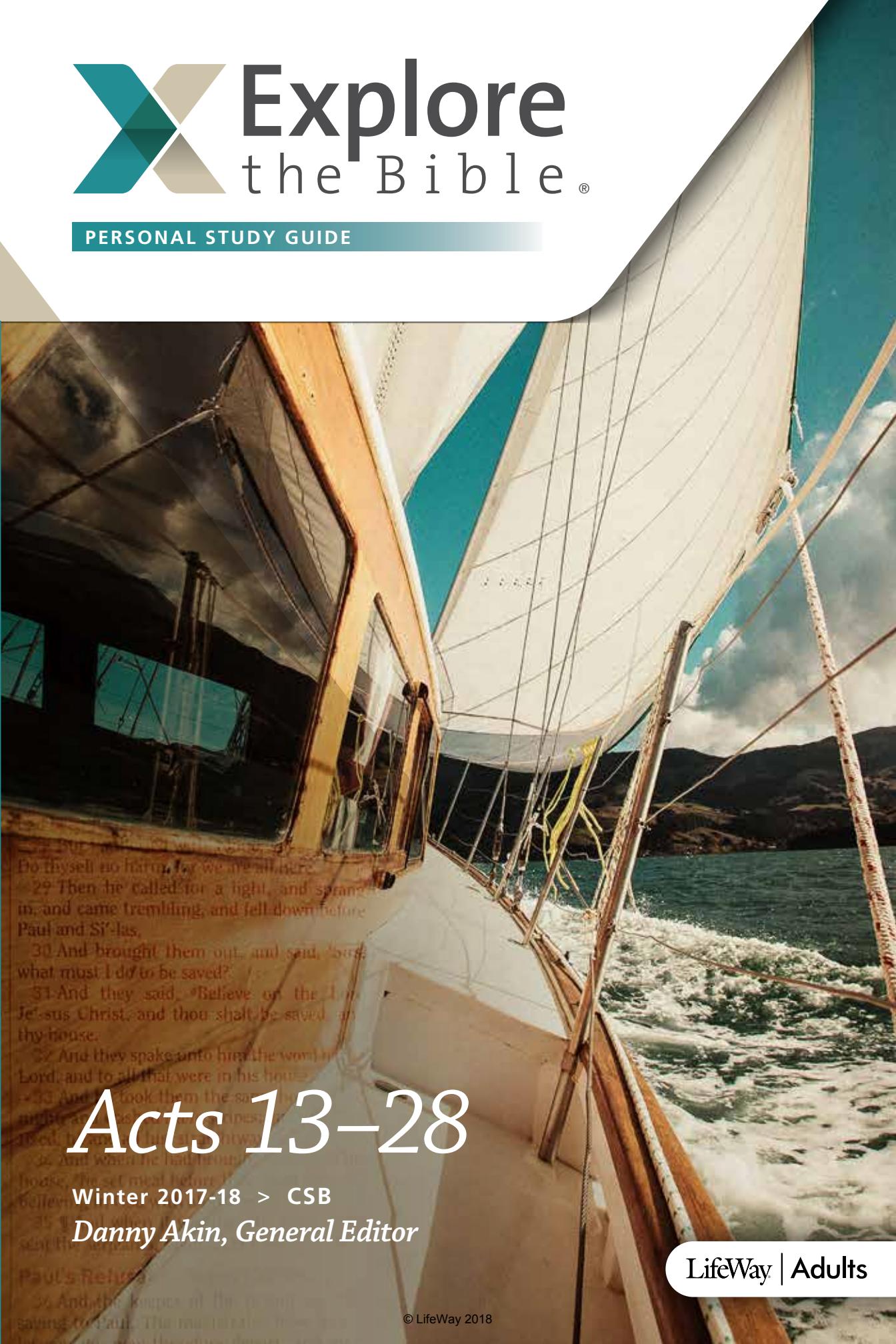




Explore the Bible.®

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



Acts 13–28

Winter 2017-18 > CSB

Danny Akin, General Editor

LifeWay | Adults

LIFE BY DESIGN

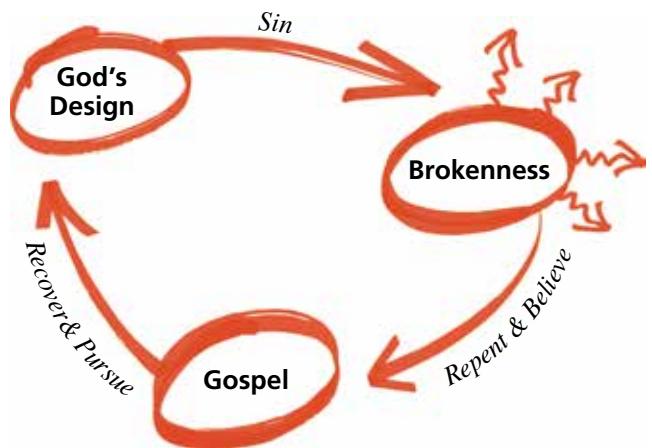
We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Genesis 1:31 and Psalm 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's Design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16, Colossians 2:14, and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Romans 10:9.)



When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's Design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His Design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:10.)

Now that you have heard this Good News, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live, die, and was raised from the dead—to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

Excerpted from Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel.

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*Evangelistic emphasis

**Sanctity of human life emphasis



» MEET THE WRITERS

Dwayne McCrary wrote this study on Acts 13–28. Dr. McCrary is a project team leader for ongoing adult Bible study resources at LifeWay, including the adult *Explore the Bible* resources. He also teaches an adult group and preschool group every Sunday in the church he attends.

Ken Hemphill also contributed to this study. Dr. Hemphill is the former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a prolific writer, and Director of the Church Planting and Revitalization Center of North Greenville University.

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ERIC GEIGER

VICE PRESIDENT,
LIFEWAY RESOURCES

DANNY AKIN

GENERAL EDITOR

MIKE LIVINGSTONE

CONTENT EDITOR

WAYNE MCCRARY

TEAM LEADER

KEN BRADY

MANAGER, ADULT ONGOING
BIBLE STUDIES

MICHAEL KELLEY

DIRECTOR, GROUPS MINISTRY

Send questions/comments to Team Leader by email: Dwayne.McCrary@lifeway.com; or by mail to Team Leader, Explore the Bible: Adult Personal Study Guide, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0175; or make comments on the Web at lifeway.com.

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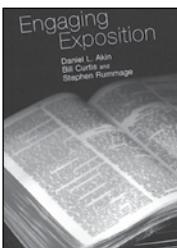
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A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR



In Acts 1:8 Jesus told His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came upon them, which He did in Acts 2, they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Acts 13–28 is the record of the gospel’s advance to the ends of the earth. What began in Jerusalem (chap. 1) will make its way to Rome (chap. 28). What started with the Jews will make its way to the Gentiles. What started with the focus on Peter (chaps. 1–12) will conclude with the focus on Paul (chaps. 13–28). The Holy Spirit will direct every step. The Lord Jesus will be exalted at every turn. The gospel will go forth in unstoppable power.

Acts is the history book of the New Testament. It provides vital and important information of the early church. There are so many valuable lessons we learn as we travel through its twenty-eight chapters. Several stand out. First, God is sovereign and His plan to reach the nations with the gospel will succeed. Second, the work of the Holy Spirit is essential to the advance of God’s mission. Third, God calls ordinary persons to do extraordinary works that reveal His greatness and glory. Fourth, the gospel is a compelling message that demands a response. Neutrality is not an option. Fifth, the work of getting the gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth is not finished! The mission of Acts will only be finished when the One who ascended in chapter one returns. Our role in God’s story is clear. Live in the power of the Spirit, bear witness to Christ, and watch what our God does through the obedience of His people!



Danny Akin

Danny Akin is President and Professor of Preaching and Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Dr. Akin has earned degrees from The Criswell College (B.A.), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and University of Texas at Arlington (Ph.D.) He has authored numerous books, including *Engaging Exposition*.



WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Agrippa [uh GRIP uh]—the last ruler of the Herodian dynasty; heard Paul's defense in Acts 26; known as Agrippa II; son of Agrippa I (who had James killed and Peter imprisoned, Acts 12:1) and great-grandson of Herod the Great (who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth, Matt. 2:1)

Antioch [AN tih ahk]—the name of two cities in Acts: Antioch of Syria, where the church set aside Paul and Barnabas for missionary work (Acts 11:19-26; 13:1), and Antioch of Pisidia in Asia Minor, where Paul preached on his first missionary journey (13:14)

Areopagus [ehr ih AHP uh guhs]—also known as Mar's Hill, a rocky hill near the Acropolis in Athens; also refers to the council that met on this hill; site of Paul's speech in Athens (Acts 17:19)

Cilicia [sih LISH ih uh]—region in southeastern Asia Minor, what is now modern-day Turkey; its most important city was Tarsus, the birthplace of Paul

Damaris [DAM uh riss]—a woman in Athens who became a Christian following Paul's speech at the Areopagus (Acts 17:34)

Derbe [DUHR bih]—city in the Galatian province of Asia Minor; Paul evangelized there on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:6) and returned there again on second and possibly third journeys (16:1; 18:23)

Dionysius [DIGH oh NISH ih uhs]—man in Athens who became a Christian following Paul's speech; a member of the Areopagus council (Acts 17:34)

Gamaliel [guh MAY lih uhl]—a Pharisee and member of the Jewish Sanhedrin; advised the Sanhedrin not to condemn to death Jesus' apostles (Acts 5:34); Paul's former teacher (22:3)

Iconium [igh KOH nih uhm]—city in eastern Asia Minor visited by Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey; they were persecuted there (Acts 14:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:11)

Lystra [LISS truh]—city in eastern Asia Minor visited by Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey; Paul and Barnabas were mistaken as gods there (Acts 14:8-18); Paul was stoned there (14:19); home of Timothy

Pamphylia [pam FIL ih uh]—a province in Asia Minor in what is now southern Turkey; one of the chief cities was Perga, where John Mark left Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:13)

BIBLE READING PLAN

- 1. Acts 13:1-3
- 2. Acts 13:4-12
- 3. Acts 13:13-15
- 4. Acts 13:16-25
- 5. Acts 13:26-33
- 6. Acts 13:34-41
- 7. Acts 13:42-47
- 8. Acts 13:48-52
- 9. Acts 14:1-7
- 10. Acts 14:8-13
- 11. Acts 14:14-20
- 12. Acts 14:21-23
- 13. Acts 14:24-28
- 14. Acts 15:1-5
- 15. Acts 15:6-11
- 16. Acts 15:12-21
- 17. Acts 15:22-29
- 18. Acts 15:30-35
- 19. Acts 15:36-41
- 20. Acts 16:1-5
- 21. Acts 16:6-10
- 22. Acts 16:11-15
- 23. Acts 16:16-24
- 24. Acts 16:25-34
- 25. Acts 16:35-40
- 26. Acts 17:1-4
- 27. Acts 17:5-9
- 28. Acts 17:10-15
- 29. Acts 17:16-21
- 30. Acts 17:22-29
- 31. Acts 17:30-34

- 1. Acts 18:1-4
- 2. Acts 18:5-8
- 3. Acts 18:9-17
- 4. Acts 18:18-23
- 5. Acts 18:24-28
- 6. Acts 19:1-7
- 7. Acts 19:8-10
- 8. Acts 19:11-17
- 9. Acts 19:18-22
- 10. Acts 19:23-27
- 11. Acts 19:28-34
- 12. Acts 19:35-41
- 13. Acts 20:1-6
- 14. Acts 20:7-12
- 15. Acts 20:13-16
- 16. Acts 20:17-24
- 17. Acts 20:25-31
- 18. Acts 20:32-38
- 19. Acts 21:1-6
- 20. Acts 21:7-14
- 21. Acts 21:15-25
- 22. Acts 21:26-30
- 23. Acts 21:31-36
- 24. Acts 21:37-40
- 25. Acts 22:1-10
- 26. Acts 22:11-16
- 27. Acts 22:17-22
- 28. Acts 22:23-30
- 29. Acts 23:1-5
- 30. Acts 23:6-11
- 31. Acts 23:12-18

- 1. Acts 23:19-24
- 2. Acts 23:25-35
- 3. Acts 24:1-9
- 4. Acts 24:10-14
- 5. Acts 24:15-21
- 6. Acts 24:22-27
- 7. Acts 25:1-5
- 8. Acts 25:6-12
- 9. Acts 25:13-22
- 10. Acts 25:23-27
- 11. Acts 26:1-7
- 12. Acts 26:8-11
- 13. Acts 26:12-18
- 14. Acts 26:19-23
- 15. Acts 26:24-32
- 16. Acts 27:1-6
- 17. Acts 27:7-12
- 18. Acts 27:13-20
- 19. Acts 27:21-26
- 20. Acts 27:27-38
- 21. Acts 27:39-44
- 22. Acts 28:1-6
- 23. Acts 28:7-10
- 24. Acts 28:11-16
- 25. Acts 28:17-22
- 26. Acts 28:23-24
- 27. Acts 28:25-29
- 28. Acts 28:30-31



INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

»» WRITER

Acts is the second part of a two-volume work by the same writer. He did not identify himself by name; however, clues within the book and its clear connection to the Gospel of Luke have led most evangelical Bible scholars to conclude that Luke, a physician and missionary associate of Paul (Col. 4:14), wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. He addressed both works to one named Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1), and in Acts 1:1-2 he referred to the Gospel as his “first narrative” about “all that Jesus began to do and teach” until He ascended to heaven. At the end of Luke’s Gospel, the apostles are told to remain in the city until they are clothed with power. At the beginning of Acts we find them waiting in Jerusalem as instructed. Acts is a sequel to the Third Gospel.

»» PURPOSE

Acts has often been referred to as “the acts of the apostles” or “the acts of the Holy Spirit.” We could also refer to it as “the continuing acts of Jesus.” Read the latter half of Acts 1:1—“all that Jesus began to do and teach.” If the Gospel of Luke was the narrative of what Jesus began to do and teach, then the Book of Acts is the continuing story of what Jesus is doing. He is still at work advancing His kingdom through His church.

»» KEY THEMES

- the activity of the Holy Spirit (1:8; 2:38; 4:8; 8:29,39; 13:2-3; 16:6)
- world missions (1:8; 11:20; 13:1-3)
- the exclusive/inclusive gospel (4:12; 8:5; 10; 11:20; 13:47)
- the providence of God (1:16; 9:16; 23:11)
- the role of prayer (1:14,24; 4:31; 6:4; 8:15; 9:40; 10:9; 10:30; 12:5; 13:3)

»» STRUCTURE

Acts 1:8 presents a rough geographical outline of the Book of Acts. The mission began in Jerusalem (chaps. 1–5), then started moving out into Judea and Samaria (chaps. 6–8), and finally with Paul went to “the end of the earth” (chaps. 13–28).

OUTLINE OF ACTS

I. Empowerment for the Church (1:1–2:47)

- A. Waiting for power (1:1-26)
- B. The source of power (2:1-13)
- C. Pentecostal witness to the dispersion (2:14-47)

II. Early Days of the Church (3:1–12:25)

- A. In Jerusalem (3:1–7:60)
- B. In Samaria: the Samaritan Pentecost (8:1-25)
- C. To the ends of the earth: Philip’s witness (8:26-40)
- D. Conversion and preparation of Paul (9:1-31)
- E. In Judea: Peter in Caesarea (9:32–11:18)
- F. To the ends of the earth (11:19–12:25)

III. Paul’s First Missionary Journey (13:1–14:28)

- A. Cyprus (13:1-12)
- B. Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52)
- C. Iconium (14:1-7)
- D. Lystra, Derbe; return to Antioch (14:8-28)

IV. The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)

V. Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (15:36–18:22)

- A. Antioch to Troas (15:36–16:10)
- B. Troas to Athens (16:11–17:34)
- C. Corinth (18:1-22)

VI. Paul’s Third Missionary Journey (18:23–21:16)

- A. The Ephesian Pentecost (18:23–19:41)
- B. Macedonia to Troas, Athens, Corinth, and return (20:1–21:16)

VII. Paul en Route to and in Rome (21:17–28:31)

- A. In Jerusalem (21:17–23:35)
- B. In Caesarea (24:1–26:32)
- C. Voyage to Rome (27:1–28:15)
- D. Ministry at Rome (28:16-31)

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THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Christ's death and resurrection are central to the gospel message.

ACTS 13:26-39

When we first meet new neighbors, we usually probe to find out a little about their history. We may ask about what brought them to the area, where they once lived, and about their family. We may also want to know about their religious beliefs. But these questions also open the door for them to ask us the same questions.

If you were meeting new neighbors, what questions would you ask them? If they asked you about your religious beliefs, what would you tell them?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 13:1-52

Paul and his fellow travelers, on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–14:28), arrived in Antioch of Pisidia, a town in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). As was their custom, Paul attended worship at the local synagogue. After a public reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders gave him the opportunity to address the group gathered (Acts 13:15). Paul took advantage of the opportunity by sharing the gospel with them (13:16–41). He began with God’s promises to Israel and explained how Jesus was the One promised.

The events leading up to Paul’s sermon in Antioch of Pisidia were part of a new day in the Christian church. After Jesus’ resurrection and immediately prior to His ascension, He told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would empower them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (1:8). The Holy Spirit filled them on the day of Pentecost, giving them the power to do the mission assigned by Jesus (chap. 2). Peter took the lead by preaching the gospel as a large crowd gathered in Jerusalem. The Bible tells us that 3,000 people responded to Peter’s sermon and were baptized. This was just the beginning of the growth of the church, as more were added daily. With this growth came persecution, with Stephen being the first martyred for his Christian faith (7:54–60). But persecution didn’t halt the spread of the gospel; in fact, the opposite took place. As a result of the persecution, the gospel was taken to Samaria (8:1), just as Jesus had directed.

At the stoning of Stephen, we are introduced to a zealous Jewish leader named Saul (8:3). While he may not have been the one who initiated Stephen’s death, he certainly did not object to it. This experience only fueled his desire to eliminate Christ followers. While Saul was on his way to Damascus, Jesus appeared to him. Saul (Paul) became a follower of Christ (see Acts 9).

The gospel message was preached to Gentiles in Antioch and large numbers of them began to follow Christ (11:21). Their acceptance of Jesus created a controversy that required the Christian leaders to take a stand. Led by Barnabas, a delegation was sent to Antioch to observe what was going on. Paul would eventually accompany Barnabas to Antioch and these two men would invest in the lives of the believers for a year (11:22–26).

The church in Antioch became the center of missions in the early church. This congregation commissioned Barnabas and Paul as church planters (13:1-3). The missionary team traveled to the island of Cyprus, proclaimed the gospel in the local synagogue, then set off to Perga. John Mark returned to Antioch, while Saul and Barnabas moved on to Antioch of Pisidia, a town in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) sitting on a trade route (13:14).

As mentioned earlier, Paul and Barnabas attended worship at the local synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. After a public reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders gave Paul the opportunity to address the group (13:15). The apostle took advantage of the opportunity by sharing the gospel (13:16-41).

Paul was invited to speak again on the following Sabbath to even a larger crowd. Many of the Gentiles present became followers of Christ, but the Jewish leaders led an opposition group that ran Paul and his fellow missionaries out of the region. They then set their sights on Iconium (13:42-52).

Read Acts 13:26-29 in your Bible. Note the different ways Paul pointed to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. What does his focus on Jesus' death and resurrection indicate about the importance of that event?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CRUCIFIED (ACTS 13:26-29)

Paul began his message by pointing to God's work in history. He called attention to God's choosing, prospering, and leading the Hebrews. Paul explained that the coming of Jesus was the fulfillment of all God's promises to Israel (13:23).

VERSE 26

²⁶ "Brothers and sisters, children of Abraham's race, and those among you who fear God, it is to us that the word of this salvation has been sent."

Paul brought focus to his message by identifying two distinct groups in the crowd. In the first group were the descendants of Abraham, **children of Abraham's race**. These were the people you would expect to find at a Jewish synagogue. The second group was identified as those who **fear God**. The people in this group would have been Gentiles looking for God but who had not yet become Jewish proselytes. In today's world, we might refer to them as seekers. In Paul's future travels, these would often be the first converts to Christianity.

Every person is either someone who has forgiveness of sin through Christ or is in need of Christ's forgiveness.

Paul referred to both groups collectively as **brothers and sisters**. Both groups were being offered salvation through faith in Christ. One group had no advantage over the other. Every person is either someone who has forgiveness of sin through Christ or is in need of Christ's forgiveness.

VERSES 27-29

²⁷ Since the residents of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize him or the sayings of the prophets that are read every Sabbath, they have fulfilled their words by condemning him.

²⁸ Though they found no grounds for the death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him killed. ²⁹ When they had carried out all that had been written about him, they took him down from the tree and put him in a tomb.

Paul went on to explain that the people of Jerusalem, led by the religious leaders, failed to recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah. They heard the Old Testament prophets read every Sabbath but did not make the connection. They had also heard John the Baptist, whom the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem questioned (vv. 24-25). They were looking for a political leader to free them from an oppressive Roman government. They should have been looking for the One who could free them from the greater oppression of sin and eternal death.

