and debate the matter honestly.
- They listened to personal testimony and reflected on scripture.
- And finally, they reached a decision that promoted unity and advanced the mission.

The mission to the Gentiles now had the clear and unified support of the church leadership in Jerusalem. Paul and his companions could continue their ministry without the burden of debating circumcision and law-keeping as they spread the message of the gospel throughout the Roman empire.



PASSAGE INSIGHT

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL: A TURNING POINT IN CHURCH HISTORY

ACTS 15

ACTS 15:1-35

1 Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the
1 believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses,
1 you cannot be saved." ² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and
1 debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other
1 believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

1 ³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and
1 Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the
1 believers very glad. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the
1 church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had
1 done through them.

1 ⁵ Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood
1 up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law
1 of Moses."

1 ⁶ The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷ After much discussion,
1 Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God
1 made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message
1 of the gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted
1 them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate
+ between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you
1 try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our
1 ancestors have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our
1 Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

1 ¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling
1 about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

1 ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon
1 has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name
1 from the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it
1 is written:

1 ¹⁶ "After this I will return
1 and rebuild David's fallen tent.
1 Its ruins I will rebuild,
1 and I will restore it,

¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,

even all the Gentiles who bear my name,

says the Lord, who does these things'—

¹⁸ things known from long ago.

¹⁹ "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers.

²³ With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

³⁰ So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹ The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³² Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. ³³ After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ³⁴ But Silas decided to remain there. ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Who is a family member or friend in your life who you turn to when you need wise
| counsel on a matter? If possible, please share an example of a time you have
| done so.

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| What was the issue that caused disagreement between the Jewish believers and
| the Gentile believers? What was at the core of this issue?

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| In what ways was it wise for Paul and Barnabas to respond to the controversy by
| seeking guidance from church leaders in Jerusalem? What might have happened
| if they had decided to continue without such help?

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| Describe the process that Peter, James, and the council used to decide this
| matter. What key points or evidence were presented regarding God's salvation
| of Gentiles?

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| Peter reminds the council that God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles just as He
| did to the Jews (Acts 15:8-9). Why is this an important point in the discussion?
| How is Peter's statement in verse 11 important for us today?

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| The early church faced a serious disagreement but handled it with discussion,
| wisdom, and scripture. How can we apply their example when facing conflicts in
| our own church or small group?

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DAILY READINGS

1. MARK 12:28-34
2. ROMANS 14:1-12
3. GALATIANS 2:1-21
4. EPHESIANS 2:1-10
5. EPHESIANS 4:1-6
6. ACTS 15:1-21
7. ACTS 15:22-35

ACTS 15:36-41

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| What break-up between famous personalities (musicians, athletes, actors, etc.) is
| memorable to you? What caused the conflict?

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| What did Paul and Barnabas have a disagreement about prior to the second
| missionary journey (Acts 15:37-38, Acts 13:13)? Can you list some arguments that
| support both sides of the issue?

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| What was their solution to the disagreement? What did each of them do?

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| How was the conflict used for the good of the Kingdom? How does this teach us
| that God can still use the church even when there are disagreements?

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| When we face such disagreements with other believers, how can we handle them
+ in a way that honors Christ? What are some common mistakes to avoid?

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| What does Colossians 3:13-15 tell us about relating to one another – even those
| we disagree with?

DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 133:1-3
2. ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12
3. 2 CORINTHIANS 13:11
4. PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11
5. COLOSSIANS 3:12-14
6. 1 JOHN 4:7-12
7. ACTS 15:36-41

ACTS 16:1-10

Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek.² The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.³ Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.⁴ As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Have you ever had a mentor or someone who deeply influenced your spiritual growth? What impact did they have on your life?

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| What do you recall about Paul's experiences in Lystra from Acts 14? How does that history make his return impressive and his discovery of a young, new disciple more interesting?

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| What facts do we learn about Timothy in verses 1-3? Why does Paul decide to have Timothy circumcised (verse 3), even though circumcision was not required for salvation?

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| How are the qualifications listed for Timothy relevant for the work that he is about to do with Paul? How are they relevant for effective ministry today in a small group, church, or mission field?

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+ What is the approach described in verses 4-5 that Paul and Timothy used when visiting churches on this trip? What is the outcome?

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| How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit in verses 6-10? How can we depend on His guidance in our Christian walk today?

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DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 25:1-22
2. MATTHEW 10:1-23
3. JOHN 10:1-21
4. LUKE 4:14-30
5. PHILIPPIANS 3:7-21
6. ISAIAH 42:5-16
7. ACTS 16:1-10

ACTS 16:11-40

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis.¹² From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent

earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.

³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized.³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men."³⁶ The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

³⁷ But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Have you ever had an unexpected encounter with someone that led to a meaningful conversation about faith? What happened?

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| According to today's passage, who are the first Christians on the continent of Europe and in the city of Philippi? Is this surprising to you? Why or why not? What does the passage teach us about God's love for all kinds of people?

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| Who was Lydia and how did she come to faith in Jesus? What were the immediate results of her conversion?

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| How did the evangelistic efforts of Paul and Silas land them in a Philippian jail? What was their attitude like in the prison? How did this lead to more evangelism?

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| How does Lydia model generosity and hospitality? What do you think that first church meeting at her home was like?

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| The gospel came to Europe through Paul and Silas' obedience to God's invitation. Where is God inviting you to give, go, and even suffer so that others might hear and believe?