As a result of their failure to recognize who Jesus was, the people of Jerusalem and their leaders unknowingly fulfilled the prophecies they ignored (see Ps. 22; Isa. 52:13–53:12). Moses had recorded God's declaration that a person hung on a tree was under God's curse



(see Deut. 21:23). Paul specifically used the term **tree** in verse 29, reminding his readers of what they no doubt had heard many times.

Paul emphasized that the people of Jerusalem **found no grounds for the death sentence**. The greater guilt was on the Jewish and Gentile **rulers**. Paul had once been one of those who rejected Jesus. Had he been in Jerusalem at the time, he most likely would have endorsed the crucifixion of Jesus. The good news of salvation is offered to all, even to those who reject Him.

What do the actions of the people of Jerusalem teach us about humanity and our need for a Savior? How do people reject Jesus today despite knowing that He died for them?

BIBLE SKILL: Compare the biblical text to a similar passage.

Compare Paul's message in Acts 13:26-39 with the one delivered by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:23-36). What similarities and what differences did you notice? How do the circumstances surrounding the two events account for the differences?

RESURRECTED (ACTS 13:30-37)

VERSES 30-31

³⁰ But God raised him from the dead, ³¹ and he appeared for many days to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.

In the first half of this speech, Paul focused on the actions of God. He portrayed God as the sovereign Lord who acted on behalf of His people (vv. 17-25). The focus then shifted to the actions of the people who rejected Jesus (vv. 26-29). Having established that Jesus died and

was placed in a tomb at the hands of humans, Paul now turned the focus back to God and His acting on behalf of His people.

God raised Jesus from the dead. The bodily resurrection is the ultimate proof that Jesus is the Messiah. If there were any doubters in Paul's crowd, he reminded them of the eyewitnesses of the resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul gives an extensive list of eyewitnesses but did not do so here. There really was no need to point to anyone other than Jesus' disciples, who were **witnesses** to His resurrection. There was no question in the minds of the crowd that Jesus died and was buried, and more people saw Him resurrected than saw Him placed in the tomb. We can have confidence that Jesus is resurrected, living eternally.

Eye Witnesses of the Risen Christ

- *Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18)*
- *Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10)*
- *Two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)*
- *Peter in Jerusalem (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)*
- *The disciples with Thomas absent (John 20:19-25)*
- *The disciples with Thomas present (John 20:26-29)*
- *Seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-14)*
- *Eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20)*
- *Over five hundred at one time (1 Cor. 15:7)*
- *James, the brother of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7)*
- *Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:5)*

VERSES 32-33

³² And we ourselves proclaim to you the good news of the promise that was made to our ancestors. ³³ God has fulfilled this 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.

Paul emphasized that he and Barnabas were in the same line of witnesses as those who saw Jesus crucified and resurrected. Both men had visited with some of the eyewitnesses. After his conversion, Paul spent time in Jerusalem with the apostles, where he would have had opportunity to visit with these eyewitnesses (Acts 9:26-27).



Paul turned to the Scriptures to further emphasize that Jesus was the Messiah to whom the Old Testament pointed. He referred to Psalm 2, which Judaism understood as a messianic promise. The verses these Jews had ignored or misinterpreted now came alive with new meaning. Jesus had always been the eternal Son of God, including the time He spent walking on this earth. Through the resurrection, Jesus was exalted to God's right hand, seated as the Son of God, and addressed by the Father as **Son**.

VERSES 34-37

³⁴ As to his raising him from the dead, never to return to decay, he has spoken in this way, I will give you the holy and sure promises of David. ³⁵ Therefore he also says in another passage, You will not let your Holy One see decay. ³⁶ For David, after serving God's purpose in his own generation, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and decayed, ³⁷ but the one God raised up did not decay.

Paul pointed to additional Old Testament prophecies in Isaiah 55 and Psalm 16. God promised that David would have an heir who would rule eternally. This promise was fulfilled in Jesus. David was a great leader who sought God. However, he died and decayed. Jesus was more than a great leader, He was the Messiah and His resurrection pointed to that fact. Unlike David, the resurrected Jesus would never return to the grave and decay. The eyewitnesses and Old Testament prophecy affirmed both the resurrection of Jesus and His identity as Messiah.

Why do you think it was important for Paul to point both to eyewitnesses and to the Scriptures to explain the importance of Jesus' resurrection? How do these work together to give us confidence in the resurrection today?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Justification*

Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer into a relationship of peace and favor with God.

PROCLAIMED (ACTS 13:38-39)

VERSES 38-39

³⁸ Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers and sisters, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you.

³⁹ Everyone who believes is justified through him from everything that you could not be justified from through the law of Moses.”

Paul now got to the main points of his speech. First, ***forgiveness of sins*** is available through Christ. Throughout his message, Paul had presented the actions taken by God. God’s actions pointed to His mercy and grace. In Paul’s final point, he emphasized God’s greatest act of mercy and grace—the offer to forgive our sin through faith in His Son. Jesus’ resurrection was more than a way to prove He was the Messiah. His death, burial, and resurrection paved the way to the Father. Jesus’ resurrection was about the fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan.

No matter how hard we try, we will never be able to be right with God on our own.

Second, ***everyone who believes*** in Jesus ***is justified***. The term *justified* describes what Jesus does for us at salvation. It was a legal term that carried the idea of being made acceptable to God. Through Jesus, one can be made right with God. The ***law of Moses*** could only reveal to us our need to be made right with God. Only in Jesus can we be forgiven of our sins and made right with God.

No matter how hard we try, we will never be able to be right with God on our own. Most of us can’t go a single day without breaking one of the Ten Commandments. We know we need a Savior. There is nothing we can do to earn that forgiveness. There is no price we can pay to get us out of this mess caused by our own sin. Only Jesus, the long-awaited Deliverer, can provide us forgiveness through faith in Him and declare us right with the Father. That is the core message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What would you say to a person who claims there are multiple ways to God and His heaven?



IN MY CONTEXT

- In the face of our rebellion, Jesus willfully paid the penalty for our sin by His death.
- We can have confidence that Jesus is resurrected, living eternally.
- Faith in Jesus is the only means of salvation.

As a group, brainstorm different ways people try to justify themselves and their sin. Then look for ways Paul’s speech at Antioch of Pisidia gives an answer to those efforts. With whom can you talk this week using insights gained from this discussion?

Reflect on Acts 13:30 and how that verse applies to you. Consider how this verse impacts your daily life and your future life. Memorize this verse and look for a way to interject it into at least one conversation this week.

Record how you became a Christian. If you have not made that commitment, review the information on the inside front cover and find a trusted Christian who can help you. If you have made that commitment, take time to thank Jesus for justifying you before the Father.

Prayer Needs



MISGUIDED WORSHIP

Only God is worthy of worship and praise.

ACTS 14:8-20

When it comes to worship, the focus is often more on style than on substance. The purpose of all worship is not to please the crowd, but to worship God. Sometimes we are guilty of making ourselves the focus of worship, thinking that the music and other elements must please us. Instead, we should always be asking if our worship is pleasing to God.

***How would you describe most people's attitudes toward worship?
For what reasons do people attend a church worship service?***

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 14:1-28

After leaving Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas continued their missionary journey and made their way to Iconium. Once again, they entered the Jewish synagogue (Acts 14:1; see also 13:14). As in Antioch of Pisidia, the proclamation of the gospel created division among the people (14:1-2; see also 13:48-50). The gospel has a way of dividing people based on their acceptance or rejection of the message. When it was discovered that those opposing Paul and Barnabas were planning to harm them, they fled to Lystra, sharing the gospel along the way (14:3-7).

In Lystra, God used Paul to heal a lame man. The crowds mistook the apostle for a god and wanted to offer sacrifices to him. Barnabas and Paul were grief stricken when they saw the misguided response from the crowd. They tried to correct the people's misunderstanding of who they were. Refusing to be the focus of the people's worship, they instead tried to point the crowd to the one true God who alone is worthy of worship and praise (vv. 8-18). God, not man, is the focus of genuine worship.

Stirred by Jewish leaders who came from Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium, the people of Lystra dragged Paul out of the city, stoned him, and left him for dead. But Paul was far from dead. God spared his life. He reentered the city, and the next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe (vv. 19-20).

After evangelizing and making many disciples in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas began their return to Antioch, their home base. Along the way, they stopped in several towns they had previously visited—Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia—to strengthen the believers there (vv. 21-25). Finally arriving back in Antioch, they reported to the church everything God had done on this first missionary journey (vv. 26-28).

Read Acts 14:8-20 in your Bible. Observe people's different reactions to Paul and Barnabas. What do their reactions reveal about humanity's need and desire to worship?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

HEALING (ACTS 14:8-10)

VERSES 8-9

⁸ In Lystra a man was sitting who was without strength in his feet, had never walked, and had been lame from birth. ⁹ He listened as Paul spoke. After looking directly at him and seeing that he had faith to be healed,

Paul and Barnabas safely arrived *in •Lystra*. As they had done in other cities, they began speaking in public places. Unlike the other towns with synagogues, Lystra had no synagogue. Paul had to create his own crowd. A lame man attended one of those gatherings. Luke described him using three different terms. He pointed out that the man was ***without strength in his feet, had never walked***, and had been ***lame from birth***. No one doubted this man's disability or his inability to walk. We are not told his name, how he got there, or his religious views. All we know is he was obviously lame and sitting in the crowd on this day.

The lame man caught Paul's attention while he was speaking. Luke indicates that Paul recognized faith in this lame man. The man may have been listening intently or affirming the things said by Paul. Somehow, his actions indicated to Paul that he had faith. In the Gospels, Jesus often highlighted the faith of people seeking healing. For example, when the paralytic was lowered through a ceiling by four men, Jesus saw their faith and acted (see Mark 2:5). Faith in God's power is often an essential element in healing.

VERSE 10

¹⁰ Paul said in a loud voice, "Stand up on your feet!" And he jumped up and began to walk around.

Paul called out for the lame man to ***stand up***, and the man ***jumped up***. The man's obedience to Paul's directive was an act of faith. He could have dismissed Paul's command, but instead, he acted out of faith.

Imagine the scene as this man stood to his feet for the first time. He had never experienced anything like this. We could understand if he had taken his time. We would have expected him to cautiously



take a step and then another as he learned how to walk. The Bible tells us that he jumped to his feet and ***began to walk around*** as if he had done this his whole life. God had used Paul to bring about the healing of a man in a pagan city, just as He had used Peter to bring about the healing of a man sitting by the temple gate called Beautiful in Jerusalem (see Acts 3:2-8).

How does God use people today to accomplish His work? How does that compare to how He used Paul in this passage?

REACTION (ACTS 14:11-13)

VERSES 11-12

¹¹ When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

Paul and Barnabas had been speaking in Greek, the universal language of the day. The people in the crowd who witnessed what Paul had done began to speak in their local language. Paul and Barnabas didn't know the language and didn't understand what was being said. We can imagine they realized, however, that they had started a commotion.

Paul had been speaking to them about Jesus, yet they seemingly ignored his message. They interpreted Paul as being a god himself. A popular story in Roman folklore told of Jupiter and his son Mercury disguising themselves and walking through this region. The story tells of them seeking shelter, only to be rejected until a poor elderly couple took them in. It concluded with the couple being rewarded and those who rejected them being punished. The people of Lystra understood Paul and Barnabas's coming to be a visit from their mythical gods.

Zeus was the leader of the Greek gods, equivalent to the Roman god Jupiter. **Hermes** was the son of Zeus and equivalent to the Roman god Mercury. Since Hermes was known as the messenger of the gods, we can see why the people began to call Paul *Hermes* and Barnabas *Zeus*.

VERSE 13

¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the town, brought bulls and wreaths to the gates because he intended, with the crowds, to offer sacrifice.

The commotion escalated with the arrival of the local *priest of Zeus*. He oversaw the work of a temple to Zeus that sat just outside the city walls. The commotion was large enough that the priest presented an ox to offer as a sacrifice. The oxen would have been decorated with garland. A parade to the temple of Zeus would have been quickly organized. At the temple, the sacrifice would be offered and a meal shared.

The people of Lystra had heard Paul share the gospel and had seen the power of that gospel displayed through the healing of the lame man. However, they missed the point and tried to explain what they saw in terms of what they already were willing to believe. They were either unwilling or unable to recognize God's work.

What are some ways people misunderstand or misinterpret God's work today? Why do some people incorrectly attribute God's work to other people or circumstances?

REDIRECTED (ACTS 14:14-18)

VERSE 14

¹⁴ The apostles Barnabas and Paul tore their robes when they heard this and rushed into the crowd, shouting:

Paul and Barnabas immediately recognized what was happening. They could have easily gone along with the crowd and accepted the honor being offered to them. Instead, they responded by tearing their clothes. Tearing one's clothes was a way of expressing strong emotion, usually displeasure. The tearing of the clothes went beyond any language barrier that may have existed.



VERSES 15-17

15 “People! Why are you doing these things? We are people also, just like you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to go their own way, 17 although he did not leave himself without a witness, since he did what is good by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.”

Paul and Barnabas tried to help the people understand. They began by pointing to their own humanness. ***We are people ... just like you.*** They wanted to dispel any thought that they were superhuman or divine. They were ordinary people like you and me.

The two missionaries sought to redirect the crowd’s focus to the one true God. They explained their purpose in being there was not to punish or reward like the Greek gods, but rather to share the good news of the gospel. Believers who have been used by God as an instrument of His work must clearly point to Christ, giving Him all the credit.

Paul and Barnabas emphasized turning from worthless things and to the living God. The psalmist pointed to the foolishness of idol worship, explaining that idols have mouths, eyes, and ears yet cannot speak, see, or hear (see Ps. 135:15-17). Isaiah also pointed out the worthlessness of idols; they are made by hired craftsman with the hope they will not topple (see Isa. 40:18-20).

Believers who have been used by God as an instrument of His work must clearly point to Christ, giving Him all the credit.

Paul sought common ground by utilizing what we call “natural” revelation (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-32). He told of three things that set God apart from the false gods the people of Lystra served. First, this living God was the creator of everything. Paul quoted Exodus 20:11, which was part of God’s commandment for honoring Him on the Sabbath. This command was about worshiping the one true God, which was exactly what Paul was calling the people of Lystra to do.

The next point Paul made emphasized God’s kindness. God had revealed Himself to everyone through His general provisions for

His creation. Paul pointed out that God provided rain that produced bountiful harvests as a witness to His goodness and sovereignty. The group Paul addressed in Lystra was mostly pagan with little concern about Jesus' fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. Instead, Paul focused on how God's attributes and power are seen in nature.

VERSE 18

¹⁸ Even though they said these things, they barely stopped the crowds from sacrificing to them.

Paul and Barnabas regained control of the situation, but barely. No sacrifice was offered and no special honors were bestowed on the two missionaries. They had diffused the crowd and stopped the people from adding to their blasphemy.

What were the potential dangers if Paul and Barnabas had accepted the praise from the people? What attitudes did Paul and Barnabas display in pointing the people to Jesus?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

There is one and only one living and true God.

REJECTED (ACTS 14:19-20)

VERSES 19-20

¹⁹ Some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and when they won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ After the disciples gathered around him, he got up and went into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

Just when it seemed that the situation had calmed down, Jews came from other cities, determined to stop Paul at all costs. **•Iconium** was a little less than twenty miles from Lystra, but **•Antioch** of Pisidia was



about one hundred miles away. These visitors convinced the people of Lystra to join them in the mob action of stoning Paul.

Prior to his conversion, Paul had participated in a mob action similar to this with the stoning of Stephen (see Acts 7:54–8:1). Now Paul was on the other side of the mob action, being hit by the flying rocks. Rocks hit Paul with enough force that he fell to the ground as if dead. The groups assumed they had killed him and drug his body outside the city.

As Paul lay on the ground, a group of believers surrounded him. These were most likely people converted when the missionaries initially visited the city. Luke tells us that Paul stood up much like the lame man that had been healed, and walked back into the city with these believers. The next day, the two missionaries headed to **•Derbe**. The stoning did not discourage them from completing their mission; there were more cities needing to hear the gospel.

To what lengths might a person go to discredit or silence the gospel message? What can we learn from Paul's response that might help us deal with efforts to discredit or quiet the gospel message today?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare and contrast passages looking for similarities.*

Read Romans 1:26-32. Compare Paul's explanation of the response of pagans to the good things of God and the sermon he preached in Lystra in Acts 14:15-17. We refer to God's revelation in conscience and nature as "natural" or "general revelation." What is the role of general revelation? What are the similarities between the two passages? What can we learn about sharing the gospel by comparing these two passages?

IN MY CONTEXT

- God uses believers as instruments of His grace and mercy.
- Unbelievers sometimes misinterpret the work of God in and around them.
- Believers who have been used by God as an instrument of His work must clearly point to Christ, giving Him all credit.

List ways you can help unbelievers and skeptics identify God's work in the world. How can your group help you do the things you listed? What needs to change in your own life to point others to Christ?

Compare your attitude toward worship with the attitudes listed at the beginning of this session. Identify attitudes you need to change in light of what you discovered in today's study. What steps do you need to take to do so?

Focus on Acts 14:15. Identify ways you help others turn to the living God. How can you be more intentional in sharing the gospel with others?

Prayer Needs





AVAILABLE TO ALL

Salvation is available to everyone through faith in Jesus alone.

ACTS 15:6-11,24-31

Some matters require believers to agree to disagree. Some people view the eleven o'clock hour as the only time for a worship service, while others think it's okay to worship at other times. Some prefer one style of worship; others prefer a different style. Viewpoints surrounding Jesus' second coming might also be an area where we agree to disagree. But there are some beliefs that are non-negotiable.

What beliefs are non-negotiable? How can a person decide which issues are secondary and which are non-negotiable?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 15:1-35

Paul and Barnabas ended their first missionary journey by returning to Antioch of Syria (Acts 14:26). They had established a community of believers in several cities and had endured persecution. No doubt, they had many things to share with the believers in Antioch who had sent them. They certainly shared about the Gentiles who had believed the gospel and had come to faith in Christ (14:27; see also 13:46-48).

Several days after Paul and Barnabas's return to Antioch, a group from Judea arrived in Antioch and began to teach that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved (15:1). For centuries, Jews had accepted Gentiles into the Jewish faith through circumcision and keeping the law. These Judean men were carrying on that tradition, teaching that people had to become Jews before they could be saved by Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

Paul and Barnabas became aware of the Judean teachers and confronted them. The believers in Antioch realized this dispute could hinder future efforts to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. Since the dispute was with Judean people, the leaders of Antioch decided to send a delegation to Jerusalem to settle the matter. Paul and Barnabas were included in the group sent (v. 2).

The church leaders in Jerusalem welcomed Paul, Barnabas, and the rest of the delegation. They listened intently to Paul and Barnabas as they reported on their missionary trip and shared about the conversion of Gentiles. Former Pharisees who had accepted Christ and were now a part of the Jerusalem church called for the Gentile believers to be circumcised and to obey the Law of Moses (v. 5). The issue that caused the debate in Antioch was now front and center in Jerusalem.

Verses 6-21 record what is known as “the Jerusalem council.” At stake was the nature of the gospel. After much debate regarding the issue of requiring Gentiles to be circumcised, Peter, Barnabas, and Paul testified. The church leaders then agreed that all people, whether Jew or Gentile, are saved in the same way—by God's grace (v. 11). A letter was written and sent to the Gentile believers explaining the decision of the council. The church leaders requested, however, that Gentile Christians refrain from practices that would put a strain on their relationship with

Jewish believers (vv. 22-29). The Gentile believers rejoiced when they received the letter (vv. 30-35).

Read Acts 15:6-11, 24-31 in your Bible. Look for words and phrases that reveal the nature of salvation. Summarize what these words and phrases reveal about salvation.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

NO DISTINCTION (ACTS 15:6-11)

VERSE 6-9

⁶ The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this matter. ⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them: “Brothers and sisters, you are aware that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he also did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

The church leaders needed to address the issue. Luke identified these leaders as **the apostles and the elders**. Apostles were the original eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection and the elders were the pastors in the early church. Apparently, they considered the matter in front of the other believers assembled (see v. 12). The significance of the issue called for the entire church to be involved in the process.

We are not told how long the group debated, but it obviously took considerable time, as points and counterpoints were introduced into the debate. Finally, **Peter stood up** and addressed the group. As the leader of the apostles and a Jew himself, Peter’s comments would carry a great deal of weight.

Peter made four major points in his presentation. First, God had chosen him to share the gospel with **the Gentiles**. In the early days of the church, Peter was sent to share with Cornelius, a Gentile. God had communicated to Peter through a vision about different kinds of food,

some of which Peter would have avoided as a Jew (Acts 10:9-16). The message of the vision was clear: salvation through faith in Jesus was to be offered to Gentiles as well. Peter found other people present when he arrived at Cornelius' home, and he shared the gospel with any and all, regardless of their ethnic background.

God makes no distinction between people based on ethnic or religious heritage.

Second, the Gentiles willingly received the gospel. Cornelius and the others assembled at his house gladly received Peter and his message. Not only did they hear; they believed.

Third, the Gentiles' belief was confirmed by the giving of **the Holy Spirit**. These Gentiles received the Holy Spirit in the same way the Jews did on the Day of Pentecost.

Fourth, the experience was the same for both Gentiles and Jews who accepted the gospel. Peter was clear that God makes **no distinction** between people based on ethnic or religious heritage.

BIBLE SKILL: *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Reflect on Acts 15:9. What words stand out to you as you read the verse through repeatedly? What emotions does this verse elicit? When you read the phrase "no distinction" what first comes to your mind? What distinctions do we make that might hinder the flow of the gospel through the witness of our church?

VERSES 10-11

¹⁰ Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples' necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are."

Peter asked the people who demanded circumcision to explain why they required something God did not require. He compared adding



the requirements of circumcision and keeping the law to **putting a yoke on the disciples' necks**. A yoke was used to guide an animal and was usually seen as a burden. Peter understood that the law could not save a person; only faith in Jesus could do so. Every person of Jewish heritage knew the shortcomings and burden of trying to earn salvation by keeping the law.

Peter stated his position: Jews are saved **in the same way** that Gentiles are saved, through **the grace of the Lord Jesus**. Peter had witnessed this truth firsthand when he delivered the gospel to Cornelius. He had heard Paul and Barnabas report about the Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia. There was no doubt in Peter's mind that all people come to the Father through faith in Jesus. Salvation is a gift of grace, free to anyone who accepts the gospel.

When Peter stood up, debate dominated the assembly. When Peter sat down, silence fell over the whole assembly (see v. 12). Peter's speech paved the way for a God-honoring decision.

What unbiblical stipulations are placed on people today before being accepted into a local church? How do those stipulations compare to what was being faced by the early church?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS (ACTS 15:24-29)

After Peter concluded his speech, Paul and Barnabas told of all the marvelous works God had done through them among the Gentiles. This report was followed by a response from James, Jesus' half-brother, who was a leader among the elders of the church. After referencing Peter's speech, James concluded that the new community of faith would be made up of Jews and Gentiles. He then fortified his argument with the words of the prophet Amos (see Amos 9:11-12). He also called

for the group to draw up a letter that stated their decision that would be delivered to the believers in Antioch. The group agreed, and a letter was written for Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas to deliver.

VERSES 24-27

²⁴ “Since we have heard that some without our authorization went out from us and troubled you with their words and unsettled your hearts, ²⁵ we have unanimously decided to select men and send them to you along with our dearly loved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who will personally report the same things by word of mouth.

The letter was addressed to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (v. 23). The reason for the letter was identified in verse 24. The Jerusalem church leaders wanted the recipients to know that the teachers requiring circumcision had acted without the endorsement of the Jerusalem church. By contrast, the group carrying this letter was authorized by the church in Jerusalem to speak on its behalf.

The reference to *our dearly loved Barnabas and Paul* and that they had *risked their lives* for the name of Christ would have encouraged the Gentile believers. *Judas and Silas* are also identified, serving as additional witnesses to the decisions made by the church in Jerusalem. We know little about Judas (this was not the Judas who betrayed Jesus), but Silas would stay in Antioch after the delivery of the letter and eventually accompany Paul on the second missionary journey.

The letter emphasized the unanimous decision of the church. It appears that those who once called for Gentiles to be circumcised had changed their minds. The evidence presented by Peter and Paul and the leadership of James moved the group forward in unity. The believers in Antioch could rest assured that the letter they received represented the heart of the Jerusalem church. Having two men from Jerusalem and two men from Antioch deliver the letter and explain the situation assured that the message would be fairly delivered.

VERSES 28-29

²⁸ For it was the Holy Spirit’s decision—and ours—not to place further burdens on you beyond these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating



anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. You will do well if you keep yourselves from these things. Farewell.”

The letter quickly got to the point. First, it highlighted the role of **the Holy Spirit** in making this decision. His working through the testimonies and speeches were obvious. It was through His guidance that the church in Jerusalem came to the decision about to be reported in the letter.

Peter had accused the Judean teachers of trying to place an unbearable yoke on the necks of the Gentile believers. The decision of the council was that no such burden was required. The Jerusalem church had no desire to place a burden on the Gentiles beyond what was necessary for the unity of the church.

For the sake of unity, the letter called for the Gentile believers to do four things. These were not requirements for salvation, but were issues the Gentile believers needed to be aware of in order to maintain fellowship. The first action listed in the letter was to avoid **food offered to idols**. Paul would deal with this issue when addressing the church at Corinth (see 1 Cor. 8; 10). Some of the meat offered to idols in a pagan temple would often make its way into the meat market. Jewish believers equated eating this meat with idolatry.

All who follow Jesus should be welcomed into the church with open arms.

The second requirement was the prohibition of eating flesh with the **blood** (see Lev. 17:10-13). The third thing was to abstain from eating any **strangled** animal. Strangling was a method of slaughter that left blood in the meat. The final requirement dealt with **sexual immorality**. Many Gentile believers were accustomed to the lax pagan standards for sexual behavior and were being called to a higher standard as followers of Christ.

Salvation is available only through faith in Jesus. All who follow Jesus should be welcomed into the church with open arms. As a community of believers, we are commanded to live our lives in a way that promotes unity and builds up the body.

What standards should a church use when communicating appropriate ways of living out the Christian life today?

SECURE ENCOURAGEMENT (ACTS 15:30-31)

VERSE 30

³⁰ So they were sent off and went down to Antioch, and after gathering the assembly, they delivered the letter.

The official delegation delivered the letter to the church in **Antioch**. It was in Antioch that the trouble had initially started, and from here the delegation had been sent to Jerusalem to address the issue. One can imagine the people's anticipation as days passed, waiting for the delegation to return. Once the group arrived from Jerusalem, the church in Antioch assembled.

VERSE 31

³¹ When they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

After the letter was read, the assembly responded with joy. This was the news they had waited for, and the mostly Gentile church was greatly encouraged. They had a spiritual question and needed help. The leaders in the Jerusalem church were able to give direction and encouragement, and both the Jerusalem and the Antioch believers were strengthened through the process.

Judas and Silas, the representatives from Jerusalem, encouraged and strengthened the believers "with a long message" (v. 32). Verse 33 seems to suggest that Judas and Silas may have found it difficult to leave their new friends. After spending additional time with the believers in Antioch, the two men were sent back to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and proclaiming the message of the Lord (v. 35). Luke affirmed the continuing work of the Spirit. With the issue of how Gentiles can become part of the assembly settled, the gospel continued to spread.

What kinds of spiritual questions are being asked in the church today? How can the way a church handles conflict and potentially divisive spiritual questions be an encouragement to a community?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers can take joy in the fact that salvation is available to all who place their faith in Jesus.
- Believers are to demonstrate their trust in Jesus in word and deed.
- Believers can encourage others who are seeking answers to spiritual questions.

Review Acts 15:9. Ask God to reveal sinful distinctions you may make of other people. Confess any distinctions He reveals and begin to pray for the salvation of people you may know who are in the groups God reveals.

Who in your life needs the salvation that is offered to them? What can you share with them from this study that might encourage them? Make an appointment to visit with them.

Discuss how conflict is handled within your group. Identify lessons learned from this study about addressing conflict or maintaining unity in the church. What principles should your group or church follow in the future?

Prayer Needs



THE PROMISED ONE

Jesus is the promised Messiah, the One who provides salvation to all who trust Him.

LUKE 2:25-38

Christmas just wouldn't be the same without music. Whether it's in restaurants, on street corners, or even in the office, there is just something special about Christmas music that adds to the experience. It just wouldn't be the same without the tune of "Silent Night" or some other familiar carol ringing in our heads.

Why is music such an important part of the Christmas season? What songs do you look forward to hearing during this time of the year?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 2:1-40; ACTS 13:23-25

Luke emphasized the music of the first Christmas. He recorded Mary's song in response to Elizabeth's blessing (Luke 1:46-55). He also recorded Zechariah's praise that follows the naming of his son John (1:68-79), the angelic multitude (2:14), and finally the prophetic praise of Simeon (2:29-32). This final song of the first Christmas is part of our focus for this session.

Luke began his Gospel by connecting the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. Gabriel appeared to both Zechariah and Mary to announce the conception of both children. Both births were supernatural: Elizabeth was too old, and Mary was a virgin. Luke used similar language to describe the growth of each boy (1:80; 2:40). John the Baptist would be the one who prepared the way for God's Messiah. When Paul was preaching at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, he used John the Baptist's ministry to introduce the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as the promised Messiah (Acts 13:23-35).

Luke set the time of Jesus' birth by pointing to a decree issued by Caesar Augustus that called for every citizen to return to his hometown to be registered. Since Joseph was in the family line of David, he and Mary made their way to Bethlehem even though Mary was well along in her pregnancy. Once there, Mary gave birth to Jesus, fulfilling Micah's prophecy (Luke 2:1-7; see also Mic. 5:2).

For the third time in his Gospel, Luke told of angels being sent. This time, the angels announced the birth of Jesus to a group of shepherds. These shepherds made their way into the city and found Jesus, just as the angels had described. On their way back to the fields, they shared with everyone they met about what they had heard and seen (Luke 2:8-20).

Luke told of Joseph and Mary meeting the requirements of the Mosaic law for a firstborn son (2:21-24,39-40). After eight days, Jesus was circumcised and officially given His name. A woman was considered ceremonially unclean for the first 40 days after giving birth. After that time passed, she would then bring a sacrifice to the priest. Mary brought two turtledoves as a sacrifice, a provision made for someone living in poverty (Lev. 12:6-13). At this time, the family would also present their firstborn son to the priest to dedicate Him to the Lord.

It is in that backdrop that Luke introduced two characters. Simeon and Anna are mentioned only by Luke. Nothing is known about them beyond what he shared. However, they both gave testimony about the Child, recognizing Him as the promised Savior. They both responded with praise, with Luke recording yet another song about the arrival of Jesus in our world (Luke 2:25-38).

Read Luke 2:25-38 in your Bible. Note words and phrases that indicate emotions expressed. What do these emotions reveal about the significance of Jesus?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

SIMEON'S PRAISE (LUKE 2:25-32)

VERSES 25-26

²⁵ **There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him.** ²⁶ **It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah.**

All we know about the man named **Simeon** is found in these few verses. Luke characterized him as **righteous and devout**. *Righteous* would indicate that he was a good and honorable man. The Greek word translated **devout** is found in the New Testament only in Luke and Acts (also written by Luke). The word reminds us that Simeon was careful when it came to following his religious responsibilities.

Simeon is further described as **looking forward to Israel's consolation**. God had promised a time of comfort and renewed hope to Israel. Several prophets pointed to this promised hope, but Isaiah was the most prominent, describing a day of restoration (Isa. 44:26), compassion (49:13), and comfort (51:3). This consolation went beyond God's plan for His people. It included the role the Messiah would play in that plan.

Luke also said that **the Holy Spirit was on** Simeon. This connected Simeon to a small group of biblical characters that included judges,



prophets, and selected kings (Saul, David, Solomon, and a few others). These Old Testament characters were given the Holy Spirit to accomplish a certain task for a specific time. After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would reside in believers continually and permanently.

The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would see the promised Messiah before his death. Luke never tells us the age of Simeon, nor does he tell us his occupation. Simeon's actions were something usually done by a priest, but Luke does not tell us for sure. We have no idea how much time passed between when the promise was made and the day it was fulfilled. What is clear is that Simeon was looking for the promised Messiah and that God had kept His promise.

VERSES 27-28

²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said,

The Holy Spirit directed Simeon to the temple complex on this particular day. Simeon would have been standing inside the temple complex surrounded by the outer wall. Some historians have calculated the space to cover nearly thirty football fields. Imagine the scene as Simeon stands in this large complex filled with people and animals moving all around.

In the middle of this scene entered a young couple with an almost six-week-old baby. They were there to offer the sacrifice for Mary and to present Jesus for His dedication. Simeon was paying attention to what the Holy Spirit directed him to do. He approached the family and took the baby in his arms.

VERSES 29-32

²⁹ Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation. ³¹ You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples— ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.

Simeon broke out with a song, realizing the importance of this moment for him. He used the word *now*. It was a moment he had been awaiting ever since God had promised him that he would see

the Messiah. At that moment, Simeon was holding the very promise in his hands!

God had not spoken in four centuries, and now the silence was being broken like the rising of the sun pierces the darkest of nights.

Simeon said he could now die *in peace*. He had been as a faithful servant, keeping watch during a long, dark night. God had not spoken in four centuries, and now the silence was being broken like the rising of the sun pierces the darkest of nights.

Simeon saw the Messiah as more than a political figure who would deliver Israel from Roman rule. He saw Jesus as God’s salvation for all people. As *a light for revelation to the Gentiles*, Jesus provided salvation for *all peoples*. But this did not mean the Jews no longer had a place. In Jesus, they found their *glory* because they were the means through which God provided salvation to all.

How do people view Jesus today? How do these views compare to Simeon’s understanding of who Jesus is?

BIBLE SKILL: *Evaluate your emotional response to a passage.*

Read Luke 2:29. What emotions do you sense as you read of Simeon’s reaction to the babe in his arms? How was Simeon’s contentment found in Jesus? How does Simeon’s reaction reflect the reaction a person might have when they first express faith in Jesus?



A FUTURE PIERCING (LUKE 2:33-35)

VERSE 33

³³ His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

The shepherds had amazed Bethlehem with their account of the angels and what they had found (see Luke 2:18). Joseph and Mary were **amazed** at Simeon's announcement. We can only imagine how perplexing the song of Simeon may have been as this couple stood in the temple complex as this stranger held their son.

VERSES 34-35

³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary: "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed— ³⁵ and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Simeon turned his attention to Mary, directly addressing her. He told her that Jesus would cause some to fall and others to rise. Peter used a similar idea when he quoted Isaiah 8:14 and called Jesus a cornerstone that some people would stumble over (1 Pet. 2:6-8). A cornerstone is the stone on which the rest of a structure is built. For those who would place their faith in Jesus, He would be the rock on which they would build their lives. Jesus' whole ministry would be a sign of God's love for all people, but not everyone would accept that love.

How a person responds to the gospel reveals either an honest search for the truth or a prideful reliance on self.

Simeon's somber words to Mary about her soul being pierced can be understood in different ways. The ministry of Jesus would take Jesus away from home and cause a divide in her family. The most frequent explanation, however, is that this refers to the pain Mary would experience as she witnessed the crucifixion of her Son, which included Him being pierced (see John 19:34).

Simeon also explained that Jesus would cause the hearts of people to be **revealed**. Luke used this same term to describe Jesus' knowing the thoughts of people who opposed Him (see Luke 5:22). How a

person responds to the gospel reveals either an honest search for the truth or a prideful reliance on self.

Why do many people focus on the birth of Jesus but ignore His death? How does focusing on the birth while ignoring His mission and death affirm Simeon's words to Mary?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Salvation is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer.

ANNA'S AFFIRMATION (LUKE 2:36-38)

VERSES 36-37

³⁶ There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and was a widow for eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers.

Without telling us how Mary responded to Simeon's words, Luke quickly turned his attention to a widow named **Anna**. Mary may not have been given an opportunity to respond before Anna arrived (see v. 38). All we know about Anna is found in these few verses. Like Simeon, she was devoted to her work in the temple area. Luke noted her Jewish heritage, being of the lineage of one of the northern tribes (Asher).

Various ideas exist about Anna's age. Some understand Luke to be indicating that she was **eighty-four years** old the day she saw Jesus in the temple. Others believe that she had been a widow for eighty-four years, meaning she was more than one hundred years old. Either way, Anna was a senior adult who had been a widow a significant amount of her life.

Anna was constantly in God's temple. No provisions existed for a woman to actually live in the temple area, so Luke's description would



be like us saying she was there when the doors opened and was the last one to leave. As a prophetess, she would be included on a short list. Miriam, the sister of Aaron (Ex. 15:20); Deborah (Judg. 4:4); and Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:3) are called prophetesses in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Philip's four daughters are said to have prophesied (Acts 21:8-9).

VERSE 38

³⁸ At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Just as Simeon had been at the right place at the right time, now Anna was also. She approached at seemingly the very moment Simeon was handing Jesus back to His parents and began giving thanks to God. No interaction between Anna and Mary or Joseph is recorded. Instead, Luke notes that Anna spoke to the people in the temple area.

Luke identified those addressed by Anna as ***looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem***. The term used by Anna is synonymous with the phrase "looking forward to Israel's consolation" used in connection to Simeon (v. 25). Simeon and Anna were not alone in their hope for the Messiah. Joseph of Arimathea, the one who assisted in the removing of Jesus' body from the cross and in the burial, was also identified by Luke as a man looking forward to the kingdom of God (23:51).

Both Simeon and Anna responded with praise to God when they saw Jesus, the One who would bring salvation to Gentiles through Israel. Both Simeon and Anna realized that God's redemptive plan for all people would be fulfilled in Jesus. They showed understanding of the Old Testament prophecies that many of the religious leaders of the day failed to see or at least were unwilling to accept. God gave a glimpse of His salvation to these two ordinary people, and they responded with thankfulness and enthusiasm. Every believer should offer praise to God for His providing a means for salvation through Jesus.

What is the connection between praising God and sharing Christ with others? Can there be a powerful witness if there is no worship?

IN MY CONTEXT

- Jesus is the promised Messiah.
- Jesus' purpose in coming included His sacrificial death on the cross.
- Believers should offer praise to God for His providing a means for salvation.

Reflect on what Jesus means to you. How would you describe Him or introduce Him to a friend? How does your understanding of Jesus impact how you live your life? How should it?

As a group, list ways a person could remind others of the mission of Jesus? How can Christmas be used to point others to Easter and God's gift of salvation through faith in Jesus? Take one idea shared and put together a plan for taking that action in the next twenty-four hours.

Set aside some time to offer praise to God for sending His Son to provide salvation. Reflect on Luke 2:7 and the wonder of Jesus' birth. Write a prayer of thanksgiving based on your reflections.

Prayer Needs





STRENGTHENED

God strengthens His church through His faithful servants.

ACTS 15:36-41; 16:1-5

God chooses to use ordinary people to accomplish His purposes. He invites His people to play a role in expanding His kingdom. He allows us to be His partner with others who He also invites to work with Him. He brings people together who will make a greater impact than they could have made by themselves.

How do you respond to the idea that God invites people to be a part of His work? In what ways does this excite and scare people at the same time?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 15:36–16:15

As we study God’s Word, we become acutely aware that He chooses to work through human instruments. For example, when God wanted to redeem the righteous before the flood, He selected Noah to build the ark and become an instrument of His earthly activity. He worked through people like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and the judges. God has chosen to accomplish His kingdom activity on earth by taking ordinary people and empowering them to do extraordinary things.

In the Book of Acts, we see God using ordinary people to carry the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. These messengers not only crossed geographic borders, they also crossed cultural and racial barriers. Reaching the Gentiles forced the early church to define exactly what was required for a person to become a Christian. Some Jewish Christians wanted to require Gentiles to be circumcised before they accepted the Jewish Messiah. Following a debate by church leaders in Jerusalem, it was decided that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised. They recognized that Jews and Gentiles are saved in the same way—by the grace of Jesus (15:11). Once this hurdle was crossed, the door was open for taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Now the church faced a new question. Who would be God’s messengers in this kingdom-sized task? Paul and Barnabas had been commissioned by the church in Antioch to take the lead (13:3). They were companions on the first missionary journey (13:4–14:28), but would part ways over Barnabas’s invitation for John Mark to travel with them again. As a result, God formed two missionary teams, one led by Barnabas and the other led by Paul (15:36–41).

Paul’s team revisited cities he had preached in on the first missionary journey. But they also went beyond that original group of cities and visited key cities that would play a significant role in the early church, including Philippi (16:1–15).

Read Acts 15:36–16:5 in your Bible. Outline the result associated with each action identified in these verses. How are the results connected? Could the final result identified in 16:5 have happened without each previous action?



EXPLORE THE TEXT

PARTING WAYS (ACTS 15:36-39)

VERSE 36

³⁶ After some time had passed, Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s go back and visit the brothers and sisters in every town where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they’re doing.”

Paul wanted to make a second visit to the churches established during the first missionary trip. He proposed the trip to Barnabas to **see how they’re doing**. In other words, he wanted to check on their progress. Since these churches were made up mostly of Gentiles, he also would have wanted to share with them the letter from the Jerusalem church regarding the decision concerning the salvation of Gentiles. Sharing this letter would bring encouragement to these Gentile believers and also give them helpful guidelines for relating to Jewish believers.

Paul referred to their work as preaching **the word of the Lord**. He understood they were delivering a message that did not belong to them. The message was God’s message; the two missionaries were simply the means for delivering the message.

VERSES 37-38

³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take along John Mark. ³⁸ But Paul insisted that they should not take along this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work.