DAILY READINGS

1. GENESIS 39:1-23
2. PSALM 107:1-16
3. ISAIAH 61:1-11
4. ROMANS 5:1-11
5. PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20
6. ACTS 16:11-15
7. ACTS 16:16-40

ACTS 17:1-15

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.² As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said.⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here,⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."

⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.

⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.¹² As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³ But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.¹⁴ The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea.¹⁵ Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When have you experienced travel disruptions or unplanned events on a trip? How did things work out?

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| How do Paul and his companions begin ministry work in the city of Thessalonica? How does this compare to Paul's previous travel experiences?

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| What is the main message Paul presents as he reasons with the Jews in the synagogue? What was the response from his audience? Do you see a pattern emerging based on his previous journeys?

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| How was the reception of Paul and Silas different in Berea? What was key in how the Bereans inspected the message taught by these Christians?

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| Why do you suppose Paul was such a lightning rod for the opposing Jews (Philippians 3:4-11)? Imagine having to live with a constant threat of violence against you because of your beliefs. How would you respond?

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| How can we develop a Berean-like attitude in personal Bible study and our daily walk with Christ?

DAILY READINGS

1. JEREMIAH 20:8-18
2. PROVERBS 1:1-19
3. JOHN 7:14-31
4. 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10
5. 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-16
6. 1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-3:13
7. ACTS 17:1-15

ACTS 17:16-34

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.”²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴ “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.
²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.

³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

NOTES

Have you ever been to a different city or country and found yourself saddened or distressed by what you saw?

What did Paul see in Athens that deeply troubled him?

How did Paul engage various groups of thinkers, philosophers, and religious groups in Athens? How did he relate the message of Jesus to their cultural context?

Paul preached a powerful sermon in verses 22-31 from the Areopagus (Mars Hill). Can you find 3-4 ways he connects his message to their culture? What famous temple would have been in the background of his sermon?

How did the people who heard Paul's words respond? What do their responses teach us about sharing the gospel?

What can we learn from Paul about interacting with non-believers? How can we start spiritual conversations with them?

DAILY READINGS

1. DEUTERONOMY 4:32-40
2. ISAIAH 44:6-11
3. ISAIAH 44:12-23
4. JOHN 1:1-18
5. JOHN 3:16-21
6. COLOSSIANS 1:15-23
7. ACTS 17:16-34

ACTS 18:1-17

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.⁶ But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.⁸ Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

¹² While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.¹³ “This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”

¹⁴ Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you.¹⁵ But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.”

¹⁶ So he drove them off.¹⁷ Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When has someone been a helper or encourager to you and the work you were
| doing? Can you think of a recent example to share?

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| How does God encourage Paul by bringing the people mentioned in verses 1-5
| around him?

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| How does Paul balance tentmaking with preaching in verses 3-5? Why do you
| think he worked in this way (1 Thessalonians 2:9)? How might working in the
| marketplace and in vocational ministry help or limit his leadership in the local
| church of Corinth?

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| Given the difficult experiences that Paul had endured in other cities, how was
| the Lord's message a great encouragement to Paul (verses 9-10)? How does God
| protect Paul when he is charged by the Jews before the proconsul, Gallio?

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| How would you describe the focus on Paul's mission and ministry efforts during
| his year and a half in Corinth? In verse 6, how do the Jews respond to Paul's
| message, and what does Paul do as a result?

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| How have others encouraged and helped you when ministry gets frustrating?

DAILY READINGS

1. LUKE 12:1-12
2. JOHN 15:18-27
3. 1 PETER 5:6-11
4. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9
5. 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11
6. 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10
7. ACTS 18:1-17

ACTS 18:18-28

Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken.¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.²⁰ When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined.²¹ But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.²² When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

²³ After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

²⁴ Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

²⁷ When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.²⁸ For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Have you ever had a mentor, teacher, boss, or coach correct you? How did you receive it? How did it help you?

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| What is the significance of Paul's team approach to ministry?

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| How is Apollos described in verses 24-26? What strengths did he have? Where was he deficient?

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| Why do you think it was important for Priscilla and Aquila to meet with Apollos privately as opposed to correcting him publicly? Why is it important to have mentors in our lives to give correction and help us grow?

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| Apollos had "thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" but also had room to grow. Why is it important to be open to receiving correction and input from others? What happens when we refuse?

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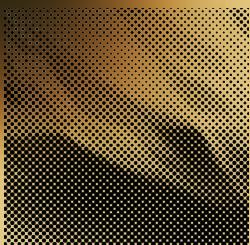
+ Given this passage, what are the ways teamwork and community are evident in our church and in our lives today?

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DAILY READINGS

1. PROVERBS 9:1-12
2. TITUS 2:1-15
3. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-25
4. 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-15
5. HEBREWS 13:7-17
6. 2 PETER 1:3-11
7. ACTS 18:18-28

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ACTS 19

EPHESUS AWAKENS: BAPTISM, THE SPIRIT, & APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

Acts 19:1-7 records the Apostle Paul's encounter with a group of twelve men in Ephesus. This brief narrative touches on several theological issues that are significant in the life of the early church and in Christian doctrine today: baptism, the reception of the Holy Spirit, the laying on of hands, and the manifestations of speaking in tongues and prophecy.

In verse 3, Paul asked, "Into what then were you baptized?" and they responded, "Into John's baptism." John's was a baptism of repentance as the Jews anticipated the arrival of the Messiah (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). In contrast, believer's baptism was instituted by Christ as a public identification with His death, burial, and resurrection performed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The twelve men in Acts 19 had not yet received this baptism so Paul baptized them "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Act 19:5), signifying their acceptance of Christ and their identity as part of the church community.