Barnabas agreed with Paul’s plan and **wanted to take along John Mark**. John Mark had traveled with Paul and Barnabas before. He began the first missionary journey but returned to Jerusalem after the team visited Pamphylia (see Acts 13:13). John Mark was now in Antioch and available for the trip. We should also note that John Mark and Barnabas were cousins (see Col. 4:10), which may in part explain why Barnabas wanted to give him another opportunity.

Paul thought it was inappropriate to take someone who had previously deserted them. He may have believed that Mark’s departure revealed a character defect that disqualified him from this type of work. When recording John Mark’s departure, Luke simply characterized him as leaving (see Acts 13:13). The Greek word used

here, translated *deserted*, is a much stronger word. Paul had counted on John Mark, but his leaving the team left them shorthanded. Paul did not want to face that situation again.

Profile of John Mark

- *Writer of the Second Gospel*
- *Son of Mary, in whose house the Jerusalem church met (Acts 12:12)*
- *Barnabas's cousin (Col. 4:10)*
- *Companion of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:38)*
- *Cause of a split between Paul and Barnabas when he left them during the first missionary journey (Acts 15:39)*
- *Was with Paul when the apostle wrote Colossians (Col. 4:10)*
- *Referred to by Paul as "useful to me in the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11)*
- *Described by Paul as a coworker (Philem. 24)*

VERSE 39

³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed off to Cyprus.

Luke did not gloss over or hide the conflict between Paul and Barnabas. Some scholars have suggested that their dispute was deeper than who traveled with them on this second journey. In Galatians 2:11-14, we find Peter declining an invitation to eat with Gentiles in Antioch when a group of Jews arrived. Others followed Peter's example, including Barnabas. Paul confronted Peter about this incident, though we are not told if he confronted Barnabas.

The two friends agreed to go separate ways. It seems likely that Barnabas saw potential in the young John Mark. Barnabas's investment in John Mark paid off. Other New Testament references give evidence that at some point Paul again became convinced of John Mark's usefulness (see 2 Tim. 4:11).

God worked through this disagreement to expand His kingdom. Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus. This is the last reference to Barnabas in Acts, with the focus shifting to Paul and his missionary team. Paul and Barnabas both had legitimate reasons for excluding or including John Mark on the trip. Both were faithful to their call and, as a result, God doubled His number of missionary teams.



What did Paul and Barnabas understand about God's call and purpose in their lives? How did that understanding impact their decision to part ways?

BIBLE SKILL: Compare similar passages.

Genesis 13:5-13 records a disagreement between Abram and Lot. Review the passage in Genesis and compare it to the conflict Paul and Barnabas faced. How are the stories similar? How are they different? What principles can we learn from both stories?

A NEW TEAM (ACTS 15:40–16:3)

VERSES 40-41

⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and departed, after being commended by the brothers and sisters to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ He traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Paul now needed a new partner for his trip, so he **chose Silas**. Silas was part of the group sent to Antioch after the Jerusalem council, indicating that he was trusted and respected by the Jerusalem church. The 250-mile trip from Jerusalem to Antioch gave Paul plenty of time to get to know Silas and to observe him as they interacted with various churches along the way and in Antioch. Silas was also a Roman citizen, which would be helpful on future trips (see Acts 16:37).

Luke stated that the new team left **after being commended** to the grace of the Lord. This suggests that the church in Antioch commissioned the two, just as Paul and Barnabas had been commissioned prior to leaving on the initial missionary trip (13:2-3). The new team made their way **through Syria and •Cilicia**, visiting with churches as they traveled.

VERSES 1-2

¹ Paul went on to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek. ² The brothers and sisters at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him.

Paul and Silas made their way to •*Derbe* and •*Lystra*. On Paul's first missionary journey, he and Barnabas were confused for gods after the healing of a lame man in Lystra. Paul would eventually be stoned and left for dead outside the city (Acts 14:19). However, there were some who accepted the gospel.

Now Paul returned to Lystra and met a young believer named Timothy. Timothy, his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois may have been some of Paul's earliest converts in this area. When writing Timothy later, Paul identified Lois and Eunice as believers (2 Tim. 1:5). Apparently, Timothy was discipled by these women (2 Tim. 3:15). Timothy's *father was a Greek* and his mother was a Jewish believer.

The believers in *Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of* Timothy. In many places, Timothy would have been seen as an outcast. By Jewish law, he would have been viewed as a Jew because of his mother's heritage. However, he would have been viewed as suspect since his father was Greek. In the church, he found acceptance.

Profile of Timothy

- *Friend and trusted coworker of Paul (Phil. 2:19-22)*
- *Had a believing Jewish mother and Greek father (Acts 16:1)*
- *A native of Lystra; well respected by believers there (Acts 16:2)*
- *Taught the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15)*
- *May have been converted on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:6-23)*
- *Paul required him to be circumcised (Acts 16:3).*
- *Recipient of two of Paul's letters (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2)*

VERSE 3

³ Paul wanted Timothy to go with him; so he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek.



Much like Barnabas, who saw potential in John Mark, Paul saw potential in Timothy. Paul invited Timothy to join him and Silas, but one issue would need to be addressed first. Paul required Timothy to be circumcised. This may seem like a strange request in light of the decision made by the Jerusalem church to not require circumcision for Gentile converts.

Timothy was the son of an uncircumcised Greek. Jews would have viewed him as a Greek. But in the eyes of Gentiles, he was raised by a Jewish mother and was therefore a Jew. In a way, Timothy was neither and both at the same time. By requiring Timothy to be circumcised, Paul was not caving in to the group that taught Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved (see 15:1). Rather, he was trying to make Timothy a more effective missionary partner to the Jews. In Paul's missionary journeys, he typically began in the Jewish synagogues where possible. Circumcision would eliminate potential problems by removing the stigma from Timothy's status in the eyes of the Jewish community.

Why was it important for Paul to assemble a team that would work well with him? How did the background of each man make him an asset to the team?

GROWTH SEEN (ACTS 16:4-5)

VERSE 4

⁴ As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for the people to observe.

With his new team now complete, Paul led the group ***through the towns*** he had visited in the past: Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. These towns were in the southern part of Galatia. If Paul's Letter to the Galatians was written prior to the decision by the Jerusalem church, one can see why he would have been anxious to share with them the letter written as a result of that decision. Having Silas on the trip gave even more credibility, since Silas was a member of the group sent by the Jerusalem church to share the decision about the inclusion of Gentile believers. Hearing the decision of the Jerusalem

church would have encouraged the Gentile believers and opened the door for more people to hear the gospel.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Cooperation*

Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom.

VERSE 5

⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Luke gave a summary of the results of the missionary work. First of all, the **churches** were **strengthened in the faith**. Luke used the same Greek word to explain what happened to the legs of the lame man who was healed in the temple (3:7,16). When healed, the man's feet were strengthened, meaning he could stand on his own. These churches and believers were now able to stand on their own. They had grown deeper in their faith and had a firm understanding of the gospel.

The second result Luke identified emerges from the growing faith seen in these believers. More people were being reached by the gospel. The presence of a missionary team sparked this effort, but the believers appear to have been just as involved as the team. Their confidence in the faith moved them to share with others who in turn accepted the gospel and were disciplined by other believers. Reaching more people for Christ and helping people grow in the Christian faith are portrayed as working together, complementing each other.

What is the relationship between evangelism and discipleship? Can you have one without the other? Explain. What kind of balance should be struck between evangelism and discipleship in your life?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Being faithful to God’s purposes in our lives plays a role in our decision-making process and personal growth.
- Believers must look for other faithful believers with whom they can partner to fulfill God’s mission.
- Believers should be involved in both the sharing of the gospel and encouraging spiritual growth in others.

How would you describe your calling and life purpose? Ask God to help you put your life purpose in writing. What are you doing that reflects your God-given purpose?

With whom can you partner to more effectively be involved in kingdom work? What actions do you need to take to foster that partnership?

Evaluate your involvement in evangelism and discipling other believers. In which one of these two activities are you more invested? What actions will you take to be more involved in evangelism and discipleship?

Prayer Needs



A CHANGED FAMILY

God uses our influence to lead others to Him.

ACTS 16:22-34

Some news is just too good to keep to ourselves. As hard as we may try to keep some things a secret, we just can't help ourselves. A job promotion or new job offer, an engagement, or expecting a child are events we can't wait to share, especially with the people we love. We want to see their reaction and allow them to share in our joy.

What is the best news you have ever shared with your family? What was their response?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 16:16–17:15

We find all kinds of stories in the Bible about families with news to share. God promised Abraham a son in his old age. Sarah laughed at the news and then denied that she laughed. Joseph had a dream about his father and brothers bowing to him, and he could not keep it quiet. Mary received news from an angel about a child she would bring into this world. Her news caused Joseph to rethink their relationship. In Acts, we find a jailer who discovered the truth of the gospel. His family heard the message as well and became followers of Christ.

Our path to the jailer begins with Paul, Silas, and Timothy starting their missionary journey. They first went through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia to revisit the places where Paul and Barnabas had preached the gospel on the first missionary journey. They wanted to go to Asia, but the Holy Spirit did not allow them to do so. While in Troas, Paul had a vision from the Lord that directed him to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10).

The team left Troas by ship and spent several days in Philippi, a Roman colony and a leading city of that district of Macedonia (16:11-12). While Luke mentioned several other Roman colonies, Philippi is the only one he described as a Roman colony. A Roman colony used Roman law and that may account for Luke's mention of its status, a detail that will be important as the journey unfolds.

When Paul visited cities, he typically attended the Jewish synagogue on the first Sabbath possible. No synagogue existed in Philippi, but several Jewish women met outside the city gate by the river for prayer. Paul found out about the meeting and made his way to the group to tell them about Jesus (16:13).

One of the women, Lydia, responded to the gospel message and she and her household were baptized. After her conversion, she invited the missionary team to use her home as their missionary base (16:14-15).

While in Philippi, Paul and Silas were followed by a slave girl who had a spirit of prediction, implying she was possessed by a demon. In the name of Jesus, Paul commanded the spirit to come out of the girl and it did so immediately (16:16-18).

Realizing they would lose potential revenue, the owners of the fortune-teller brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates. Laws prohibited foreign religious propaganda among Roman citizens.

The slave girl's owners falsely accused Paul and his colleagues of breaking this law. No mention is made of the profits they stood to lose as a result of the young girl being freed from the demon. A crowd assembled and the situation escalated quickly. Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into a Philippian jail (16:19-24).

Read Acts 16:22-34. Notice the attitudes toward Paul and Silas before, during, and after their arrest. How do the attitudes compare?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE SITUATION (ACTS 16:22-24)

VERSE 22

²² The crowd joined in the attack against them, and the chief magistrates stripped off their clothes and ordered them to be beaten with rods.

The crowd quickly turned into a mob, partly because of anti-Jewish sentiment in the city (see v. 20). The crowd began to attack the missionaries, so the *magistrates* took control. The magistrates functioned as judges and took the testimony of the girl's owners as credible evidence. The owners were most likely wealthy and had influence in the community. The magistrates apparently saw no reason to give Paul and the others an opportunity to offer a defense.

Luke stated that the robes of the men were torn off, capturing the rawness of the moment. Paul and the team were being prepared for a flogging. Flogging could be used as a way to get a confession, given as a part of a larger punishment yet to come, or as the lone punishment. Roman citizens could not receive this type of punishment, but neither Paul nor Silas revealed their citizenship at this time.

VERSES 23-24

²³ After they had severely flogged them, they threw them in jail, ordering the jailer to guard them carefully. ²⁴ Receiving such an order, he put them into the inner prison and secured their feet in the stocks.



After overseeing the beating of the missionaries, the magistrates handed them over to the jailer. They directed the jailer to **guard them carefully**. The magistrates may have thought that if Paul and Silas could free a slave girl, then they might also have the power to escape from a jail.

The jailer put them in **the inner prison** and placed their feet **in the stocks**. The stocks had multiple holes for the legs so the legs could be forced wide apart as additional punishment. We are not told if Paul and Silas were subject to that kind of treatment. We might think of the inner cell as the dungeon. Paul and Silas were not going anywhere.

Why do you think some people respond so strongly against the gospel message and its messengers?

THE OPPORTUNITY (ACTS 16:25-28)

VERSE 25

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

What a scene this must have been. With their backs bleeding and bruised and their legs in stocks, none of us would blame Paul and Silas for complaining in the darkness of the inner dungeon. But here they were, **praying and singing** with an audience of **prisoners**. We can assume that at least some of the other prisoners were rough criminals and probably not the most receptive audience. But on this night, they **were listening** to Paul and Silas praise their Savior. Believers can pray and sing even in the most difficult moments of their lives.

We don't know how the actions of Paul and Silas impacted the other prisoners. We are not told if any of them accepted the gospel, but we know they heard it. The prisoners must have been impacted in some way since they did not try to escape when given the opportunity.

VERSES 26-28

²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ When the jailer

woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped.²⁸ But Paul called out in a loud voice, “Don’t harm yourself, because we’re all here!”

At midnight, an *earthquake* shook the jail. Earthquakes were common in this region, but this earthquake was different. The prison was still intact without the walls collapsing, even though all the doors were opened and all the restraints were loosened.

The event woke the jailer. Most jailers had living quarters within the complex so they could respond quickly to any emergency. This jailer immediately understood the seriousness of the situation, assuming that the prisoners were escaping.

Jailers were responsible for the prisoners under their care. If prisoners escaped on their watch, they would have most likely been flogged and executed. This jailer decided it was better for him to *kill himself* than to face a beating with rods and the executioners at daybreak.

As the jailer prepared to take his life with the sword, Paul *called out* to him *in a loud voice*. He assured the jailer that everyone was present and accounted for. We are not told why they all stayed, but they did, and God would use their staying as a way to free a jailer from his sin.

How did Paul and Silas’s actions demonstrate their confidence in God? How would you describe their impact on the others in prison?

Profile of Silas

- *Silas and Silvanus are Greek and Latin forms of the same name.*
- *Leader in the early Jerusalem church (Acts 15:22)*
- *Carried news of Jerusalem conference to the believers at Antioch (Acts 15:22)*
- *Accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40-41)*
- *Imprisoned with Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:19-24)*
- *Served as Peter’s scribe and/or letter carrier (1 Pet. 5:12)*



THE CONVERSION (ACTS 16:29-32)

VERSES 29-30

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He escorted them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Luke emphasized the quick response of the jailer. He immediately called for lamps and torches from assistants working the jail. Most of us would make sure a structure was safe to enter after an earthquake, but not the jailer; he **rushed in** and **fell down trembling** at the feet of Paul and Silas.

The jailer could have asked a variety of questions of the two men. He could have asked about their reasons for remaining in the jail or for their midnight song service. Instead, he asked one of the most profound questions any person can ask: **what must I do to be saved?**

The jailer must have seen the earthquake as a sign of God’s judgment. He most likely knew that the two men were in the jail for religious reasons. He may have known about the slave girl they healed. The earthquake, combined with no prisoners escaping, got his attention. He wanted to know more about this gospel Paul and Silas preached.

VERSES 31-32

³¹ They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house.

The answer given by the two missionaries was simple and direct. The jailer was told to **believe** in Jesus, the only One who could save. Paul and Silas confidently stated that through faith in Jesus the man would be saved. Not *might* or *could*, but *would* be saved.

This news must have thrilled the jailer. He realized that everyone in his house needed to hear it. Luke does not tell us how the jailer’s family was told to come and hear. The jailer’s house most likely was near the jail.

When the jailer’s family arrived, Paul and Silas clearly communicated the gospel to them. That **they spoke the word of the Lord** indicates the missionaries gave a fuller explanation of the way of salvation—beyond the statement in verse 31. We should always be ready to explain the gospel to anyone at anytime.

The jailer could not decide for his family. Each person would need to decide for him or herself, but the jailer clearly made sure each member had the opportunity to hear the message and make that decision.

What does the presence of the jailer's family reveal about his attitude toward them? How do you see the same attitudes demonstrated today?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Family*

A husband has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family.

THE TRANSFORMATION (ACTS 16:33-34)

VERSE 33

³³ He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized.

When the jailer first met the two missionaries, he had treated them like common criminals. Jailers dealt with the worst in their society and as a result were not known for showing mercy. Believing the gospel changed the jailer. He showed mercy to Paul and Silas.

After the jailer cared for the missionaries, Luke said ***he and all his family were baptized***. The way Luke worded this makes it clear that the family members who accepted the gospel message were baptized along with the jailer. Baptism serves as means of declaring one's faith in Jesus. It is our public profession of faith in Jesus.

Notice that the group did not hesitate or wait for a more opportune time to declare their faith in Jesus through baptism. While baptism is not required for salvation, it is a first step of obedience symbolizing one's willingness to follow Jesus. Failing to take that step can lead to doubts, questioning, and guilt. This family knew they needed to take that step of obedience ***right away***.



VERSE 34

³⁴ He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God with his entire household.

The jailer then led his family to do something extraordinary. They hosted the missionaries in their **house**, serving **a meal** and celebrating. The jailer no longer viewed Paul and Silas as prisoners but as fellow believers in Christ. He had been commanded to guard these prisoners securely; now he served them a meal, risking punishment for himself. The jailer was more concerned about Paul and Silas's well-being than he was about himself.

The two prisoners must have returned to their cells after their meal in the jailer's home. Finally, realizing that the charges against Paul and Silas were bogus, the magistrates sent the police to tell the jailer to release the prisoners (vv. 35-36). Paul refused to leave until the magistrates came to personally escort them from the prison (v. 37). At this point, he revealed their Roman citizenship, causing quite a stir. This put the magistrates on notice since the punishment they had administered was unlawfully given. In effect, this also protected the believers in Philippi from persecution after Paul left town. Before leaving, Paul and Silas went to Lydia's house and encouraged the believers there (v. 40).

What things did God accomplish through Paul and Silas's imprisonment? How does that impact the way you react to tough times in your own life?

BIBLE SKILL: *Read various passages and summarize.*

Luke made it clear that the jailer's faith was evidenced by his ministry to and fellowship with Paul and Silas. Read Matthew 7:15-20 and James 2:14-19. How do these passages define the relationship between faith and works? Write a summary statement explaining what these verses teach about faith and works.

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers can praise God when persecuted and ridiculed, knowing that God uses their responses as a testimony to others.
- Believers must share Jesus with other family members.
- Salvation through Jesus leads to demonstrations of faith that are observable by others.

Memorize Acts 16:31. With whom in your family can you share this verse in the next seven days? Record how you plan on sharing this verse with them.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very little and 10 being very much, how would you rate the change that Jesus made and continues to make in your life? How do you show others that Jesus makes you different?

Prayer Needs





THE UNKNOWN KNOWN

Through faith in Christ, sinful humans can know the one true God.

ACTS 17:22-34

An unanswered question forces us to search. We may turn to the Internet, call a friend, or buy books on the subject with the hope of finding the answer. We are wired with a desire to know, to understand, to figure it out. We seek to know what is unknown.

What kind of questions do people face that cause them to search for answers? What sources might someone consult to find answers to these questions?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 17:16–18:23

When Paul visited Athens, he was troubled by the number of idols he saw. At one point he noticed an altar that was inscribed “to an Unknown God” (Acts 17:23). The people of Athens were known for their philosophical curiosity. Paul acknowledged that the multiplicity of idols indicated religious curiosity. He then declared that he was able to make known to them the identity of the god they worshiped in ignorance. Simply stated—he would make the unknown known.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy had crossed into Europe from Troas to do missionary work in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (16:6-10). In each city, people accepted the gospel. But Paul and his coworkers were also persecuted and harassed by non-believers. In Berea, Paul was escorted out of the city for his own safety. Timothy and Silas remained in Berea, while Paul waited for them in Athens (17:16).

Athens had a rich history and culture. In Paul’s time, it was not the city it had once been but still influenced philosophy, art, and literature of the day. Athens was dominated by idols, with some estimating there were more idols in the city than there were people.

Paul engaged a group of philosophers in the marketplace. This conversation would open the door for him to share the gospel with the other philosophers in the Areopagus, a court that sat on top of a hill. The response was mixed with some accepting the gospel and others rejecting it (17:18-34). Luke ended the narrative by simply stating that Paul left Athens and made his way to Corinth (18:1).

In Corinth, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, a married couple who were tentmakers. At some point, Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth. The team ministered in Corinth for at least a year and a half and saw many become believers. In time, the leaders of the synagogues brought charges against Paul to the proconsul Gallio, who refused the case. The team remained in the city for many days before returning to Antioch, ending the second missionary trip (18:2-23).

As you read Paul’s sermon in Acts 17:22-31, identify his main points. How does each point build to the next point to get to his conclusion (vv. 30-31)?



EXPLORE THE TEXT

UNKNOWN GOD (ACTS 17:22-23)

Athens was the home of Socrates and Plato and the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno. As a result, the residents were well versed in philosophical discussions. While witnessing in the marketplace, Paul was challenged by some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Epicureans viewed pleasure as the chief end of life. They did not deny the existence of the gods, but viewed them as disinterested in human affairs. The Stoics focused on rational thought. They believed in individual self-sufficiency and were essentially pantheists, seeking to live in harmony with nature. They gave Paul the opportunity to present and defend his teachings.

VERSE 22

22 Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect.

The **•Areopagus** could refer either to a place (also known as Mars Hill) or to a council that originally met at this place. In this case, it likely refers to the council that met there. As Paul stood **in the middle of** this council, he began by recognizing the people of Athens for their **extremely religious** culture. The way Paul worded it could have been a commendation or an accusation. The phrase *extremely religious* can be translated as superstitious or devout. If Paul meant for his hearers to understand the term as devout, he would have done so to establish rapport with the group. If he meant for them to understand the term as superstitious, he was sharing his disdain over the number of idols he observed in the city. Either way, he was about to focus on the problem of idolatry.

VERSE 23

23 For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed: ‘To an Unknown God.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

Paul emphasized that worship in Athens was directed toward objects. Temples, shrines, and altars dominated the city. Paul had come across an altar dedicated **to an Unknown God**. The people of Athens wanted

to make sure they had all their bases covered. They didn't worship any one deity; they worshiped any and all deities, even those they did not know.

The presence of an altar to an unknown deity opened the door for Paul to introduce them to Jesus. Paul used the phrase **what you worship** instead of *whom you worship*. He wanted to make sure he did not miscommunicate that by having this altar the Athenians were actually worshiping the one true God in ignorance. They were actually worshiping a piece of stone. Paul was about to introduce them to the one true God.

What misconceptions do people have about life and deities? How could those misconceptions be used to initiate a conversation about the gospel?

THE KNOWN CREATOR (ACTS 17:24-29)

VERSES 24-27

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands.

²⁵ Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. ²⁷ He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

Paul made a series of claims that moved his audience toward the gospel. First, he identified God as the Creator of everything. The word **world** translates the Greek term *cosmos*. The Greeks taught that deity was found in the heavens and in humanity. By using the term *cosmos*, Paul was helping them understand that the Creator stands above creation. Since God created everything, then it would stand to reason that He is **Lord** over all.

Second, if God created everything, then He had no need for a man-made temple or shrine. Why would the Creator confine Himself to only location?



Third, God does not depend upon humans. In fact, the opposite is true. Humans are dependent upon Him for life and everything else, for that matter. Paul's audience would have agreed in principle with him in some way. They would have seen divinity as totally self-sufficient and would have agreed that the divine was the giver of life and breath. They would have also agreed that temple worship was inferior to being in the actual presence of a deity.

Paul and his audience were on common ground but understood that common ground in very different ways. Their pantheistic view of God was totally different than Paul's monotheistic view. *Pantheism* means "all is God." Pantheists believe that the world depends on God but do not separate the world's existence from God's existence. Paul's declaration that God is the Creator who gives life and meaning makes every creature ultimately dependent upon and accountable to Him as the one true God.

Fourth, Paul claimed that all of humanity came **from one man**. His audience would have disagreed at this point. The Greeks believed they were superior to all other races, categorizing all other races as barbarian. Paul was saying that all people everywhere could trace their ancestry to Adam, whom God created. Thus, God was more than a local Jewish deity; He was God of all people and nations.

By pointing to God's setting the **times and the boundaries** for all nations, Paul was presenting God as sovereign ruler. God is the One who determines when a nation would rise, when it would fade away, and the extent of its borders. Paul's listeners were aware of the rise and decline of countries, especially their own. No nation determined its own path independent of God's divine sovereignty.

Finding God would require a proper response to God's revelation of Himself in Christ.

Finally, Paul stated the connection between the created and the Creator. God's total care of humanity was intended to cause all humans to **seek God**. The Stoic philosophers believed that humans could find God through reason. For Paul, their method was like groping in the darkness. Finding God would require a proper response to God's revelation of Himself in Christ.

VERSES 28-29

28 For in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’

29 Since we are God’s offspring then, we shouldn’t think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination.

The Stoic philosophers would have thought of life, movement, and existence in a pantheistic sense. Paul, on the other hand, used a Greek saying, *in him we live and move and have our being*, to anchor all of human existence in the one God who had created everything. In the second half of verse 28, Paul quoted from one of their own poets. He agreed that humans shared in the divine nature, but only in the sense that God created humanity in His image.

Since we are God’s offspring and the work of His hands, then no idol crafted by human hands is a sufficient representation of the one true God. If humans are like God, then God is not like any idol made of gold, silver, or stone. Since mankind is the offspring of the One True God, they must give Him the honor and worship that is due Him.

What misconceptions about God does Paul address in this passage? How are those same misconceptions expressed today?

BIBLE SKILL: Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a doctrine.

The term “general” or “natural” revelation is used to refer to God’s revelation of Himself in ways other than through His written Word. Compare Acts 17:22-29; Acts 14:16-17; and Romans 1:18-23. What can we learn from these passages about God’s general revelation?



JUDGMENT BY THE SON (ACTS 17:30-31)

VERSES 30-31

³⁰ Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

Paul returned to the idea he used at the beginning of his speech by using the word **ignorance** (see v. 23). Their ignorance was now a thing of the past since they had heard the gospel. Because they had heard the message, they were now responsible for responding to that message. Since all people are created by the same God, then **all people everywhere** are required **to repent**. The people of Athens needed to repent of their wrong belief and turn to God.

By pointing to a coming judgment day for all, Paul emphasized urgency. The people needed to repent and they needed to do it at that moment. They would be judged **by the man** God **appointed**. Paul was talking about Jesus. The resurrection was **proof** of Jesus’ authority to judge the world.

The discussion had come full circle. The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers initially had been curious about Paul’s message that included a reference to the resurrection (see v. 18). Paul explained that God’s desire for people to seek and know Him was evidenced in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In what ways is God’s requirement for repentance fair to everyone? How does Jesus’ being raised from the dead qualify Him to judge everyone?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Repentance*

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God.

SPLIT DECISION (ACTS 17:32-34)

VERSES 32-34

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some began to ridicule him, but others said, “We’d like to hear from you again about this.” ³³ So Paul left their presence. ³⁴ However, some people joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Any confusion about what Paul meant earlier about the resurrection was now clear. He was talking about people coming back to life. The Epicureans believed there was no human existence after death. The Stoics believed that only the immaterial spirit survived death. To both groups, any talk of a physical resurrection was foolishness. No wonder some ***began to ridicule*** Paul. However, others expressed interest in hearing more about what Paul was teaching. They had not been persuaded, but were at least open to talk about it later. Paul left the council meeting and soon thereafter left Athens.

Luke pointed out that as Paul walked away, he was joined by ***some people*** who ***believed*** the gospel. •***Dionysius*** and •***Damaris*** were specifically named, leaving us to speculate that these were names others would recognize. Dionysius was a member of the Areopagus. The church historian Eusebius identified him as the first bishop of the church of Athens. Damaris, a woman, was the other convert named. It would have been unusual for a woman to attend a meeting at the Areopagus, but she may have been a Jewish convert who initially heard Paul at the synagogue. We know nothing about her beyond her conversion and gender.

Paul had seen the emptiness of secular philosophy and was heartbroken. God gave him the opportunity to share the gospel message. Though there were mixed results, the people of Athens at least knew how they could find the once unknown God. It was up to them to decide if they would accept His offer to know Him.

Identify the different responses of the people who heard Paul in Athens. What other ways might a person respond to hearing the gospel for the first time?



IN MY CONTEXT

- People are searching for the truth, looking for meaning.
- God makes Himself known so that we can know and worship Him.
- No one is exempt from God’s judgment.
- While people may respond in a variety of ways, believers must continue to share the truth of the gospel.

Who do you know that is religious but not a follower of Christ? Identify insights from today’s study that could be used to share the gospel with that person. How can you do this in a loving way?

Reflect on Acts 17:20. How does this verse serve as motivation to share the gospel with others? Memorize this verse.

How would you categorize your response the first time you heard the gospel? What caused you to consider or reconsider the truth of the gospel message? How does reviewing your own journey help you understand the response of others to the gospel?

Prayer Needs



VALUE ALL

Christ values every person, so we should not exploit or disregard others.

ACTS 16:16-19; PSALM 139:13-16

Our lives are bombarded with images of people. Every day celebrities and people we have never met flash across our social media feeds and the news. Some images cause us to take a second look. Some move us to empathy. Some images we just pass over without trying to understand the significance of the image or the person.

What do our responses to an image of a person reveal about who we value and why?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 16:16-19; PSALM 139

Life is precious because it is a gift from God who alone is the source of life. God created humankind in His own image, which means we are relational, rational, and responsible. God created us to have an eternal relationship with Him. Human life is of such infinite value that God sent His only begotten Son to redeem fallen humanity. If God values each life, how can we do less?

This lesson brings together passages from Acts and Psalms. The Acts passage records an incident that took place on Paul's second missionary journey. Paul, Silas, and others had arrived in Philippi, a city without a synagogue. Some Jewish women met outside the city by the river. Lydia was a member of this group, and she was converted to Christianity as result of Paul's teaching. Paul continued go to this place outside the city walls to join these ladies for prayer. At some point, Paul encountered a slave girl who "had a spirit by which she predicted the future" (Acts 16:16), which implies demonic possession. She began following Paul and the missionaries as they preached. She would call out that the men were servants of God and that their message was the way of salvation. Paul cast the spirit from her. The girl's owners became upset with Paul, knowing the girl was no longer profitable to them (v. 19). This story set the background for the arrest of Paul and Silas and their experience in the Philippian jail.

The second passage in this lesson is from Psalm 139. In the first section of the psalm (vv. 1-6), the psalmist reflected on God's unlimited knowledge and humanity's inability to grasp what God knows. In the second section (vv. 7-12), the psalmist contemplated God's omnipresence. The psalmist concluded that because God is everywhere, He is always available to lead and protect (v. 10).

In the third section (vv. 13-18), the psalmist reflected on God's active involvement in his own conception and birth. God's intricate craftsmanship demonstrated the value God placed on the psalmist as a person created in His image. The last section of the psalm (vv. 19-22) shifts dramatically in tone. The psalmist issued a call to stand with God against evil in the world. God's enemies were his enemies (v. 22). People and forces that devalue human life and attempt to thwart God's divine purpose in the world must be opposed by God's people. The psalm ends

with a prayer that God will “search” and “test” and “see” and “lead” (vv. 23-24). We will never learn to value all human life like God without His continuing work in our lives.

Read Acts 16:16-19 in your Bible. Notice the number of times the words “profit” are used to describe the slave girl. Why was it important for Luke to emphasize her perceived value to her owners?

Read Psalm 139:13-16 in your Bible. Highlight words and phrases used by the psalmist to describe God’s role in the development of a human. What do these phrases reveal about God and His care for individuals?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FREEDOM GAINED (ACTS 16:16-18)

VERSE 16

¹⁶ Once, as we were on our way to prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She made a large profit for her owners by fortune-telling.

In the absence of a local synagogue, a group of women led by Lydia regularly met outside the city gates of Philippi to pray. Paul and Silas joined them frequently. One day while making their way to the prayer meeting, they encountered a **fortune-telling** slave girl. Luke identified her as being controlled by a spirit of prediction. Literally, he called the spirit a “python spirit.” Greeks used the python as a symbol of Apollo, who was believed to be able to predict the future. They believed Apollo could deliver his predictions through selected females. Some considered these women to be ventriloquists since they had no control over what they said.

Greeks and Romans often consulted these fortune-tellers, placing them in high demand. Not surprisingly, this led to their exploitation



by some. In the case of the young slave girl in this passage, she generated enough revenue to support more than one owner. These **owners** viewed her as a commodity.

VERSE 17

17 As she followed Paul and us she cried out, “These men, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation, are the servants of the Most High God.”

The slave girl **followed** Paul and the others as they made their way through the city toward the place of prayer. It appears that she would shout as she followed Paul. The Gospels tell of incidents when demons would make a scene by calling out the identity of Jesus. For example, when Jesus approached a demon-possessed man in the Garasenes region, the man cried out for Jesus not to torment him and identified Jesus as “Son of the Most High God” (Luke 8:26-28).

The slave girl used this same phrase to identify Paul. This was a common name used for God in the Old Testament. But in Philippi, the name would have also been used for Zeus. To complicate matters, the girl also characterized the message of Paul as showing **the way of salvation**. The Greek idea of salvation was physical deliverance from death. One can see how the message of Paul could have been distorted as she repeatedly **cried out** as she followed them.

VERSE 18

18 She did this for many days. Paul was greatly annoyed. Turning to the spirit, he said, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out right away.

Luke explained that the fortune-teller’s following and shouting wherever Paul and the other missionaries went lasted **for many days**. We can only imagine the distraction and confusion this caused. Some may have begun to associate her with the group of missionaries. Something had to happen for Paul’s team to continue to be effective.

Much as Jesus had done, Paul commanded the spirit to leave the girl. Two things stand out in Paul’s **command**. First of all, notice that he addressed **the spirit** and not the girl. Paul realized that spirit was the problem and not the servant girl. Also notice that Paul clearly acted **in the name of Jesus**. Bystanders would have clearly understood by whose power Paul commanded this spirit to leave. The power of Jesus

is seen in the response of the spirit. The spirit didn't argue or fight, but immediately **came out** of her. She was now free to be herself again.

How would you describe the difference between Paul's view of the slave girl and the owners' views of her? How would you define the motives of each in how they related to her?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Christian and the Social Order*

In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography.

THE COMPLAINT (ACTS 16:19)

VERSE 19

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

The owners reacted as expected. All they could see was lost revenue. The word Luke used to describe the demon's departure ("come out," v. 18) is the same Greek word he used to describe ***their hope of profit*** being ***gone***. We are not told what happened to the girl. She is not mentioned after the demon's departure. Her owners had no interest in her wellbeing; their only concern was the potential money lost. To them, she was a business asset, not a person.

Jesus saw the same reaction when He healed the demoniac in Mark 5. He cast the legion of demons that once controlled the man into a herd of pigs. The pigs immediately stampeded down a cliff to their death in the water below (see Mark 5:1-17). When the townspeople arrived and saw the man in his right mind, they asked Jesus to leave the area. They, too, had no interest in the wellbeing of the man; their concern was only the lost revenue.



Paul and Silas were taken to the city leaders, usually found in **the marketplace**. Luke pointed out that they were **dragged** there. They were treated like criminals for freeing a slave girl from a demonic spirit. Society will tolerate Christians until their actions impact the economy. When that happens, Christian views are seen as a threat and painted as a problem, regardless of the truth.

How might someone justify the response of the owners? How do people use the same justification today for devaluing human life?

Society will tolerate Christians until their actions impact the economy.

VALUED BY GOD (PS. 139:13-16)

The owners of the slave girl were blinded to the value of this person. In contrast, the psalmist celebrated the wonder of humanity, emphasizing God's involvement in the creation of every person. God's intentional design gives every individual worth and value at the moment of conception.

VERSE 13

¹³ For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

The word translated **created** is typically used in the Bible to refer to divine activity. God did not stop creating after the sixth day as recorded in Genesis 1. The psalmist realized that God's creative work continues to take place in a **mother's womb**. The psalmist did not ignore the role of the parents, but emphasized God's active involvement in the process.

VERSE 14

¹⁴ I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well.

The psalmist could only respond with **praise** to God. He saw God's work as wonderful, a testimony of God's power. He was astonished and

amazed at God's handiwork seen in the human body. The psalmist didn't need charts and overlays of the human body to recognize its complexity. ***I know this very well***, he claimed. The psalmist used the same word, ***know***, to describe God's perfect knowledge in verses 1-4. He was not claiming to have full knowledge like God. Instead, the psalmist was emphasizing his first hand knowledge of the wonders of God's handiwork. He needed no additional evidence; he knew the care with which he had been created.

God's intentional design of each person gives every individual worth and value at the moment of conception.

VERSE 15

¹⁵ My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth.

The psalmist again echoed God's all-encompassing knowledge by noting that God saw even his ***bones*** at the psalmists' conception. Nothing is ***hidden*** from God, including the conception of a child.

The psalmist also made the claim of God's knowledge based on the formation of the body. The word ***formed*** appears in the Book of Exodus when describing the embroidered screens for the temple (Ex. 26:36; 27:16; 38:18) and the linen tunic and turban for the high priest (28:39). The psalmist pictured his body as the work of an embroiderer who skillfully creates an intricate and beautiful pattern. We can think of the intricate network of veins, sinews, muscles, and nerves that make up the human body as a woven piece of art.

The term ***made*** points to conception, while the term ***formed*** deals more with the development of the child. The psalmist recognized God's involvement in both.

VERSE 16

¹⁶ Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began.

God observed the psalmist when he was an embryo in his mother's womb. One might compare this to the weaver who knows the threads and materials before he or she begins to create a tapestry. The materials and threads sit waiting on the weaver to bring them all



together into a one-of-a-kind masterpiece. One would be hard pressed to find a stronger statement affirming the sanctity and dignity of a yet-to-be-born child. God values each of us, even when we were in an embryonic state.

One would be hard pressed to find a stronger statement affirming the sanctity and dignity of a yet-to-be-born child.

The psalmist focused on his life before his life actually began. He declared that God had a plan for him. This same word translated **planned** was used to describe how God took dust and fashioned that dust into Adam (Gen. 2:7). Some understand the psalmist to be talking about the development of the embryo with the stages of that development being planned by God. Others understand the psalmist to be talking about God's providential care during our lifetimes. Both ideas are true and present within this psalm. Either way, our only response can be praise for God and His handiwork.

How do the words of the psalmist relate to the slave girl freed from the demon by Paul? How does our understanding of both passages impact our treatment of all people from conception to death?

BIBLE SKILL: *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Read Psalm 139:13-16 aloud several times. Emphasize the pronouns used for God in the passage. Then read it aloud emphasizing the pronouns the writer used of himself (I, me, my, etc.) How does each verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by emphasizing the pronouns the writer used for God and then the pronouns the writer used for himself?

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers must seek to take action as advocates for people who are devalued and marginalized.
- Society should be challenged to oppose businesses that profit from the devaluing of humans.
- Believers are to value all human life.

With your group, create a list of people or groups in your community who need an advocate. Propose ways the group could be that advocate. What role can you play in helping the class be an advocate for one of those persons or groups?

At the end of each day for the next seven days, spend some time reflecting on Psalm 139:14. Ask God to show you anyone you devalued or marginalized throughout that day. Confess your attitude to God and then identify ways you can begin to combat this tendency.

Prayer Needs





INCOMPLETE PICTURE

God uses believers to help others better understand the gospel.

ACTS 18:24-28; 19:1-7

We frequently encounter “incomplete pictures.” These pictures may include buildings under construction, stories partially overheard, or the scene of an auto accident. Our brain tries to complete the picture in an effort to make sense out of what we see. We may jump to conclusions based on our incomplete picture. Sometimes, we get it right, sometimes we don’t.

***How can filling in the blanks of a story or picture get a person in trouble?
How can knowing only part of the picture or story lead to confusion?***

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 18:24–19:41

On Paul’s third missionary trip (Acts 18:23–21:17), Luke introduces us to a believer in Ephesus named Apollos. Though Apollos had been “instructed in the way of the Lord” (18:25), he had an incomplete picture of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Priscilla and Aquila “took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately” (v. 26). While traveling through Ephesus, Paul encountered twelve disciples who had never heard of the Holy Spirit or baptism into Christ. In their case, more than instruction was needed; Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus (19:1-7).

Luke highlighted three different periods of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. First, Paul spent three months preaching in the Jewish synagogue before some zealous Jews forced him to move away from the synagogue (19:8-9). Second, Paul used the lecture hall of Tyrannus as a preaching point for two years. As a result, the gospel spread to all Asia, and the Word of God flourished (19:10-20). Third, Paul made the decision to go to Corinth, sending Timothy and Erastus ahead to make preparations while he stayed in Ephesus. A riot occurred when the silversmith Demetrius brought charges against Paul for damaging the reputation of the Ephesian goddess Artemis (19:21-41). Once the issue was settled, Paul left for Macedonia (20:1).

In addition to the events outlined by Luke, Paul carried on an extended ministry to Corinth while living in Ephesus. He wrote several letters, including 1 Corinthians, from Ephesus. He also received news and letters about the problems the church faced. In addition, he made several trips to Corinth from Ephesus.

Read Acts 18:24–19:7 in your Bible. Highlight descriptors used to characterize Apollos and the twelve men Paul encountered, looking for any similarities. What do these descriptors reveal about their character and desires?



EXPLORE THE TEXT

A PARTIAL WITNESS (ACTS 18:24-26)

VERSE 24

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, an eloquent man who was competent in the use of the Scriptures, arrived in Ephesus.

Luke was very specific in the way he introduced Apollos to his readers. We are told that Apollos was a *Jew* and *a native Alexandrian*.

The Egyptian city of Alexandria was the second largest city in the Roman Empire. It was known for trade, openness to intellectuals, and its large library. With a large Jewish population, Alexandria was the birthplace of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Apollos would have had access to the best minds of his day as well as to the Old Testament. This would also explain why Luke characterized him as *eloquent* and *competent in the use of the Scriptures*.