After their baptism, Paul laid hands on them and "the Holy Spirit came on them" (Acts 19:6). This is consistent with the pattern of the Holy Spirit in confirming the authenticity of faith, the acceptance of Gentiles, and empowering them for ministry. In the book of Acts, God marks the Spirit's coming to signify critical moments in redemptive history (Acts 2, Acts 8, Acts 10). In Acts 19, the visible manifestations

likely served to affirm Paul's apostolic ministry and the unity of all believers—Jewish, Samaritan, and Gentile—under the same Holy Spirit. The normative pattern for believers today is to receive the Holy Spirit at the moment a person believes in and professes Jesus Christ as Lord. "...When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13b-14).

The laying on of hands by Paul in this account is in keeping with the demonstration of apostolic authority as seen throughout the book of Acts. Rather than being prescriptive for today, this is descriptive, giving an account of what happened in a unique transitional period in the early church.

When the Holy Spirit came on these men, "they began speaking in tongues and prophesying" (Acts 19:6). This mirrors the pattern seen in Acts 2 and 10, where speaking in tongues or other human languages confirmed the Spirit's work in Jews and Gentiles respectively.

Speaking in tongues in Acts refers to real human languages primarily known by the hearer. The speaker was divinely enabled to address the hearers in their own language to accomplish God's purposes, authenticate the apostles, edify the hearers, and establish the early church. Prophesying in this context is a Spirit-empowered declaration of truth. It functioned in this case as a sign that the Holy Spirit was truly at work in these men and possibly served as the edification of the local believers in Ephesus.

Acts 19:1-7 powerfully demonstrates the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan as the gospel reaches new people and places. What began as a movement among Jewish believers in Jerusalem expanded to Gentiles in Ephesus. For the church today, Acts 19 reminds us of the sufficiency of Christ, the centrality of the gospel, and the power of the Holy Spirit who draws people from every background into one redeemed and Spirit-filled body.



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ACTS 19:1-41

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

³ So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”

“John’s baptism,” they replied.

⁴ Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

¹³ Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” ¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” ¹⁶ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

¹⁷ When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. ¹⁸ Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done.

¹⁹ A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. ²⁰ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

²¹ After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." ²² He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

²³ About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. ²⁷ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. ³⁰ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

³² The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³ The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴ But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

³⁵ The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? ³⁶ Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. ³⁷ You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. ³⁸ If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. ³⁹ If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴⁰ As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." ⁴¹ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| What hardships or difficulties have you endured when traveling?

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| According to verses 8-10, what is Paul's strategy for ministry in Ephesus? How is
| this similar to his approach in other cities?

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| How were the views of baptism and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit developing
| in the early church?

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| How do the people of Ephesus respond in verses 17-20 to the failed exorcism in
| verses 13-16? What does this show about true repentance?

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| What causes the riot in verses 23-27, and why are the silversmiths so upset about
| Paul's teaching?

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| What does this passage teach us about the power of the gospel to transform both
| individuals and communities?

DAILY READINGS

1. MATTHEW 12:22-32
2. EPHESIANS 1:1-14
3. EPHESIANS 1:15-23
4. EPHESIANS 2:14-22
5. JOHN 16:1-15
6. ACTS 19:1-22
7. ACTS 19:23-41

ACTS 20:1-12

When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia.² He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece,³ where he stayed three months. Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia.⁴ He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.⁵ These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas.⁶ But we sailed from Philippi after the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

⁷ On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.⁸ There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. ⁹ Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead.¹⁰ Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!"¹¹ Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left.¹² The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

When was the last time you fell asleep during a sermon, class, or event?

What did Paul do immediately after the uproar in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41)? How does this evidence his zeal for the Lord's work?

How long did Paul teach the believers in Troas? What does this tell us about their spiritual hunger?

What happened to Eutychus? How did Paul help him and how did this affect those gathered?

When you have been fatigued, who has “given you life”?

How can we cultivate a deep hunger for God's Word in our own lives and church?

DAILY READINGS

1. ISAIAH 26:12-21
2. MATTHEW 9:18-26
3. JOHN 10:11-18
4. JOHN 16:31-33
5. PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18
6. GALATIANS 1:11-24
7. ACTS 20:1-12

ACTS 20:13-38

We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot.

¹⁴ When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. ¹⁵ The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Chios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. ¹⁶ Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

¹⁷ From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. ²⁰ You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

²² “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

²⁵ “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

³² “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

³⁶ When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.

³⁷ They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Think of a time when you received farewell advice from a mentor or leader. How
| did their words impact you?

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| According to verses 18-21, how does Paul describe his ministry among the
| Ephesians? What stands out to you?

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| What warning does Paul give about the future of the church (verses 28-31)? How
| is his guidance helpful for church elders in any generation?

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| Paul warns the Ephesian elders to be on guard against false teaching (verse 30).
| How can we recognize and guard against spiritual deception today?

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| Consider Paul's summary of his life work in verse 24. How does his statement
| challenge you as a follower of Christ?

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| How would you describe your life's work to a kindergartner?

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DAILY READINGS

1. DEUTERONOMY 31:1-8
2. JOSHUA 23:1-16
3. 1 SAMUEL 12:1-25
4. PSALM 78:1-8
5. MATTHEW 7:15-20
6. 2 TIMOTHY 4:1-8
7. ACTS 20:13-38

ACTS 21:1-26

After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara.² We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail.³ After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo.⁴ We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

⁵ When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray.⁶ After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

⁷ We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day.⁸ Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven.⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

¹⁰ After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.¹³ Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."¹⁴ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

¹⁵ After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem.¹⁶ Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

¹⁷ When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly.

¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³ so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. ²⁵ As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

²⁶ The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Have you ever felt called to do something difficult, even when others cautioned
| you about the risk?

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| How do the believers and Agabus warn Paul about going to Jerusalem (Acts 21:5;
| 10-12)? What is their fear?

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| Compare Acts 21:5-14 to Acts 9:23-25. Why do you think in one instance Paul
| yielded to his companions and escaped through the “basket” while in the other
| instance, he willingly embraced the “belt”?

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| How do we discern when it is time to be rescued and when it is time to endure?

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| What was Paul told by the elders in verses 20-22 about his reputation in
| Jerusalem? What did he do to demonstrate his respect for Jewish customs? How
| would this have enabled him to minister to them?

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| What would be a way for us to show love and respect for people who are different
| than us without compromising our own values?

DAILY READINGS

1. ISAIAH 50:4-9
2. JEREMIAH 26:1-24
3. ROMANS 12:9-21
4. 1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23
5. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21
6. ACTS 21:1-16
7. ACTS 21:17-26

ACTS 21:27-22:29

When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him,²⁸ shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place."²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar.³² He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

³³ The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. ³⁵ When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. ³⁶ The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Get rid of him!"

³⁷ As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied. ³⁸ "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?"

³⁹ Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

⁴⁰ After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

22 “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”

² When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: ³ “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶ “About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

⁸ “‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

“I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰ “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

“‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹² “A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴ “Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

¹⁷ "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance

¹⁸ and saw the Lord speaking to me. 'Quick!' he said. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.'

¹⁹ "Lord,' I replied, 'these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

²¹ "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

²² The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"

²³ As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵ As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."

²⁷ The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes, I am," he answered.

²⁸ Then the commander said, "I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship."

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

²⁹ Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Have you ever been misunderstood or falsely accused? How did you handle
| the situation?

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| What accusations do the Jews make against Paul? In Acts 22:1-5, how does Paul
| begin his defense before the crowd? Why might he have chosen to start this way?

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| In verses 6-11, Paul recounts his encounter with Jesus. What key details does he
| include? Describe the overall structure of how he shares his testimony.

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| Why do you think the crowd reacted so harshly when Paul mentioned his mission
| to the Gentiles in verses 21-23?

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| Paul speaks respectfully and strategically when addressing the hostile crowd.
| What does this teach us about sharing our faith with others?

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| When have you had an opportunity to share your testimony? How can Paul's
| approach help you be more effective in sharing your spiritual story? Would you
| consider sharing your story with the group now?

DAILY READINGS

1. EXODUS 4:10-17
2. JEREMIAH 1:4-10
3. DANIEL 3:13-18
4. 1 PETER 3:13-17
5. ACTS 21:27-36
6. ACTS 21:37-22:21
7. ACTS 22:22-29

ACTS 22:30-23:35

The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

23 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.”² At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth.³ Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!”

⁴ Those who were standing near Paul said, “How dare you insult God’s high priest!”

⁵ Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’”

⁶ Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.”

⁷ When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.⁸ (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

⁹ There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”¹⁰ The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹ The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

¹² The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³ More than forty men were involved in this plot. ¹⁴ They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

¹⁶ But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

¹⁷ Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” ¹⁸ So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.”

¹⁹ The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?”

²⁰ He said: “Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. ²¹ Don’t give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.”

²² The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.”

²³ Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. ²⁴ Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.”

²⁵ He wrote a letter as follows:

²⁶ Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. ²⁸ I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. ²⁹ I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰ When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

³¹ So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. ³² The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. ³³ When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. ³⁴ The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵ he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| What do you consider to be the most influential city in the world? Why?

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| How did the Roman authorities attempt to discover what the accusations were
| against Paul? How did Paul cleverly divide the Sanhedrin?

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| Who appeared to Paul in Act 23:11? What did He promise Paul? Why is it significant
| for Paul to testify in Rome? What was significant about this city?

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| Read Acts 23:12-15. How did the Jewish religious leaders plan to silence
| Paul? How serious were they about this plan? Why do you think they wanted
| Paul silenced?

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| In what two ways does the Lord protect Paul? How does his journey through the
| Roman legal system further advance the mission?

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| Trials and tribulations on this earth can be used to do God's will and advance His
| cause. Do you have an example of a trial in your life being used by God for His good
| and glory?

DAILY READINGS

1. DANIEL 6:1-28
2. JEREMIAH 15:15-21
3. MARK 13:9-13
4. 2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-11
5. ACTS 22:30-23:11
6. ACTS 23:12-22
7. ACTS 23:23-35

ACTS 24:1-27

Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.² When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation.³ Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude.⁴ But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

⁵ "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect⁶ and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him.^[7]⁸ By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him."

⁹ The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

¹⁰ When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense.¹¹ You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.¹² My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city.

¹³ And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.

¹⁴ However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.¹⁶ So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

¹⁷ "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.¹⁸ I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance.¹⁹ But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me.

²⁰ Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin—²¹ unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'"

Acts 24:6-7

Some manuscripts include here:

"...so we seized him, and we would have judged him in accordance with our law.⁷ But the commander Lysias came and took him from us with much violence,⁸ ordering his accusers to come before you."

²² Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” ²³ He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

²⁴ Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” ²⁶ At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

²⁷ When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| When growing up, who listened to conflicts between siblings or family members
| and decided who was at fault? How did that usually work out for you?

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| What specific charges does Tertullus bring against Paul? How does Paul defend
| himself? What key points does he make in his response?