VERSES 25-26

²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately about Jesus, although he knew only John's baptism. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. After Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately.

Luke goes on to describe Apollos as having been *instructed in the way of the Lord*. He most likely had been taught about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Apollos took what he had been taught and was *teaching* it to others. He taught with fervor and accuracy about Jesus but lacked some knowledge. He *knew only of John's baptism*. As Apollos taught *about Jesus*, he likely taught the concept of baptism as a symbol of repentance.

As Paul had done, Apollos arrived in town and began speaking *in the synagogue*. Luke notes him as being bold, a term used to describe Paul's preaching as well (see 19:8). In the crowd were *Priscilla and Aquila*. This couple met Paul in Corinth during his second missionary journey. They had fled Rome when Claudius removed all Jews from that city. Since they were tentmakers like Paul, the three

worked together in Corinth. When Paul traveled to Ephesus, they went with him. Even after Paul left, Priscilla and Aquila remained in Ephesus (18:18-19). In Scripture, they are never mentioned apart from the other and were recognized by Paul as hosting a church in their house (see Rom. 16:3-5).

Instead of making a scene in front of the gathered crowd, Priscilla and Aquila **took him aside**. Once in the privacy of their home and away from the crowds, the couple offered Apollos instruction that filled in the details of what he was missing. They could have stopped him mid-sentence while teaching in the synagogue, but instead they dialogued in a private setting. Much could be learned today from how they approached Apollos.

What are the dangers of a person teaching a partial truth and teaching it well? How did the approach taken by Aquila and Priscilla strengthen Apollos as opposed to tearing him down? What principles for confronting a person did they follow?

A COMPLETE WITNESS (ACTS 18:27-28)

VERSE 27

²⁷ When he wanted to cross over to Achaia, the brothers and sisters wrote to the disciples to welcome him. After he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.

At some point after receiving instruction from Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos expressed a desire to go to **Achaia** [uh KAY yuh]. Achaia was a Roman province with Corinth as its capital. Luke does not tell us why Apollos wanted to go to Corinth. Most likely, he had heard the stories of Paul's work in the city and wanted to help. As a Jew with a Greek background, it makes sense that he would be qualified to reach both Jews and Greeks with the gospel.

The church in Ephesus supported Apollos and a letter of recommendation was drafted. Such letters were common and necessary in the early church. These letters protected the early church from faulty doctrine and false teachers. False teachers were rampant, anxious to make a living off the people in these new churches. They



saw an opportunity and the early church had to take steps to make sure traveling teachers could be trusted.

Apollos was welcomed by the believers in Corinth and made an immediate impact. Luke identified the people Apollos helped as **those who by grace had believed**. He was highlighting the fact that salvation comes only and always through God's grace. Apollos's message was consistent with Paul's message. Paul wrote to the Ephesians explaining that salvation comes through faith in Christ, not of our own doing but as a grace gift of God (see Eph. 2:8-9).

VERSE 28

28 For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.

Apollos's combination of zeal and biblical knowledge uniquely prepared him to debate the Jews of Corinth. Luke pointed out that Apollos used Old Testament **Scriptures** to help Jews understand that Jesus was **the Messiah**. He may have drawn from texts like Genesis 12; 49; Deuteronomy 18; 2 Samuel 7; Psalms 2; 22; or Isaiah 53. Luke's brief description of Apollos's ministry in Corinth is similar to what Paul wrote about him in 1 Corinthians. Paul referred to Apollos as a fellow servant whose unique ministry was to water the seed Paul had sown (1 Cor. 3:5). Apollos built on what Paul started.

How important was it for Apollos to build on his scriptural understanding while preaching and debating in Corinth? What role did his background play in his effectiveness?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Scripture*

All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

AN INCOMPLETE FAITH (ACTS 19:1-7)

VERSE 1

¹ While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples

Paul *traveled* over the mountains to make his way *to Ephesus*, avoiding the heat of the coastline. By the time he arrived in Ephesus, Apollos had already left for Corinth. The first group Paul encountered in Ephesus was identified by Luke as *disciples*. Some scholars believe these disciples were already followers of Christ. They point to Paul's assuming they believed in Jesus when he addressed them in verse 2. Others believe Luke used this term to identify them as disciples of John the Baptist.

VERSE 2

² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" "No," they told him, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

We are not told what caused Paul to ask the question in verse 2. It seems to be an awkward conversation starter. Something tipped off Paul. Based on the question, Paul considered the presence of *the Holy Spirit* to indicate a person was a true believer in Jesus. He did not separate believing in Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit, but treated them as connected. Both salvation and the Holy Spirit are received when a person believes.

The conversation between the men and Paul seems to indicate that they were not believers of Jesus, especially because they were willing to be baptized in the name of Jesus. They seem to recognize their need to accept Christ as Savior and to be baptized. By including the story of Apollos and these disciples in consecutive passages, Luke illustrated the difference between an incomplete understanding of the gospel (in Apollos) and a misguided understanding of the gospel (the disciples).

Their admission that they *haven't even heard* of the Holy Spirit seems a little odd. John taught that the One coming after Him would baptize with the Holy Spirit (see Luke 3:16). For them to miss that would be a big miss. They may have learned of John from one of his followers who had left out some of the details. At any rate, they had heard the message of John but not the message of the gospel.



VERSES 3-4

³ “Into what then were you baptized?” he asked them. “Into John’s baptism,” they replied. ⁴ Paul said, “John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Jesus.”

Paul asked about the *baptism* they had experienced. Their response confirmed Paul’s suspicions. They had accepted John’s teachings and were baptized as a sign *of repentance*. They may have also made John the centerpiece of their faith and not Jesus.

Paul explained that John’s message was about believing *in the one who would come after him*. The problem was they had failed to recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah. Their reason for baptism was noble (repentance), but their faith was misguided.

It is at this point that we see the greatest difference between Apollos and these men. We are told that Apollos was “instructed in the way of the Lord” (18:25), indicating that he had heard the gospel message. He fell short in his understanding of baptism. However, these disciples had not heard the gospel message that God provides salvation by grace through faith in His Son, Jesus.

What are the dangers of trusting in baptism rather than faith in Jesus for one’s salvation? How can trusting in baptism cause a false hope?

BIBLE SKILL: *Create a compare and contrast chart to study a passage.*

On one side of a vertical line, write words and phrases that describe Apollos (Acts 18:24-28). On the other side, write words and phrases that describe the twelve disciples of John (Acts 19:1-7). Use the chart to gain a clearer understanding of why Apollos received further instruction while the twelve received baptism in the name of Jesus.

APOLLOS

THE TWELVE DISICPLES OF JOHN

VERSE 5

⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

These disciples responded immediately to Paul and *were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus*. The message of John had prepared them for a quick response to the gospel message. These men were required to be baptized since they had not yet identified with Christ through baptism.

VERSES 6-7

⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak in other tongues and to prophesy. ⁷ Now there were about twelve men in all.

When Paul *laid his hands on them*, three things happened. First, they received *the Holy Spirit*. The next two actions would be evidence of this first event. Secondly, they began speaking *in other tongues* (see Acts 2:4; 10:46). In Acts 8:14-17, Luke recorded Peter and John laying hands on Samaritans who accepted the gospel message. Luke did not record the Samaritans speaking in other languages, but receiving the Spirit was outwardly obvious in some way. The third action was prophesying. In a sense, the Pentecost experience of Acts 2 was duplicated by God now with these men.

Even with that said, the laying on of hands was not a part of the original Pentecost event. No precise pattern can be found in the Book of Acts for receiving the Holy Spirit. When we look at the entire Book of Acts, we will find that the Spirit came in various times and ways. God gave His Spirit to every believer as He saw fit. What is clear is that the presence of the Holy Spirit serves as a sign that a person is a true believer of Jesus. Today, believers in Jesus receive the Holy Spirit the moment they are converted. There is no such thing as a Christian who does not have the Holy Spirit living inside of them (Rom. 8:16).

How would you explain the value of baptism and its place in the life of the believer? What can be pointed to as proof that a person is a believer? How can a person be certain of his salvation?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers need to make sure that boldness and eloquence are accompanied by depth of understanding when presenting the gospel.
- The church is strengthened when believers who have depth of understanding share a complete picture of the gospel.
- Genuine faith in Jesus is demonstrated through baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit.

How can you help others gain a clear picture of the gospel message? What principles did Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul follow? How can you follow those principles as you share the gospel message?

What are you doing to deepen your understanding of the gospel? What action can you take in the next seven days that will help you deepen your understanding?

Reflect on Acts 18:24 and 28. What needs to change so that what was said of Apollos could be said about you? Review these verses regularly as a reminder of the importance of pointing to Scripture when sharing the gospel.

Prayer Needs



DELIVERED

Sharing the gospel is worth the sacrifice and effort.

ACTS 20:22-35

Goodbyes are hard. They are hard when you know you may never see that person again. When leaving for college, work, or other reasons, you will eventually move on and so will the people left behind. That doesn't negate the relationships, but it does change them. They are no longer your neighbors, your coworkers, or your classmates.

What is the best way to say goodbye to friends? What would you want a friend to remember about you?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 20:1–21:26

It was time for Paul to move on. Ephesus had become a second home for Paul. With Ephesus being his home base, Paul traveled to Macedonia, possibly visiting Philippi and Thessalonica. The apostle wrote First Corinthians while in Ephesus, and from Macedonia he wrote Second Corinthians. From there, Paul traveled to Greece, where he stayed for three months (Acts 20:1-3).

A plot devised by the Jews to kill Paul caused him to change his travel plans, and he headed back through Macedonia to his hometown of Troas (20:3). It was in Troas that Eutychus fell from a third story window and had to be revived by Paul (20:7-12).

From Troas, Paul sailed to Miletus. In a hurry to make it to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost, he sailed past Ephesus. Nevertheless, when he stopped at Miletus, he sent for the church elders from Ephesus to deliver his farewell address and to caution them about challenges they would face (20:17-38).

Paul continued on to Tyre, where believers warned him not to travel to Jerusalem (21:4). In Caesarea, Paul stayed in the house of Philip the evangelist. While there, Paul met Agabus, who prophesied that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem (21:8-12). In spite of the danger ahead, he continued to make his way to Jerusalem.

Once in Jerusalem, Paul reported to the church about God's work among the Gentiles. The church leaders, grateful for the Gentile believers, raised the issue of the Jewish believers who reported that Paul was teaching Jews to abandon the law. A plan was proposed to solve the problem. Instead, the situation became worse with the warnings given becoming a reality (21:15-36).

Read Acts 20:22-35 in your Bible. Look for words and phrases that express Paul's resolve to share the gospel. How did Paul's goal of sharing the gospel impact his decision to go to Jerusalem?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

HIS COMMITMENT (ACTS 20:22-24)

With the Ephesian church leaders now in Miletus, Paul began to address them by recounting past experiences with them. He emphasized ministering in the church with humility, passion, and boldness in the midst of conflict (vv. 19-20). He had faithfully witnessed to unbelievers about their need for repentance and faith (v. 21). After reflecting on the past, Paul turned his attention to what lay ahead.

VERSES 22-23

22 “And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, compelled by the Spirit, not knowing what I will encounter there, 23 except that in every town the Holy Spirit warns me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me.

Paul had decided to return to Jerusalem in spite of the potential dangers. He had made the decision before he left Ephesus, and no one was going to change his mind (see Acts 19:21). Paul reminded his hearers that the Holy Spirit was pushing him to go to Jerusalem.

The apostle was unsure about what lay ahead for him. The only thing he knew about his future was that he would go to Jerusalem, that he would faithfully share the gospel, and that he would face opposition once in Jerusalem. The *Holy Spirit* had already told Paul that *chains and afflictions* were awaiting him once he arrived in Jerusalem. On multiple occasions while on this specific trip, Paul had received warnings about going to Jerusalem. Luke recorded two specific warnings—one in Tyre and the other in Caesarea (see Acts 21:4,11). The Holy Spirit was preparing Paul for what he was about to endure for the sake of the gospel.

VERSE 24

24 But I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God’s grace.

Paul was all in. The warning did not scare him or keep him from doing what he knew was required for the sake of the gospel. As Paul considered the cost of obedience, he realized that the greater cost would be found in failing to share the gospel. He had already been crucified



with Christ (see Gal. 2:20). He was ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of the gospel, calling his life of **no value** when compared to the gospel.

As Paul considered the cost of obedience, he realized that the greater cost would be found in failing to share the gospel.

When writing to Timothy, Paul compared the Christian life to running a race (see 2 Tim. 4:7). In this passage as well, he compared his ministry to running a race. To win the race, the runner must stay the **course** and keep running. Paul was intent on winning his assigned race. Runners endure the pain of the race not just to run, but to finish and to do so well. Paul knew that only through finishing well would he find true satisfaction in this life.

Paul's race and ministry was summed up as testifying to **the gospel of God's grace**. He spent his life telling others about God's grace found through faith in Jesus. It was the gospel of grace that made the potential adversity worth it.

How does a warning serve as a way to prepare for what is ahead? How does understanding the value of the gospel give a person the strength to endure difficulties that result from the gospel?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Evangelism and Missions*

The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others.

HIS CONCERN (ACTS 20:25-31)

VERSES 25-27

²⁵ And now I know that none of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore I declare to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, ²⁷ because I did not avoid declaring to you the whole plan of God.

Paul changed the focus of his speech. He now focused on the church in Ephesus. His plan was to do all he could to take the gospel to the western part of the Roman Empire. Rome potentially would be his base, which is why he wrote his letter to the church in Rome. This plan assumed he survived Jerusalem. Either way, Paul was committed to God's call on his life to take the gospel to the nations.

It was the gospel of grace that made the potential adversity worth it.

The apostle planned on sharing the gospel wherever he could, just as he had done in Ephesus. He clearly explained that if a person in Ephesus was not a believer, it was not because of him. He had done everything possible to share the gospel in the city. He had offered people the opportunity to accept the gospel. He had preached without holding back any part of the gospel of grace. He set the standard for the church leaders hearing his words. They would now be called upon to follow his example, not backing down from proclaiming the truth of the gospel.

What might keep a person from being able to make the same claim Paul made in verses 26-27? What makes it hard to share the gospel with everyone a person meets?

VERSE 28

28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.

Paul expressed his deeper reason for wanting to visit with the Ephesian church leaders. His absence would open the door for problems. He called on these leaders to ***be on guard*** like shepherds watching a flock. A shepherd had to remain alert and ready. No doubt some of these church leaders would face difficulties and temptations. They had to make sure they kept guard over themselves first, then they could guard the sheep. He emphasized guarding ***all the flock***,



not just the Jewish or just the Gentile sheep. The shepherd was responsible for the entire flock.

Paul reminded them that the responsibility of guarding the flock was a task assigned by **the Holy Spirit**. Paul's first missionary journey began by the church in Antioch recognizing that the Holy Spirit had set him and Barnabas aside for this work. God used the church to confirm and support what He was already doing in the lives of the two missionaries.

To emphasize the magnitude of the responsibility, Paul reminded the leaders that this flock was **purchased** at a high price. Jesus' death on the cross paid for the salvation of these believers. God was entrusting that which was purchased with the death of His Son into the watchful care of these leaders.

VERSES 29-31

29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I never stopped warning each one of you with tears.

Paul explained in greater detail why it would be important for these leaders to be on guard. False teachers would rise up. Paul compared them to **savage wolves**. Jesus had used a similar term for false teachers (see Matt. 7:15). A wolf has no concern or interest in the well-being of sheep. In fact, it is only worried about its own well-being and will do whatever is necessary to feed its own appetite. The same would be true of these false teachers.

The apostle reminded these leaders that the false teachers would come from within the church as well. This group would be more dangerous because of the trust placed in them as one of their own. These false teachers twisted the truth just enough **to lure** followers of Christ, especially those who may have doubts when facing persecution. Paul's **warning** pointed to the need for church leaders to focus on teaching everyone in the church the basics of the gospel and the Christian faith.

Paul concluded just as he had started—directing the leaders to **be on the alert**. He pointed to himself as an example. These men would have been aware of the work Paul did and how he did it the three years he was in Ephesus. He had set the standard when it came to

guarding the sheep and expected the next generation of leaders to follow his lead.

In what ways are false teachers like savage wolves? How does the analogy of shepherd versus savage wolf point to the motives of a church leader versus the motives of a false teacher?

HIS COMMENDATION (ACTS 20:32-35)

VERSE 32

³² And now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all who are sanctified.

Paul had given these leaders a big task. If they tried to do it on their own, they would fail. Paul reminded them that they would need to depend on God and the power of the gospel to fulfill their task as shepherds. The power of the gospel would both **build** them up for the task and provide them with the assurance of their future **inheritance**.

VERSES 33-34

³³ I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that I worked with my own hands to support myself and those who are with me.

Paul reminded the Ephesian leaders of the danger of looking for rewards in the present. These leaders had needs just like other people. He called on them to trust God to provide for those needs. Again, he pointed to his own life as an example. Paul's ministry was not motivated by financial gain. If that were the case, he would not be on his way to Jerusalem. Paul received support from other churches to do the work he had done in Ephesus. He taught that ministers should be worthy of their wages and that churches should provide for the physical needs of those who served them. However, Paul's custom was to not ask for believers in the city where he was evangelizing to support his work. Rather than burden the Ephesian believers, Paul worked to provide not only for his own needs but also those of his missionary team.



The false teachers were motivated by financial gain, which impacted how and what they taught. Paul was challenging the leaders of the church at Ephesus to be motivated by the gospel, trusting God to provide through various means, including the support of their local body of believers.

VERSE 35

³⁵ In every way I've shown you that it is necessary to help the weak by laboring like this and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, because he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul wanted to avoid anything that would get in the way of sharing the gospel. He worked hard while in Ephesus to make sure even the needs of *the weak* and poor were covered. Paul pointed to his own life and a quote of Jesus to make this final point. The Gospel accounts do not include this quote, but there is no reason to doubt that Jesus said it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called for His followers to give to the needy without fanfare (Matt. 6:2). He obviously expected His followers to take care of those in need.

How does generosity and caring for the needy move a person away from greed? Why would it have been important for these church leaders to be aware of their motives for ministry?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare similar experiences.*

Compare Paul's address to the elders from Ephesus found in Acts 20:28-38 with one of the following farewell addresses: 1 Samuel 20:41-42; 2 Kings 2:9-14; or Ruth 1:8-14. What did your comparison reveal about the person leaving and his or her concern for those left behind? How was hope for a future expressed? What principles do you see about providing a good farewell?

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers experience contentment when they faithfully fulfill God's purposes in their lives.
- Believers must remain diligent to recognize and confront divisive and false teachings.
- Believers must guard themselves from greed, focusing on the needs of others.

List ways God has used you to make a difference in the lives of other believers and His church. Thank Him for the opportunities and ask Him to show you how you can impact those outside the church. What actions do you need to take based on what God showed you?

Discuss with the group ways you can help each other be on guard against false teachings and teachers. Prioritize the ideas listed and talk about how to put the most effective ones into action.

Reflect on Acts 20:35, considering ways you can follow Jesus' words. What is one anonymous giving action you can do this week that would point someone to Christ? Record the impact that act had on you and the recipient.

Prayer Needs





THE TESTIMONY

The gospel transforms people from sinners into instruments of God.

ACTS 22:3-8,15-22

Our life stories are important. The stories we choose to tell give others a picture of what's important to us and helps them understand why we think the way we do. Even though some of our best stories have been told repeatedly, we never seem to tire of telling them. In fact, our passion for them grows every time we tell them.

What stories from your life do you find yourself always sharing with others? How do your stories impact the lives of the people you tell?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 21:27–23:22

In Acts 21:17, Paul arrived in Jerusalem. Leaders of the Jerusalem church told Paul of a rumor circulating that he was telling Jews to disregard the Mosaic law and Jewish rituals such as circumcision. After some Jews from Asia incited a crowd against Paul, he addressed the crowd by sharing his testimony.

Prior to this event, Paul gave his farewell address to the Ephesian elders before setting sail for Jerusalem (20:17-38). On his journey, Paul received warnings about the threat awaiting him in Jerusalem (21:4,11). Nevertheless, he knew he had to go to Jerusalem for the sake of the gospel (21:13).

Because of the accusations that Paul was teaching Jews to disobey the law of Moses, church leaders proposed that Paul go to the temple complex with four Jewish Christians to help them complete the requirements of a Nazirite vow. Paul also would take the vow (21:23-24). The next day, Paul and the four men returned to the temple. Jews from Asia saw Paul and assumed he had brought Trophimus, a Gentile Christian from Ephesus, into the area designated for Jewish males only. They also accused Paul of teaching against the law and the temple. The scene turned ugly (21:26-29).

The Jews attacked Paul with the intent of killing him. The Roman commander sent troops into the temple complex, seized Paul, and bound him with chains. At this point, Paul asked for permission to address the crowd. The group was attentive until Paul told of God's sending him to preach the gospel to Gentiles. As the crowd became violent again, the Roman commander took Paul into the barracks to interrogate him by scourging. Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship to avoid the punishment (21:30–22:29).