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| What does Felix's reaction to Paul's defense reveal about his character and
| motivations?

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| How did Paul leverage the misunderstandings of his accusers as an opportunity to
| explain his faith in Jesus?

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| What do you learn about Paul's beliefs stated in verses 14-16? What is his specific
| conviction regarding the Old Testament scriptures (the "Law" and "Prophets")?

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| It appears that Felix was intrigued by his time with Paul but postponed responding
| to the truth. Is there an area of your life where you feel God calling you to respond
| to truth, but you have been putting it off?

DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 37:1-20
2. ISAIAH 30:8-26
3. 2 CHRONICLES 24:15-22
4. LUKE 18:1-14
5. 1 PETER 2:11-25
6. REVELATION 3:7-13
7. ACTS 24:1-27

ACTS 25:1-22

Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem,² where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul.³ They requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way.⁴ Festus answered, “Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon.⁵ Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there.”

⁶ After spending eight or ten days with them, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him.

⁷ When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them.

⁸ Then Paul made his defense: “I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.”

⁹ Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?”

¹⁰ Paul answered: “I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well.¹¹ If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”

¹² After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”

¹³ A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus.¹⁴ Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul’s case with the king. He said: “There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner.¹⁵ When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.

¹⁶ “I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. ¹⁷ When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. ¹⁸ When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. ¹⁹ Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. ²⁰ I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. ²¹ But when Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor’s decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar.”

²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear this man myself.”

He replied, “Tomorrow you will hear him.”

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| Have you ever been involved in a real-life courtroom drama? Served on jury duty?
| Had to be on the witness stand? What happened?

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| Read Acts 24:27. How long has Paul been in prison awaiting his trial and verdict?
| Who is the new leader that will be over him?

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| Why do the Jewish leaders want Paul to be tried in Jerusalem? Where was the
| court convened and what was the result? How did Paul escalate his case?

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| Paul relied on both God's rescue and wise legal strategy. What does this say about
| his faith in action? What was significant about Paul's appeal to appear before
| Caesar in Rome?

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| King Agrippa presents Paul with yet one more opportunity to speak about Jesus.
| How do you see God using Paul's circumstances for Kingdom purposes?

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| In what ways can God use your current circumstances to advance the Kingdom?
| Who has God placed in your life needing to experience the goodness and truth
| of God?

DAILY READINGS

1. LUKE 21:10-36
2. PSALM 46:1-11
3. PHILIPPIANS 1:12-20
4. 2 TIMOTHY 2:1-13
5. HEBREWS 12:1-17
6. ACTS 25:1-12
7. ACTS 25:13-22

ACTS 25:23-26:32

The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking military officers and the prominent men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.²⁴ Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer.²⁵ I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome.²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write.²⁷ For I think it is unreasonable to send a prisoner on to Rome without specifying the charges against him."

26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense:² "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews,³ and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴ "The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem.⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee.⁶ And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today.

⁷ This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me.⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

⁹ "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

¹² “On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

¹⁵ “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ¹⁶ ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

¹⁹ “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. ²¹ That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. ²² But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—²³ that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

²⁴ At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

²⁵ “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

²⁹ Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

³⁰ The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. ³¹ After they left the room, they began saying to one another, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."

³² Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| If you could spend an evening with an historical leader (king, president, prime minister, etc.) whom would you choose?

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| Why does Paul say he is on trial before King Agrippa (Acts 26:6-7)? What does this tell us about Paul's perspective on the harmony between the Old Testament and the life of Jesus Christ?

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| How is Paul's past as a devoted Jew and persecutor of the early Christian church significant in the story of his conversion?

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| How does Paul describe his commissioning from Jesus in Acts 26:17-18? In what ways is it important that this highly educated Jew would become the person chosen to lead the effort in bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to Gentiles?

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| Paul focuses on his personal testimony as a way to share the gospel. Why do you think personal stories are so powerful in witnessing?

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| How does this passage challenge you in your own faith journey? What is one step you can take this week to be a more effective witness for Christ?

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DAILY READINGS

1. PSALM 71:1-24
2. JONAH 1:1-16
3. ISAIAH 6:8-13
4. MATTHEW 10:16-42
5. LUKE 8:4-18
6. 1 PETER 3:8-22
7. ACTS 25:23-26:32

ACTS 27-28:10

When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment.² We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

³ The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs.⁴ From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us.

⁵ When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.⁶ There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board.⁷ We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone.⁸ We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

⁹ Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. So Paul warned them,¹⁰ “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.”¹¹ But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship.¹² Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

¹³ When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete.¹⁴ Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island.¹⁵ The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.¹⁶ As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure,¹⁷ so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along.¹⁸ We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard.

¹⁹ On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.

²⁰ When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

²¹ After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. ²² But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.

²³ Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me ²⁴ and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' ²⁵ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.

²⁶ Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

²⁷ On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. ²⁸ They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep.

²⁹ Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. ³⁰ In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. ³¹ Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." ³² So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.

³³ Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. ³⁴ Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." ³⁵ After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶ They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷ Altogether there were 276 of us on board. ³⁸ When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

³⁹ When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. ⁴⁰ Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. ⁴¹ But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

⁴² The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. ⁴³ But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴ The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

28 Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ² The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³ Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

⁷ There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. ⁸ His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰ They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

Have you ever been a part of a major storm while at sea or on the water?

What happened?

How does this week's passage tell of both the power of nature and the sovereignty of God? Who was in ultimate control of the circumstances? How do we know this to be true?

As a prisoner on the ship, how was Paul able to share about the Lord with those onboard and on the island? How did it influence them?

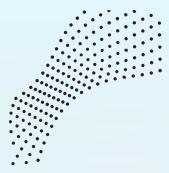
In the midst of all that was going on in this story, Paul maintained unwavering faith in God's promises. How did he stay calm in the storm, in a shipwreck, through hunger, and even with a snake bite? What can we learn from him?

How do you normally react in a crisis? Fear? Control? Calm? Confusion?

How does God use our trials and tragedies to build our faith? How has He done so in your life?

DAILY READINGS

1. ISAIAH 43:1-13
2. ISAIAH 43:14-21
3. MATTHEW 14:22-33
4. ACTS 27:1-12
5. ACTS 27:13-26
6. ACTS 27:27-44
7. ACTS 28:1-10





ACTS 28

IMPRISONED BUT UNHINDERED: THE GOSPEL EXPANDS FROM ROME

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!”

- Acts 28:30-31

Acts 28 does not end with a grand conclusion. Former pastor and chaplain of the US Senate, Lloyd Ogilvie, said of Acts 28, “The abrupt ending of Acts leaves us with the challenge and opportunity to allow the Spirit to write the next chapter... today... in and through us.”

In Acts 1, Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the remote parts of the earth.” In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit birthed the church in Jerusalem and then filled the city with the witness of Jesus by chapter 5. Then in Acts 8, that witness went to Samaria and then reached a Gentile soldier in chapter 10. By Acts 13, the gospel traveled north to Asia minor. It finally jumped to the continent of Europe in Acts 16, headed further west to Greece in chapter 17, and then went back east to Turkey in chapter 18. The gospel witness finally made it across the Mediterranean Sea to Rome in Acts 28. And there the adventure was just getting started.

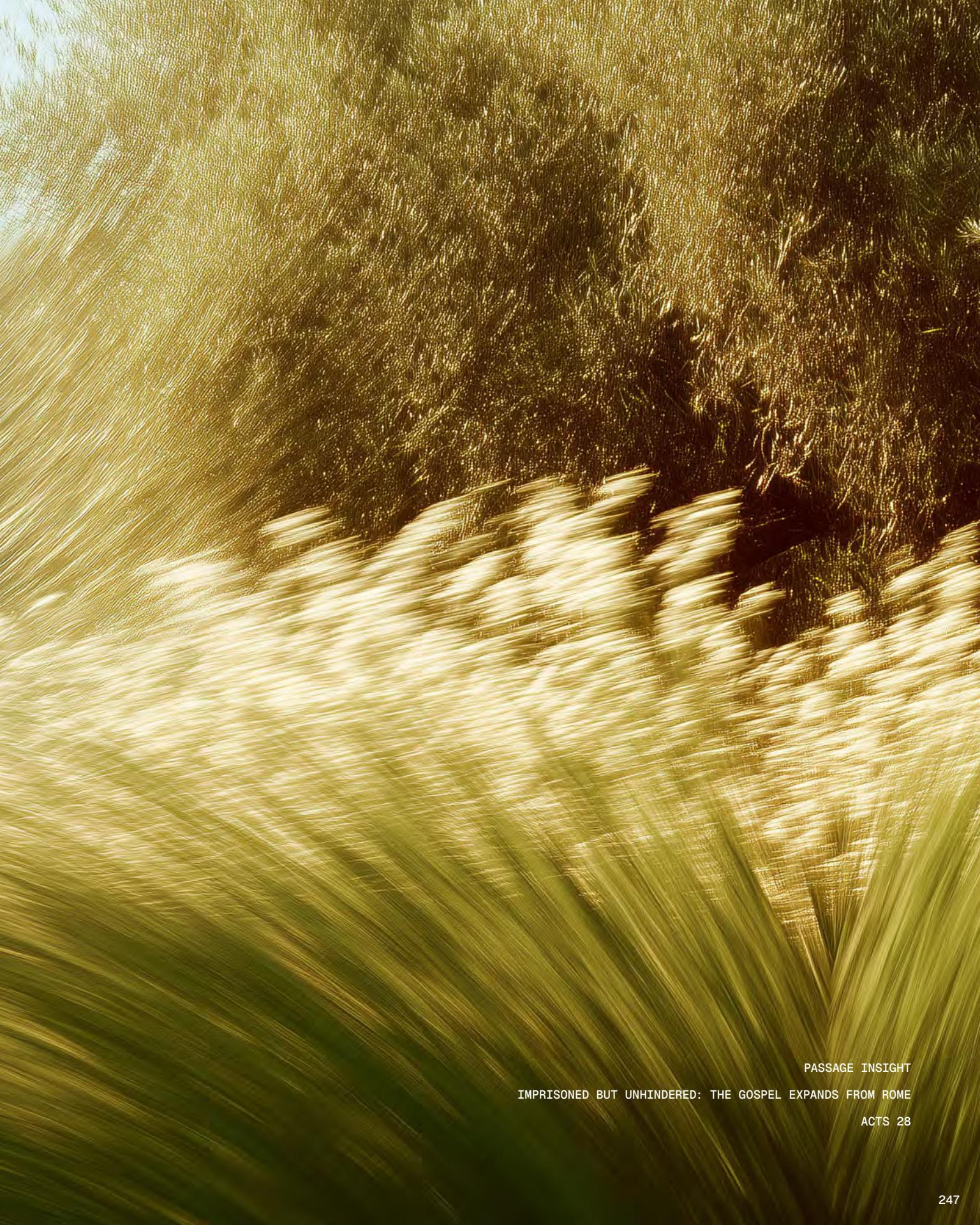
For two years, Paul remained in Rome, chained to the wrist of a member of the Praetorian guard, an elite group of soldiers who guarded the emperor and the royal city. During that house arrest, Paul wrote letters to the churches he planted in Ephesus, Colosse, and Philippi, and a letter to his friend, Philemon.