Not understanding the accusations against Paul, the commander assembled the chief priests and Sanhedrin. When Paul realized some in the group were Sadducees and some were Pharisees, he deflected the attention of the Sanhedrin by speaking of the resurrection of the dead. He knew Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, but Pharisees did. A debate broke out between the two groups. It became so heated the commander had to rescue Paul again (22:30–23:10).



The following night, Jesus assured Paul that he would preach in Rome. The animosity toward Paul continued to grow and forty men took a vow not to eat until Paul was dead. Paul's nephew discovered the plot and told the Roman commander. The commander made secret plans to move Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea, where Paul could state his case to Felix the governor (23:11-24).

Read Acts 22:3-8,15-22 in your Bible. Highlight words and phrases Paul used to describe himself. What is the contrast between how he described his life prior to Christ and how he described his life after Christ?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FORMER LIFE (ACTS 22:3-5)

Paul addressed the crowd in defense of himself. He pointed to his former life, his encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus, and his new God-given mission. Paul wanted to clearly communicate that his life was changed by his encounter with Jesus.

VERSE 3

³ He continued, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the law of our ancestors. I was zealous for God, just as all of you are today.

Paul began by emphasizing his heritage as **a Jew**. The crowd was made up of Jews who were proud of their heritage. Notice that Paul pointed to his birth, his upbringing, and his education. **Tarsus** was the capital city of **•Cilicia**, a Roman province. As such, Paul was a Roman citizen by birth but a Jew by bloodline. Scholars understand the expression **brought up** in one of two ways. One is that Paul and his family moved to Jerusalem when he was young. The other possibility is that Paul came to Jerusalem as a young teenager to be trained by **•Gamaliel**. Either way, Paul's point was clear. He had a strong connection to and understanding of the importance of Jerusalem and the temple.

Gamaliel was a leading teacher of the Jewish law during this time. He was a Pharisee and the grandson of the famous Rabbi Hillel. Gamaliel followed in the footsteps of this grandfather, being more lenient toward the Old Testament law than other teachers of his day. Luke first introduced Gamaliel in chapter five when Peter and John were being tried by the Sanhedrin. The council was proposing a death penalty for Peter when Gamaliel stepped in. After the two apostles were removed, he encouraged the council to reconsider their course of action. He reminded them that if the apostles were false teachers, time would take care of them. He also stated that if they were telling the truth, then the council would be fighting against God (see Acts 5:38-39). The Sanhedrin listened to Gamaliel's advice, demonstrating the magnitude of his influence. This was who Paul pointed to as his teacher. Paul had received the best of Jewish educations from the leading teacher of the day.

VERSES 4-5

⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, arresting and putting both men and women in jail, ⁵ as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. After I received letters from them to the brothers, I traveled to Damascus to arrest those who were there and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished.

Paul's zeal for God had led him to persecute Christians. The group present that day wanted to kill Paul, just as he had once wanted to kill Christians. The **high priest** and Sanhedrin could vouch for his efforts to persecute Christians. These leaders had issued Paul (then known as Saul) **letters** that gave him the power **to arrest** Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. Some of these same leaders were most likely present as Paul now stood in the temple defending himself.

Paul referred to Christianity as the **Way**. Jesus called Himself the way when addressing His disciples (John 14:6). The crowd viewed keeping the law as the way to the Father. Paul knew that the only way to the Father was through faith in the Son.

Why would it be important to clearly contrast your life before and after your commitment to Christ as you tell your life story?



LIFE-CHANGING ENCOUNTER (ACTS 22:6-8,15-16)

VERSES 6-7

⁶ As I was traveling and approaching Damascus, about noon an intense light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’

Having established his former life as a persecutor of Christians, Paul explained the event that changed his life. Some of the people present knew why Paul was on his way to **Damascus** but had not heard the rest of the story. He set the time of this encounter as **noon**, the brightest time of the day. For another light to outshine the noon sun would have been extreme. The **intense light** would have registered with the Jewish audience in terms of deity. The cloud followed by their ancestors out of Egypt was a column of fire at night. Moses’ face was covered because of the brightness of his skin after spending time with God on the mountain.

Paul recounted falling **to the ground** and hearing **a voice** calling his name. The question must have confused Paul (known as Saul at the time). He thought of himself as a defender of God, yet here God asked him why he was **persecuting** Him. Christ equated persecution of His church with persecuting Him.

VERSE 8

⁸ I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting.’

Paul asked the One addressing him to identify Himself. Paul revealed to his audience the identity of the One who had stopped him. He was **Jesus of Nazareth**. By identifying Jesus as being from Nazareth, Paul reminded his hearers of Jesus’ Jewish heritage. This also removed any possible doubt as to which Jesus Paul encountered.

Imagine the thoughts that raced through the minds of Paul’s hearers as he shared his story. First of all, the cover-up stories fabricated by the Jewish leaders to explain the resurrection of Jesus were exposed. One of their own was revealing the truth—Jesus was indeed resurrected from the grave. The group also had to reconsider everything they believed and understood about the Messiah and His kingdom. They would also need to consider how they would answer the same question, since they too were persecuting Christians and, by extension, Jesus.

VERSES 15-16

¹⁵ ‘Since you will be a witness for him to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now, why are you delaying? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

Paul included in his story the encounter with Ananias (see vv. 11-14). Many of Paul’s listeners would have respect for Ananias. Paul told how Ananias restored Paul’s sight and told Paul that God had a special mission for him to fulfill.

This mission was simple enough. Paul was to tell ***all people*** about what he had ***seen and heard***. In fact, Paul’s sharing with the crowd would have been an act of obedience to that command.

Paul’s first step would be baptism. Notice that the baptism included ***calling on*** the name of the Lord. This baptism was an expression of Paul’s repentance and profession of faith in Christ. Baptism was the means by which Paul confessed his faith in Jesus.

How might a person’s past be perceived as an obstacle when it comes to accepting Christ? How might other people’s opinions add to that obstacle?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

NEW PURPOSE (ACTS 22:17-21)

VERSES 17-18

¹⁷ After I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw him telling me, ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’

Paul again reminded the crowd of his regard for ***Jerusalem*** and ***the temple***. He returned to Jerusalem three years after his conversion.



While worshipping in the temple, he was visited again by Jesus in a vision. Jesus issued a warning to Paul, stating that the people of Jerusalem would reject Paul's gospel message.

VERSES 19-20

19 But I said, 'Lord, they know that in synagogue after synagogue I had those who believed in you imprisoned and beaten. 20 And when the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood there giving approval and guarding the clothes of those who killed him.'

Paul had protested the warning issued by Jesus. He was confident the Jews would listen to him. The people in the city would have known of Paul's efforts to arrest Christians. They would have also known of Paul's role in the stoning of **Stephen**. He was present, approved of the act, and watched over the clothing of those who actually threw the stones (Acts 7:58–8:1). Paul may not have thrown a stone, but was just as guilty.

VERSE 21

21 He said to me, 'Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

God's directions to Paul included more than telling him to leave Jerusalem. Going **far away** related to both the physical city and the figurative group. Paul may have thought himself to be the ideal person to reach the Jews, but God had other plans. Paul would be the mouthpiece God would use to take the gospel to **the Gentiles**.

This was not the safest way for Paul to end his speech. This statement would hit a nerve for the people hearing his testimony. Paul's being sent to the Gentiles because of Jesus' rejection by the Jews was a swipe at their national pride. They felt themselves to be God's chosen people. Though not the most strategic defense, it was the most honest. Paul was emphasizing that God's salvation is for all people, including Gentiles.

How was Paul's life purpose tied to Jesus' commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20? Does the specific purpose given to each believer always relate to that commission? Explain your thinking.

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare passages that retell the same event.*

The Book of Acts includes the story of Paul's conversion three times. Compare and contrast Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; and 26:12-18. What unique details are emphasized in each account? How do you think the specific audience impacted the way Paul told his story?

REJECTION (ACTS 22:22)

VERSE 22

²² They listened to him up to this point. Then they raised their voices, shouting, "Wipe this man off the face of the earth! He should not be allowed to live!"

The crowd had *listened* to Paul, but the mention of Gentiles was too much to bear. Their response was similar to the response Jesus received in Nazareth (Luke 4:22-29). Initially the synagogue audience listened to Jesus with amazement. However, when Jesus reminded the audience of the nationalities of the widow at Zarephath and Naaman (both Gentiles), the people tried to push Him over the side of a cliff.

The crowd was once again a mob, wanting to kill Paul. They threw aside their robes and began throwing dirt into the air (Acts 22:23). This conveys the intensity of hatred expressed by the crowd. They began questioning Paul's right to live. Whatever Paul had to say about the change in his life would be lost in the mob's unwillingness to accept the idea that God offered salvation to anyone other than Jews.

List various responses a person could have when hearing a believer's testimony about accepting the gospel. What does each response reveal about the listener?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers must help others understand that no good deed will secure salvation.
- Salvation is offered to everyone, even those who publicly denounce Jesus.
- Jesus gives believers a new life and missional purpose.
- Believers may face rejection and persecution for telling the gospel truth.

Review the information on the inside front cover and reflect on your response to Christ's offer of salvation. Have you accepted His offer of salvation through faith in Him? If not, what keeps you from taking that step? If you have, what next steps can you take to share your testimony with those who have not believed?

If you are a believer, write your salvation story following the headings: (1) former life, (2) life-changing encounter, and (3) new purpose. With whom can you share your salvation story? Memorize Acts 22:15.

Prayer Needs



ANSWERING CRITICS

The gospel demands a response of repentance and faith.

ACTS 26:19-29

Job offers and marriage proposals, among other things, can be tricky. Both usually require a quick response. Some people are prepared for the offer or proposal, having followed clues along the way. Others are completely caught off guard, unprepared to make an on-the-spot, life-altering decision.

List times in your life when you were required to make a quick decision. Were you prepared for that moment? If so, how?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 23:23–26:32

Paul stood before King Agrippa, who had responsibility over Jewish issues, and Festus, the Roman governor. Paul already had appealed to Caesar for a hearing. These two leaders were meeting with Paul to prepare a document to be sent with Paul to Rome. But Paul saw it as an opportunity to share the gospel and to give King Agrippa the opportunity to make the decision to become a follower of Christ.

Prior to this meeting, the Roman commander had moved Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea under the cover of night (Acts 23:23). Caesarea was sixty-five miles to the northwest and home to Felix, the Roman governor. The city was also a place where Paul could be more easily guarded.

While in Caesarea, Paul faced three trials. The first took place five days after his arrival. Felix invited the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to present their case against Paul. Two charges were presented by the Jewish lawyer Tertullus. They accused Paul of creating problems for Jews throughout the Roman empire and of trying to desecrate the Jerusalem temple (24:1-9).

Paul challenged the charges, calling on the Jewish leaders to produce hard evidence, especially since Paul had just been in Jerusalem. But no evidence could be produced. Paul affirmed his faith in Jesus but also expressed his acceptance of the teaching of the law and the prophets. Paul concluded by stating that he was being tried because of his view of the resurrection of the dead (24:10-21).

Felix never issued a decision, but he and his wife Drusilla met with Paul several times. Felix was intrigued by what he was hearing from Paul, even though Paul's discussions on righteousness, self-control, and judgment made him nervous. Felix was also hoping for a bribe from Paul. Felix did nothing for two years, keeping Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews (24:22-27).

After two years had passed, Felix was replaced by Festus. The Jewish leaders approached Festus about bringing Paul to Jerusalem to face trial. They were planning to ambush the group on their way. Instead, Festus called on the Jewish leaders to come to Caesarea. More charges against Paul were brought, but without evidence. Festus suggested moving the trial to Jerusalem in an effort to appease

the Jews. In response, Paul, a Roman citizen appealed to Caesar. His request was granted (25:1-12).

As Paul waited to be moved to Rome, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea to visit Festus, the new Roman governor (25:13). This Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa I, who had James killed and Peter imprisoned (see Acts 12:1-5). Agrippa II was now ruler over parts of Galilee and Perea and was the last of the Herodian rulers. It is believed he was involved in an incestuous relationship with his sister, Bernice.

Festus described Paul's case to Agrippa, admitting that he saw the issue as nothing more than disagreements over religion and a certain dead man whom Paul believed to be alive. Agrippa was anxious to hear Paul and requested a meeting. King Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus would be joined by other court officials and city leaders, with Paul being the main attraction.

Paul began his defense with words of praise for the king, calling him an expert in Jewish customs and controversies (26:3). Paul shared about his Jewish upbringing, training as a Pharisee, and persecution of Christians (26:4-11). Then he told what happened on his way to Damascus when he encountered Jesus (26:12-23). He concluded by giving Agrippa an opportunity to make a decision about Jesus (26:24-32).

Read Acts 26:19-29 in your Bible. Identify the various ways Paul defined the good news of the gospel. How do his words help you better explain the gospel?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE GOSPEL TOLD (ACTS 26:19-23)

VERSES 19-21

¹⁹ “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. ²⁰ Instead, I preached to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and were trying to kill me.



Paul had faithfully obeyed the commands of Jesus. He was more than **not disobedient**; he embraced his new purpose with the same passion he had once shown against it. The way he reacted was a result of Jesus directly telling him what to do. **King Agrippa** would have understood the importance of a Jew acting in obedience to God's direct command.

The apostle listed some of the places he had **preached** out of obedience. He took the gospel to both Jews and **Gentiles**. Paul typically began his work in a city by going to the synagogue and then turning his attention to Gentiles in the city. This also mirrors Jesus' commission to the disciples in Acts 1:8.

Paul's message was simple and clear: **repent and turn to God**, and then demonstrate that **repentance** through actions. Repenting and turning to God were seen as one action. Repentance is a turning from sin to God. This change of direction is seen in a person's good works as proof of genuine repentance. No one can secure his or her salvation through **works**; however, good works are evidence of true repentance. Ultimately, it was Paul's faithfulness in proclaiming this simple message that led to his arrest.

VERSES 22-23

22 To this very day, I have had help from God, and I stand and testify to both small and great, saying nothing other than what the prophets and Moses said would take place— 23 that the Messiah must suffer, and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles.”

Standing before kings was part of the commission Jesus had revealed to Paul through Ananias (see Acts 9:15). Paul now stood before a king, but Agrippa wasn't the only person in the room. Therefore, Paul emphasized that the gospel message was for everyone, **both small and great**. The gospel of grace knows no boundaries.

Paul's message should not have caught the Jewish leaders off guard. It was **nothing other than what the prophets and Moses said would take place**. The Old Testament taught that **the Messiah must suffer** and be resurrected (see Ps. 22; Isa. 53). But first-century Jews did not expect the Messiah to suffer, which is one reason they refused to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah.

As the resurrected Messiah, Jesus would also provide **light** for all who place their trust in Him. This idea was also taught in the Old Testament (see Isa. 42:6, 49:6; 60:3). As a servant of Christ, Paul was being used by God to fulfill these prophecies by being light to the Jews and the Gentiles.

Why is it important to point to Scripture when sharing the gospel? To what verses might a person point?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Evangelism and Missions*

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

OBJECTION REBUFFED (ACTS 26:24-26)

VERSE 24

²⁴ As he was saying these things in his defense, Festus exclaimed in a loud voice, “You’re out of your mind, Paul! Too much study is driving you mad.”

Festus had heard all he could stand. The thought of a resurrection was beyond him; it made no sense to his logical Roman mind. Festus did not doubt Paul’s intellect. In fact, he may have thought that to be the problem. Any sensible Roman knew that people did not rise from the dead, so all the talk about Jesus being alive could only be attributed to Paul’s spending too much time studying the Old Testament.

VERSES 25-26

²⁵ But Paul replied, “I’m not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. On the contrary, I’m speaking words of truth and good judgment.

²⁶ For the king knows about these matters, and I can speak boldly to him. For I am convinced that none of these things has escaped his notice, since this was not done in a corner.



Nothing would be gained by Paul's getting into an intellectual argument with Festus, who had already made up his mind. Instead, Paul would turn his focus to **the king**. But the apostle remained respectful in his response to Festus, calling him **most excellent**.

None of the events Paul testified to had been **done in a corner**. In other words, Jesus had led a public life. His crucifixion was a public event. His empty tomb was not in question. His disciples preached in open spaces and were available to any who wanted to listen. Paul himself had spent time with untold numbers of people. No secret handshake or password was needed.

Some people talk about the Christian faith as some kind of secret cult whose people meet to share amongst themselves coded knowledge and experiences. Some people today who call themselves Christians behave that way, but that was not how the believers in the New Testament acted. There were no secrets and they had nothing to hide. The gospel was out in the open for all to hear and believe.

How do people try to discredit the gospel message? What actions could a person take to prepare to address potential objections to the gospel?

Profile of King Agrippa II

- *Great-grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth (Matt. 2:1)*
- *Son of Herod Agrippa I, who beheaded James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:1-3)*
- *Ruler over northeast parts of Palestine, including Caesarea Philippi*
- *Rumored to have been in an incestuous relationship with his sister, Bernice*
- *Granted by Rome custody of the ceremonial vestments worn by the high priest on the Day of Atonement and the authority to appoint the high priest; as such, was considered "king of the Jews"*
- *An expert in "Jewish customs and controversies" (Acts 26:3)*
- *Last of the Herodian rulers*

INVITATION GIVEN (ACTS 26:27-29)

VERSE 27

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe.”

By asking the king if he believed *the prophets*, Paul was moving toward the next logical question. He knew Agrippa accepted the teachings of the Old Testament and answered as such for him. If Agrippa believed the prophets, and if he would accept Paul’s assertion that these same prophets pointed to Christ, then it would make sense for the king to *believe* that Jesus is the Messiah.

BIBLE SKILL: *Observe when and for what purpose a New Testament passage includes an Old Testament quotation.*

Jesus told the disciples of the things written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44-49). Peter and Paul pointed to the Old Testament in their presentation of the gospel. Review Peter’s message in Acts 2:14-36 and Paul’s message in Acts 13:32-41. List the Old Testament passages used in both sermons. How do these passages establish that Jesus was the promised Messiah and fortify the credibility of the church’s witness?

Agrippa was in an awkward position. By answering no, Agrippa would have been denying his belief in the prophets and offensive to the Jews he was appointed to govern. If he answered yes, he knew Paul would ask him why then did he refuse to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Either answer would have been a political nightmare for the king. Paul was not worried about getting out of jail. He had already appealed to Caesar, which assured he would remain in custody. He had a much greater purpose in mind—giving Agrippa the opportunity to respond to the gospel.



VERSE 28

28 Agrippa said to Paul, “Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?”

Interpreters differ on how to understand Agrippa’s response. Some view his response as an expression of interest and a willingness to hear more. Others view the response as Agrippa being unready to respond or not persuaded to believe.

Agrippa’s response represented the diplomatic way of answering Paul’s question with another question. Did the apostle really think he could turn the mind of the king with so few words? Would he so quickly make him into *a Christian*?

Paul may have been in chains, but the message of the gospel was more than free on that day.

VERSE 29

29 “I wish before God,” replied Paul, “that whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am—except for these chains.”

Paul’s real desire was that everyone in the room would become a Christian—Agrippa, Bernice, Festus, and anyone else who could hear him speak. We can imagine Paul making gestures as he addressed the king, then turning to directly address the others in the room. We can imagine him glancing down or perhaps raising his wrists so all could see his chains. He wanted them to share his Lord, but not his chains. It is not certain that Paul actually wore chains while addressing this group. The term *chains* was sometimes used in a metaphorical sense for imprisonment. In truth, Paul may have been in chains, but the message of the gospel was more than free on that day.

What roadblock might a person encounter when trying to give another person the opportunity to respond to the gospel? How do those roadblocks compare to what Paul faced?

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers can and should point to the Scriptures when presenting the gospel.
- Believers must be prepared to respond to objections with love and directness.
- Everyone who hears the gospel must be given the opportunity to make a decision about Jesus.

Reflect on Acts 26:20. How can you use this verse to help you prepare to share the gospel with someone? What other verses might you use? With whom can you share your gospel appeal?

Record the name of someone you have talked with about spiritual things but did not give an opportunity to respond to the gospel. How can you give the opportunity to that person? What questions might open the door for that conversation?

With your Bible study group, identify principles for sharing the gospel found in Acts 26:19-29. Share with each other ways you all have followed these principles. Record actions you need to take in light of the principles identified by the group.

Prayer Needs





ALWAYS ON MISSION

The gospel message is for all people; some will believe, but others will not.

ACTS 28:17-28

Some people, with the right training, become excellent salespeople. Others are naturals at endorsing a particular product because they use the product or because their life has been changed as a result of that product. Happy customers will eagerly tell anyone and everyone about a product they love; they just can't resist.

What kinds of products have others tried to encourage you to use because they found them to work for them? What makes their testimony more effective than a professional salesperson pitching the same product?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ACTS 27:1–28:31

In the second half of Acts, Paul made three missionary journeys, explained his conversion on multiple occasions, was imprisoned, hailed as a god, stoned, left for dead, and faced trumped-up charges and threats on his life. Luke's account ends with Paul in custody in Rome and awaiting trial before Caesar. The thread that connects all these events is that Paul saw every event and circumstance as an opportunity to share the gospel.