"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."

- Philippians 1:12-14

You cannot stop the gospel. It cannot be imprisoned. Jesus who conquered sin and death is not stopped by prison chains. He promised that His church would be built upon His gospel, and the gates of hell would give way in its presence. House arrest becomes a tool in God's hand to reach Jews and Romans, commoners and elite, religious and military leaders.

God is going to fulfill His plan to reach and redeem people from every nation. That is the Gospel-story. What Jesus launched in the Middle East two millennium ago has come to us. It did not start with us, and it does not, must not, end with us. We are caught up in a much larger story. There is no Acts 29 recorded in scripture because the acts of the Holy Spirit are still happening in and through us.



PASSAGE INSIGHT

IMPRISONED BUT UNHINDERED: THE GOSPEL EXPANDS FROM ROME

ACTS 28

ACTS 28:11-30

After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux.

¹² We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. ¹³ From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. ¹⁶ When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

¹⁷ Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. ²⁰ For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

²¹ They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

²³ They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶ “Go to this people and say,
“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

²⁷ For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.’

²⁸ “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles,
and they will listen!” ^[29]

Acts 28:29

Some manuscripts include here:

“After he said this, the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves.”

NOTES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

| What have been your favorite stories or teachings from this study of Acts?

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| After such a long and difficult journey, how is Paul received upon his arrival in
| Rome? How does it affect him?

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| Why does Paul gather the local Jewish leaders for a conference? What risk was
| he taking in doing so?

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| How is Paul's approach of witnessing in Rome the same as he has done in other
| cities? How was this different?

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| Why is it significant that the Jewish leaders in Rome were already familiar with
| the story of Jesus? How is this a strong start towards the fulfillment of Acts 1:8?

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| Some people believed Paul's message, while others rejected it (Acts 28:24).
| Why do people respond differently to the gospel, even when they hear the same
| message? How does this encourage us to remain hopeful and share the good
| news of Jesus to those around us?

DAILY READINGS

1. ISAIAH 55:6-13
2. MATTHEW 22:1-14
3. MARK 4:1-20
4. LUKE 12:22-34
5. ROMANS 1:8-17
6. COLOSSIANS 4:2-6
7. ACTS 28:11-30

APPENDIX A

MAPS

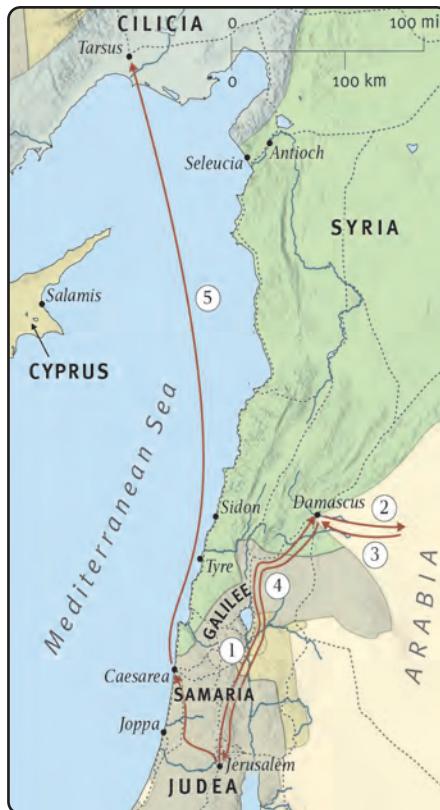
Included is a series of detailed maps, chronicling the missionary journeys and key events as described in the Book of Acts. Provided by Crossway (2008, All Rights Reserved), they trace Paul's travels across the Mediterranean world, from his early ministry in Asia Minor and Greece to his arrest in Jerusalem, imprisonment in Caesarea, and eventual journey to Rome. These maps offer a visual guide to the geographical and historical context of Acts, helping us better understand the expansion of early Christianity through Paul's ministry and trials.

The Setting of Acts

c. A.D. 30-60

The book of Acts records the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, thus fulfilling the risen Christ's words to His apostles in Acts 1:8.





WEEKS 14-15

Paul's (Saul's) Conversion and Early Travels

c. A.D. 35-39

As Paul approached Damascus to arrest followers of the Way, Jesus appeared to him (1). Galatians 1:17 makes it clear that soon after this Paul spent time in Arabia (2, 3) before going to meet church leaders in Jerusalem (4). When some believers learned of a plot to kill Paul in Jerusalem they took him to Caesarea, and he returned to his hometown of Tarsus (5).



WEEKS 16-17

Peter's Early Ministry

c. A.D. 39?

The apostle Peter traveled to the crossroads town of Lydda and healed a paralyzed man, leading many in that region to turn to the Lord. Later Peter traveled to Joppa and raised a woman from the dead. While Peter was staying at the house of Simon, a tanner in Joppa, the Roman centurion Cornelius sent for him to come to Caesarea.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

c. A.D. 30-60

Paul and Silas revisited the places in Asia Minor where Paul had preached on his first journey, while Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus. Paul and Silas visited Derbe, Lystra, and Antioch in Pisidia. From there Paul and Silas traveled to Troas, where Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia calling to them. Crossing into Europe, they passed through several towns along the Egnatian Way and traveled to the cities of Athens and Corinth in southern Greece. Then, sailing to Ephesus and Caesarea, they visited the church in Jerusalem before returning to Antioch of Syria.