Agrippa and Felix had listened to Paul's defense and found nothing worthy of death. Because Paul had appealed to Caesar, they handed him over to a centurion named Julius, who put Paul on a ship headed for Italy (Acts 26:32–27:1). The journey from the outset faced many challenges, and after some time had passed Paul warned the crew that continuing would lead to damage and heavy loss of cargo and lives. Paul's advice was ignored and the ship's captain and owner continued the voyage (27:1-12).

In a short time, the boat was at the mercy of a northeaster. The ship was being so severely battered that the crew began throwing cargo and gear overboard. The storm raged on for many days and all hope that anyone would be saved was nearly gone. Paul encouraged the crew and passengers to take courage, for there would be no loss of life. He related that an angel had told him that he need not fear because it was necessary for him to stand before Caesar (27:13-26).

After fourteen days they were drifting in the Adriatic Sea and approached land during the night. Paul urged them to eat since many had gone without food for days. He took some bread, gave thanks to God, and began to eat. This encouraged the crew and they ate as well. Once they had eaten, they threw the remainder of the grain overboard to lighten the ship (27:27-38).

When daylight came they sighted a bay with a beach and planned to run the ship aground. They got stuck on a sand bar and the stern was broken apart by the waves. The soldiers on board were ready to kill the prisoners to keep them from escaping, but the centurion intervened because he wanted to save Paul. They landed in Malta and were shown extraordinary hospitality (27:39–28:2).

As Paul was gathering wood for a fire, a poisonous snake bit him on the hand. The people assumed he was being punished for a crime until they noticed he suffered no harm. They then changed their minds,



viewing Paul as a god. Publius, who owned an estate, took them in for three days. Paul healed his father and others on the island (28:1-9).

After three months, they continued their journey to Rome on another ship that had wintered in Malta. The ship landed at Puteoli, where they found believers who invited them to stay with them for seven days (28:7-14). When Paul arrived in Rome, believers there met Paul and greatly encouraged him (28:15). He was put under house arrest with a soldier assigned to guard him (28:16). The Book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome, where he continued proclaiming the gospel without hindrance (28:31).

As you read Acts 28:17-28, look for words or phrases that point to Paul's determination to share the gospel. What other characteristics of Paul do you see in this passage?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE JOURNEY (ACTS 28:17-20)

VERSE 17

17 After three days he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had gathered he said to them: "Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans."

Paul usually began his work in a city by visiting the Jewish synagogue. Since he was under house arrest in Rome, he would need to invite ***the leaders of the Jews*** to come to him. Jews had been expelled from Rome a few years prior to Paul's arrival but were beginning to return.

Paul began his address by claiming his innocence. His imprisonment began with Asian Jews charging him with teaching against the Jewish law and the temple (see Acts 21:28). Paul stated that he had ***done nothing*** that could be understood as being against the law or against his own people.

Paul's account of his story brings to mind Jesus' prediction of Himself being handed over to the Gentiles (see Luke 9:44). Both Jesus

and Paul were handed over by Jewish leaders to a Gentile government with the hope of silencing them. Neither were silenced.

VERSES 18-19

¹⁸ After they examined me, they wanted to release me, since there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. ¹⁹ Because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar; even though I had no charge to bring against my people.

Paul explained that his innocence was affirmed by the Roman leaders, but the objections of Jews present at his hearing caused him to *appeal to Caesar* (see Acts 25:9-11). Agrippa later declared Paul to be innocent but noted that Paul's appeal to Caesar tied his hands. Festus and Agrippa had no other choice but to send Paul to Caesar (26:30-32). Paul was a Roman citizen and as a citizen he had the right to have his case heard by Caesar.

The apostle emphasized that he had nothing against the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Paul was aware that a variety of circumstances made it possible for him to stand before Caesar as a witness for Jesus. The Jewish accusers were just one piece God was using to make that happen. Even today, God uses a variety of means to bring believers in contact with others who need to hear the gospel.

VERSE 20

²⁰ For this reason I've asked to see you and speak to you. In fact, it is for the hope of Israel that I'm wearing this chain."

The real *reason* Paul wanted to visit with these Roman Jewish leaders was to tell them about the hope he had found. That hope, *the hope of Israel*, was why Paul stood before the group in chains. The hope of Israel centered on the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. Paul firmly believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah who would establish Himself as the King and Lord of the nations. Paul's testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, that Jesus is both Messiah and Lord, constituted the real contention between him and the Jews.

What are some of the things God uses to make it possible for a person to hear the gospel? How does God using a variety of things speak to His sovereignty in our world?



KEY DOCTRINE: *Evangelism and Missions*

Missionary effort rests upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ.

THE SEEKERS (ACTS 28:21-23)

VERSE 21

²¹ Then they said to him, “We haven’t received any letters about you from Judea. None of the brothers has come and reported or spoken anything evil about you.

The Jewish leaders’ seemed to want to distance themselves from Paul’s case. If they got involved, they would put themselves in a difficult position. Paul was a Roman citizen, having been accused by leaders of a race of people that had already been expelled from Rome once. Agrippa and Festus had already cleared Paul. No one in Jerusalem was asking these Jewish leaders to get involved, and they weren’t about to do so.

VERSE 22

²² But we want to hear what your views are, since we know that people everywhere are speaking against this sect.”

Though they did not know Paul’s specific case, the Jewish leaders in Rome had heard about Christianity. Emperor Claudius had expelled Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 on the charge they were creating disturbances because of Christ (see Acts 18:2). After Claudius’s death in A.D. 54, Jews began to return to Rome, including those who had become Christians. The Jewish leaders Paul now addressed appear to have kept their distance from those who had become Christians, but they were curious and were open to hearing him teach.

VERSE 23

²³ After arranging a day with him, many came to him at his lodging. From dawn to dusk he expounded and testified about the kingdom of God. He tried to persuade them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets.

This second meeting with the Roman Jewish leaders lasted a full day. **From dawn to dusk** Paul presented the gospel to this group. Because all the people present were Jewish, Paul focused attention on how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament.

Luke tells us that Paul **testified about the kingdom of God** and **about Jesus**. Jews looked to the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of God's kingdom in a renewed Israel. Paul wanted to show them that this had already occurred in Jesus. He explained the Old Testament—**the Law of Moses and the Prophets**—through the lens of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. Luke recorded similar words as Jesus addressed His disciples after His resurrection (see Luke 24:44-49).

What makes the gospel message so intriguing and interesting? How does that intrigue open the door to share the gospel with others?

Responses to the Gospel in Acts 13–28

- **opposition (13:8,50; 14:19; 16:22-24)**
- **insult (13:45)**
- **rioting (17:5; 19:23-41; 21:27-36; 22:22-29)**
- **division (14:4; 19:9; 28:24)**
- **argument (17:18)**
- **curiosity (17:20)**
- **ridicule (17:32)**
- **interest (17:32)**
- **belief (13:12; 14:1; 16:31-34; 17:4,34; 19:17-20)**
- **joy (13:48)**

THE RESPONSE (ACTS 28:24-28)

VERSE 24

²⁴ **Some were persuaded by what he said, but others did not believe.**

Some were persuaded by what Paul said, but others refused to **believe**. Even a full day listening to Paul was not enough for part of the group. Most of the Jewish community in Rome continued to



oppose Christianity, serving as another example of the rejection of the message by God's own people. The gospel would be offered to Jews first and then to Greeks (see Rom. 1:16-17), but in each case it must be received by faith.

How does the gospel divide and unite at the same time? Why does the gospel have this kind of effect on people?

VERSES 25-27

²⁵ Disagreeing among themselves, they began to leave after Paul made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah ²⁶ when he said, Go to these people and say: You will always be listening, but never understanding; and you will always be looking, but never perceiving. ²⁷ For the hearts of these people have grown callous, their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.

Luke seems to want Theophilus to know that the argument over the gospel continued, but without anyone leaving. The group was now divided, those who believed and those who did not. All was good until Paul quoted one particular Old Testament passage.

When introducing this passage, he reminded them that what he was about to say were the words of God spoken by ***the Holy Spirit***. If the group wanted to argue, they would need to argue against the Scriptures.

Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9-10. Isaiah emphasized the ***ears***, the ***eyes***, and the ***heart***. The heart was considered to be the place where a person understood and decided to act. The picture painted by Isaiah was of a group who could hear and see but were unwilling to act on what they heard and saw. If the people of Isaiah's day had heard and understood God's message, they would have turned from their ways in repentance and received God's healing. God's desire was that they be converted and healed, but for that to occur they had to respond.

Paul had spent a full day with these Jewish leaders. They had expressed a desire to hear Paul, but some really didn't want to hear

his message. They were unwilling to receive what they heard. Their rejection of the gospel fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 6. There were others waiting to hear the gospel who would receive it.

VERSE 28

28 Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

Paul’s delivering the gospel *unto the Gentiles* was nothing new. Doing so was what got him in trouble with the Asian Jews in the first place. He was not giving up on the Jews. Believers are to be faithful witnesses to all people, regardless of their response. Paul still had a desire to see his own people come to faith in Christ (see Rom. 9:1-3). But he also realized there were Gentiles who were waiting and willing to respond to the gospel. It was to these Gentiles that Paul had been sent in the first place (see Acts 13:46-47; 22:21).

Luke ended the Book of Acts by stating that Paul remained in Rome two more years under house arrest (28:30). Anyone who wanted to know about the gospel was welcomed by Paul, apparently without Roman interference. Paul’s message was consistent throughout his ministry as he declared the kingdom of God and taught about Jesus.

BIBLE SKILL: *Observe when and for what purpose a New Testament passage includes an Old Testament quotation.*

Paul quoted Isaiah 6 to encourage his audience to believe the gospel message and to help them understand why the message must also go to the Gentiles. Review these other places in the New Testament where Isaiah 6 is quoted: Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; and John 12:39-40. How is the passage used in these different passages? What factors are the same and what are different in each case?



IN MY CONTEXT

- God uses a variety of means to bring believers in contact with others who need to know the gospel.
- Believers should be looking to share the gospel with all people, especially those who are seeking to know more.
- Believers are to be faithful witnesses to all people, regardless of their response.

Share with the group the circumstances that led to your hearing the gospel. Discuss the variety of ways God worked in the lives of the group members. Thank Him for making it possible for you to hear the gospel.

Ask God to help you be more attentive to opportunities to share the gospel this week. Record any opportunities He gave you. How did He help you become aware of the opportunities? How did He help you share in those situations?

What's the difference between being a "Jesus salesperson" and a testimony sharer? Reflect on Acts 28:31. How can you live out Acts 28:31 from here on out? Who can you share the gospel with again?

Prayer Needs

Barnabas: All We Know

Roy E. Lucas



»» “Encouragement is important business.”¹ When many Bible students hear the word, “encouragement,” Barnabas comes to mind. This encouraging man was born into a Levitical family from Cyprus. His parents named him Joseph, but the apostles in Jerusalem nicknamed him “Barnabas,” which means, “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36). No other man in the New Testament demonstrated such consistent encouragement to his associates.

The early church saw in Barnabas “a good man, full of the

Holy Spirit and of faith” (11:24). Several actions gave evidence of those traits. For example, he sold a field and gave the profit to the church (4:36-37). He intervened for Paul when the Jerusalem disciples and apostles expressed concern about the former persecutor (9:26-27). Barnabas embraced John Mark when Paul rejected him as a partner for mission work (15:36-41). He supported Paul against some Judeans who wanted to force circumcision on the Gentile believers as part of salvation



(Acts 15; Gal. 2:1-10). No other man in the New Testament demonstrated such consistent encouragement to his associates.

BARNABAS'S PERSONALITY

People Person—Barnabas ministered alongside eleven people: Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Paul at Antioch (Acts 13:1); John Mark (12:25; 13:13; 15:36-41); Peter (Acts 15:7; Gal 2:9-13); James and John (Acts 15:13; Gal. 2:9); Joseph (called Barsabbas) and Silas (Acts 15:22); and Titus (Gal. 2:1).

Barnabas intervened on behalf of Paul when he needed an introduction to the leadership in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27). When facing the Jerusalem Council concerning the issue of Gentiles coming to faith in Christ, Barnabas supported Paul by contending that God saved Gentiles without them having to undergo circumcision (Acts 15). Later, preparing for the second missionary journey, Barnabas argued that John Mark should accompany Paul and himself on the trip—even though Mark had returned home early during the first missionary journey (vv. 36-39).

Passionate Person—When the Jews of Pisidian Antioch rejected the gospel, Barnabas fervently declared that he and Paul would

be focusing on sharing the gospel with the Gentiles (13:46). When the people in Lystra tried to worship him and Paul as Zeus and Hermes, Barnabas and Paul protested by ripping their own robes (14:11-18). Later, Barnabas stood single-mindedly in the midst of the Jerusalem Council and defended the gospel he and Paul had preached throughout Asia Minor (15:12).

Persevering Person—That Barnabas persevered in defending and supporting both Paul and John Mark is obvious. Barnabas (and Paul) experienced persecution by devout Jewish women and men of Pisidian Antioch. Rather than abandon the task, Barnabas (and Paul) “shook the dust off their feet” and moved to Iconium (13:51). Barnabas remained faithful to Paul when Jews came from Antioch and Iconium to Lystra and stoned Paul and left him for dead. Rather than forsake Paul, Barnabas went with him the next day to Derbe (14:19-20).

BARNABAS'S GIFTS

Pastor and Teacher—Barnabas proved to be a gifted preacher and teacher. The church in Antioch of Syria recognized his gifts as he ministered there over a year and then as they commissioned him by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to take the gospel

to other people (11:26; 13:1-4). He preached to Sergius Paulus (a Roman official who presided over Roman court hearings; 13:7) and at the following locations: Pisidian Antioch (vv. 42-43,46), Derbe (14:20-21), Lystra (vv. 21-23), and Perga (v. 25).

Equipper—Barnabas found Paul, who was in Tarsus, and brought him to Antioch to help teach (11:25-26). He teamed with Paul on the first missionary journey and sailed to Cyprus. He re-engaged John Mark in the work after his initial failure (15:36-39).

Encourager—Barnabas spoke up for Paul and John Mark. He encouraged the Jerusalem church to the point that they sent him to Antioch to evaluate the work (11:22). The apostles recognized his encouraging nature and nicknamed him, “Barnabas” (4:36).

BARNABAS’S STRENGTHS

Selflessness—Barnabas exemplified what it meant to prefer other believers above himself (Phil. 2:3). He willingly shared leadership with Paul. He humbled himself by working to support himself (1 Cor. 9:6). He yielded the content of his preaching to the Jerusalem church elders so they could examine it.



Loyalty—The Jerusalem church recognized Barnabas’s trustworthy character as being strong enough to represent them to the church of Antioch. The Antiochian believers expressed confidence in Barnabas by sending their offering to the Jerusalem church by him. This church commissioned Barnabas and Paul to carry the gospel into Asia Minor. Perhaps the greatest expression of faith in Barnabas’s loyalty was God’s gifting him to lead and preach among the churches.

Barnabas exemplified a man who lived in this world, but lived for another kingdom. His encouraging model for a Christ-centered life serves as a pattern for today’s believers to follow.

This article is condensed from an article that appeared in the Fall 2012 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Roy E. Lucas is professor of New Testament at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, Pineville, Kentucky.

1. Larry Crabb and Dan Allender, *Encouragement: The Key to Caring* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 9.

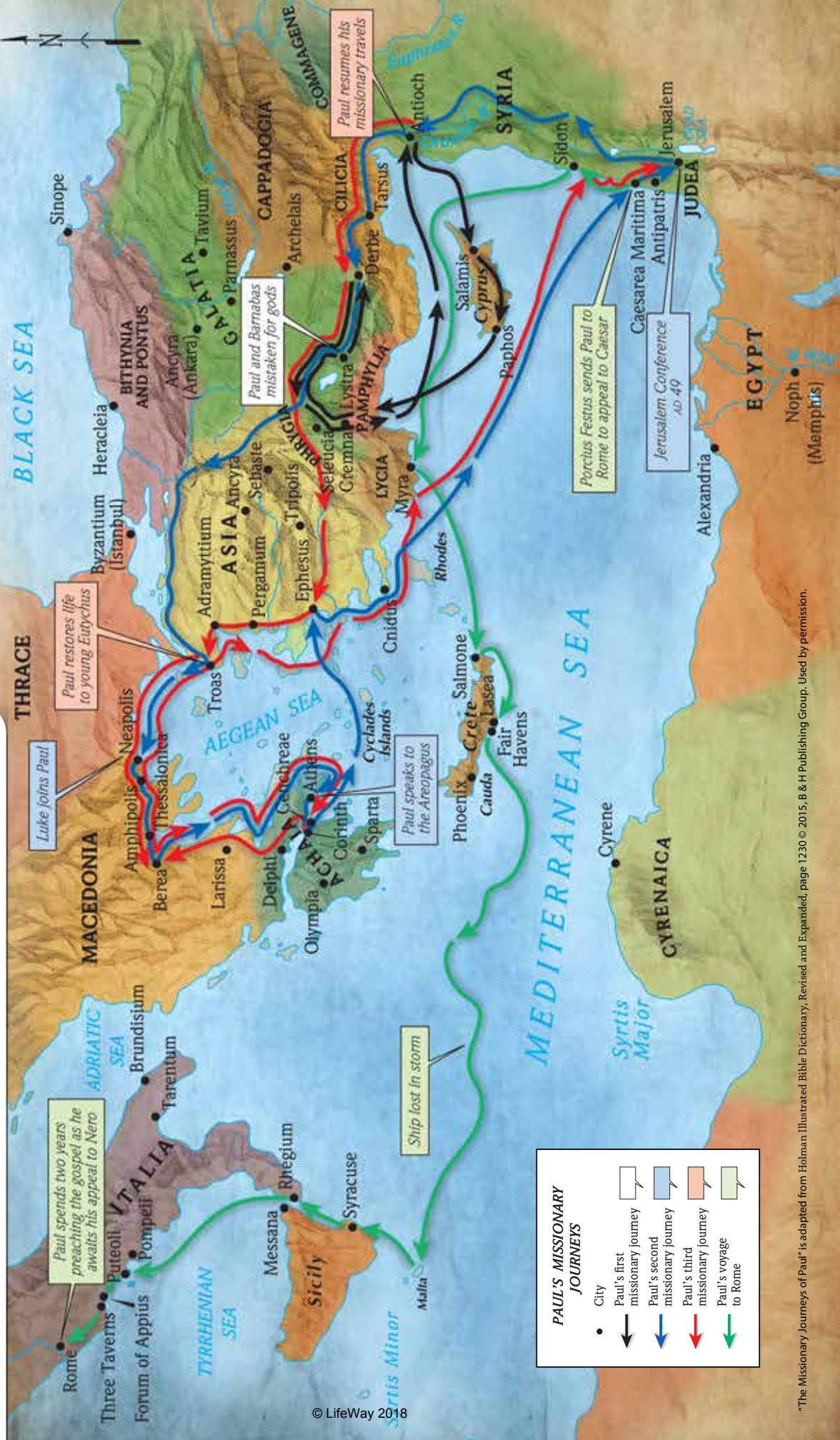


COMING NEXT QUARTER

1,2 CORINTHIANS

- Session 1** **United in Christ** > *1 Corinthians 1:10-25*
- Session 2** **Glorifying God** > *1 Corinthians 6:12-20*
- Session 3** **Keeping Commitments** > *1 Corinthians 7:1-13*
- Session 4** **Influencing for Christ** > *1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 10:31-33; 11:1*
- Session 5** **Assurance of the Resurrection** > *John 20:2-9;*
1 Corinthians 15:20-28
- Session 6** **Remembering the Sacrifice** > *1 Corinthians 11:17-29*
- Session 7** **Serving God's People** > *1 Corinthians 12:4-12,21-26*
- Session 8** **Understanding Love** > *1 Corinthians 13:1-13*
- Session 9** **Enjoying God's Comfort** > *2 Corinthians 1:3-14*
- Session 10** **Displaying the Gospel** > *2 Corinthians 4:5-18*
- Session 11** **Becoming New** > *2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 6:1-2*
- Session 12** **Giving Faithfully** > *2 Corinthians 9:1-15*
- Session 13** **Finding Strength** > *2 Corinthians 12:7b-10; 13:2-8*

Paul's Missionary Journeys



Acts 13–28

As you study the Book of Acts, you will notice that the apostles were certain the risen Jesus had called, commissioned, and empowered them. Jesus was still at work through them. It is clear that no follower of Christ in the Book of Acts thought of Jesus as dead or gone. He was—and is—alive and at work through His church. Jesus' ascension into heaven did not mark His departure, but only a change in the manner by which He performs His earthly ministry. Acts is the continuing story of what Jesus is doing. He is still at work advancing His kingdom through His church. The work of getting the gospel to the ends of the earth is not finished. Our role in the story is clear. Live in the power of the Spirit, bear witness to Christ, and watch what our God does through the obedience of His people!



Let the Word dwell in you.

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