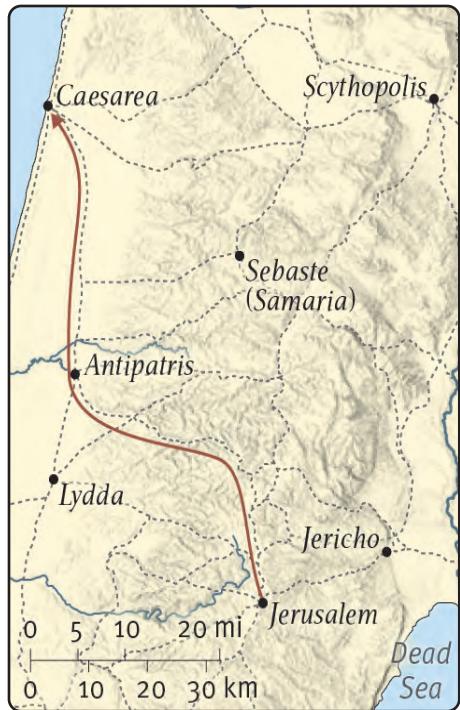


Paul's Third Missionary Journey

c. A.D. 52-57

Paul's third missionary journey traversed much the same ground as his second. Passing through Galatia and Phrygia, he proceeded directly to the great port city of Ephesus. After three years of preaching and teaching there, Paul traveled again through Macedonia and Achaia, strengthening the believers, and then finished with a visit to Jerusalem.





WEEK 38

Paul's Arrest and Imprisonment

c. A.D. 58

Paul's third missionary journey traversed much the same ground as his second. Passing through Galatia and Phrygia, he proceeded directly to the great port city of Ephesus. After three years of preaching and teaching there, Paul traveled again through Macedonia and Achaia, strengthening the believers, and then finished with a visit to Jerusalem.



WEEKS 40-41

The Kingdom of Herod Agrippa II

c. A.D. 63

Not long after Festus succeeded Felix as procurator over Palestine, Herod Agrippa II came to visit him at Caesarea. Agrippa had come to power after the death of his father, but his territory was greatly reduced by the Romans. Though Agrippa did not hold jurisdiction over Judea or Samaria, Festus, a Roman unfamiliar with Jewish disputes, sought out his advice regarding Paul's case.

Paul's Journey to Rome

c. A.D. 60

Appealing his case to Caesar, Paul was ordered by Festus to be transferred to Rome. Paul's journey was marked by difficult weather, as they had begun their voyage late into the season for sea travel. A bad decision to try to find winter harbor at Phoenix ended with the ship being driven by a storm to the island of Malta, where the ship broke apart. All aboard the ship survived, however, and Paul was soon placed aboard another ship that took him to Puteoli. From there Paul was taken to Rome.



APPENDIX B

SHARE YOUR FAITH

Your spiritual story is your most powerful tool for sharing Christ!

What is “your story”? Your story is the retelling of when and how you trusted Jesus Christ. It is your most powerful tool for sharing Christ with people who do not know Him because no one can deny your personal experience. With a little preparation you can be ready to share your story—ready to share about Jesus with people in your life.

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV84) says, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

PAUL’S EXAMPLE

Your story should follow a basic outline. The Apostle Paul shares his story in Acts 26 when he stood before King Agrippa in Rome. He was prepared as he explained his story in an effective manner with gentleness and respect for his audience. Paul provides a good outline we can follow with our own spiritual story:

1. **Acts 26:4-11** • Paul’s life before he trusted Jesus for salvation
2. **Acts 26:12-19** • How Paul trusted Jesus for salvation
3. **Acts 26:20-23** • How Paul’s life changed after trusting Jesus for salvation

DEVELOPING YOUR SPIRITUAL STORY

Some tips as you prepare your spiritual story:

- Pray and ask God to guide you as you prepare.
- Follow the Acts 26 outline:
 - My life before believing and receiving (trusting) Jesus;
 - How I came to know and trust Jesus;
 - How my life changed after trusting Jesus.
- If you placed your faith in Jesus as a child, emphasize your life since trusting in Him.
- Try to begin with a thought provoking or attention getting opening statement.
- Include enough detail to keep it interesting, but respect the time of your listeners.
- Weave the Gospel into your story so that others will know how to place their faith in Jesus.
- Practice your story with a mature believer. Get feedback, then practice it until it becomes natural.
- Smile! Remember, you are sharing “Good News!”

Some things to avoid as you prepare your spiritual story:

- Avoid using Christian jargon such as “saved,” “convicted,” or “born again” as these might confuse and alienate non-Christians.
- Be careful not to emphasize or glorify how bad you were.
- Avoid superlatives like “glorious,” “best ever,” “wonderful,” which tend to cause others to perceive your story as exaggerated.
- Try not to mention denominations or other groups even if you have positive feelings about a specific ministry or church. Your listener might not share your opinion.
- Do not give a false impression that the Christian life automatically becomes easy or that you no longer have struggles.

As you share your story, remember the ABC's:

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Be brief.

Center on Jesus.

Your story can be effective in any casual situation: over a meal or coffee, on the golf course, at the lake, at a ball game, on a drive; anywhere you are having a conversation with a non-believer can be a great place to share your spiritual story. People are interested in your story and may identify with it. No matter what your past has been, your story is valuable and can be used by God to help another person learn about faith in Jesus.





