



GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

HOUSTON

COMMUNITY GROUP
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
PART I

WELCOME TO COMMUNITY GROUP AT GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

Whether you've been worshiping at Grace Bible Church (GBC) for years or just finished a Growth Group, you have likely heard or read GBC's purpose statement:

WE EXIST TO GLORIFY GOD BY MAKING DISCIPLES WHO TRANSFORM THE WORLD.

It's a short sentence, but it defines and focuses our ministry efforts at GBC. We believe that God uses discipleship to equip His people for His kingdom work and for His glory. In other words, God gets the glory, and we get the privilege of participating in His plan of redemption. It's for this reason that we are excited to welcome you to Community Group.

The purpose of our small groups is to equip people with biblical knowledge and ministry skills that will help them worship God more fully with minds, hearts, and lives devoted to His service. There are two principal components of a Community Group that we believe God uses to transform and equip our congregation.

The first is the **curriculum**. For over two thousand years, the Church has followed the model of Jesus' disciples. Just as they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42), we do today as well. This is because we must know about God and ourselves in order to follow Him.

The second component of a Community Group is **community**. In the same way that those in the early church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, they also were committed to "fellowship" (Acts 2:42). By discussing and practicing the glorious truths of the gospel in community, we find that God uses other people to shape and strengthen our individual faith.

LIFE STORY

A Life Story is a clear, concise overview of the most formative moments of your life. We include this as part of our time together in Community Groups to help people get to know one another. It also presents you with an opportunity to reflect on your life and consider how God has moved and worked over the years. We hope you will find the following exercise edifying!

HINGE POINTS

A hinge point is something that has had a significant impact on the trajectory of your life. While these moments can be positive or negative, they've helped shape or influence who you are today. Choose 7-10 high AND low hinge points and list them in the chart below.

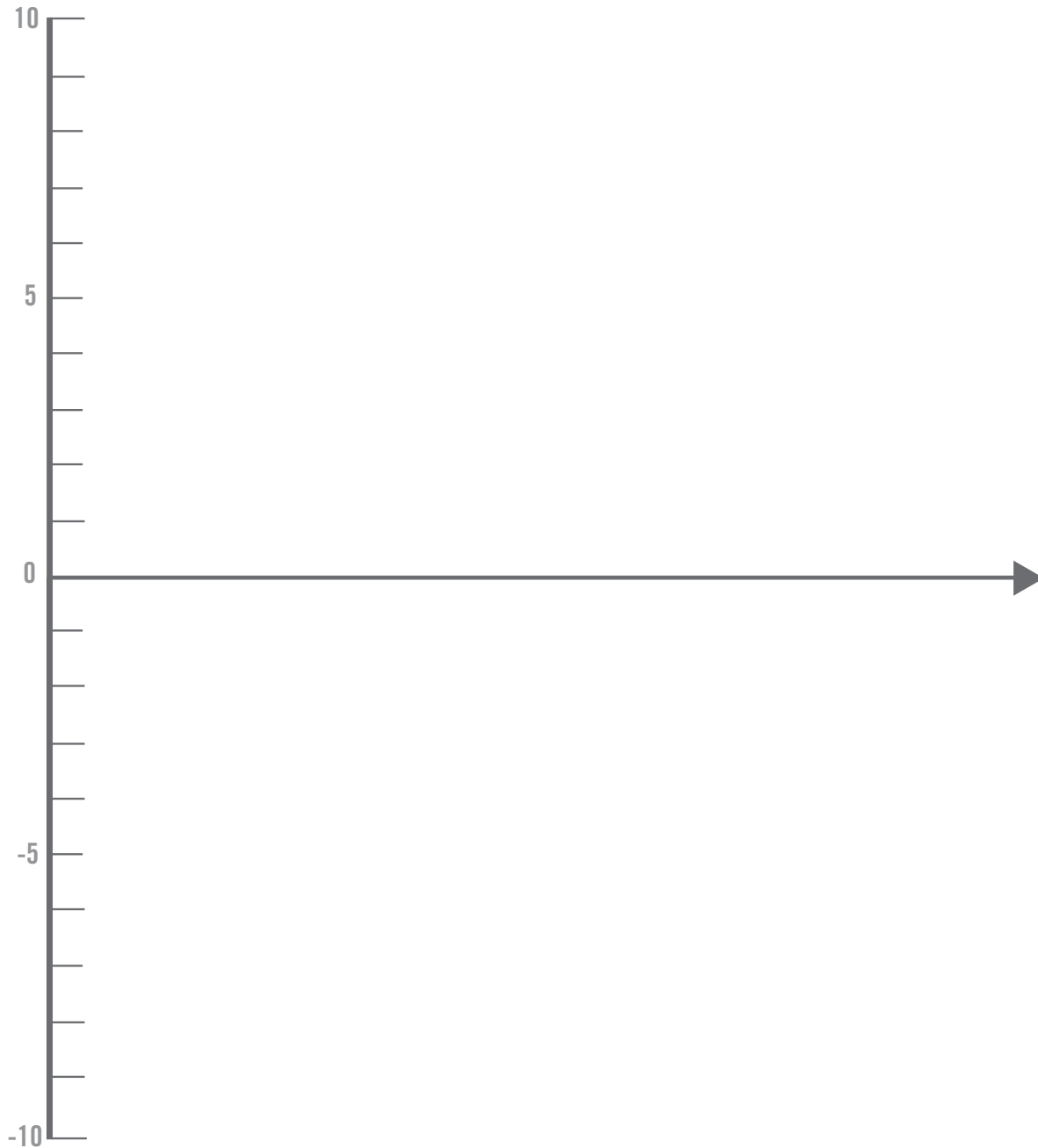
HIGH POINTS	LOW POINTS
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

Next, determine the 7-10 most impactful events from your high and low hinge points by circling them. Then, rate each event, positively or negatively, by giving a -10 to +10 rating. Place the numerical score next to the corresponding event.

LIFE STORY

TIMELINE

Chronologically chart your 7-10 most significant high and low hinge points on the graph below. This will serve to visually depict the most formative moments of your life on a timeline.



On the following page, select 5 of your most significant hinge points to consider more deeply. As you do this, we'll ask you not only what happened and why it was significant, but also how it shaped or influenced your life.

LIFE STORY

Spending time reflecting on your most significant hinge points is the critical part of this exercise. The goal is to put your thoughts to paper to explain what happened and why it was significant. Please note that one of your hinge points must be when you became a Christian.

HINGE POINT 1:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT 2:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT 3:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT 4:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT 5:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

LIFE STORY

The last step of this exercise is to organize your thoughts to share with your group. Start by providing basic background information. Then, share your most significant hinge points with the group. After, conclude by giving a snapshot of where you are right now. We've provided an outline to help you do this.

BACKGROUND / BIOGRAPHY (1-2 MINUTES)

Briefly provide general background and biographical information.

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

CONCLUSION (1-2 MINUTES)

How would you describe your current relationship with God?

Are you actively engaged in discipleship? If so, how? If not, why not?

You should make every effort to share your Life Story in 10 minutes. This will require extended preparation in advance of your meeting. After you have shared, allow time for the group to ask questions. In total, this portion of your meeting should not exceed 15 minutes.

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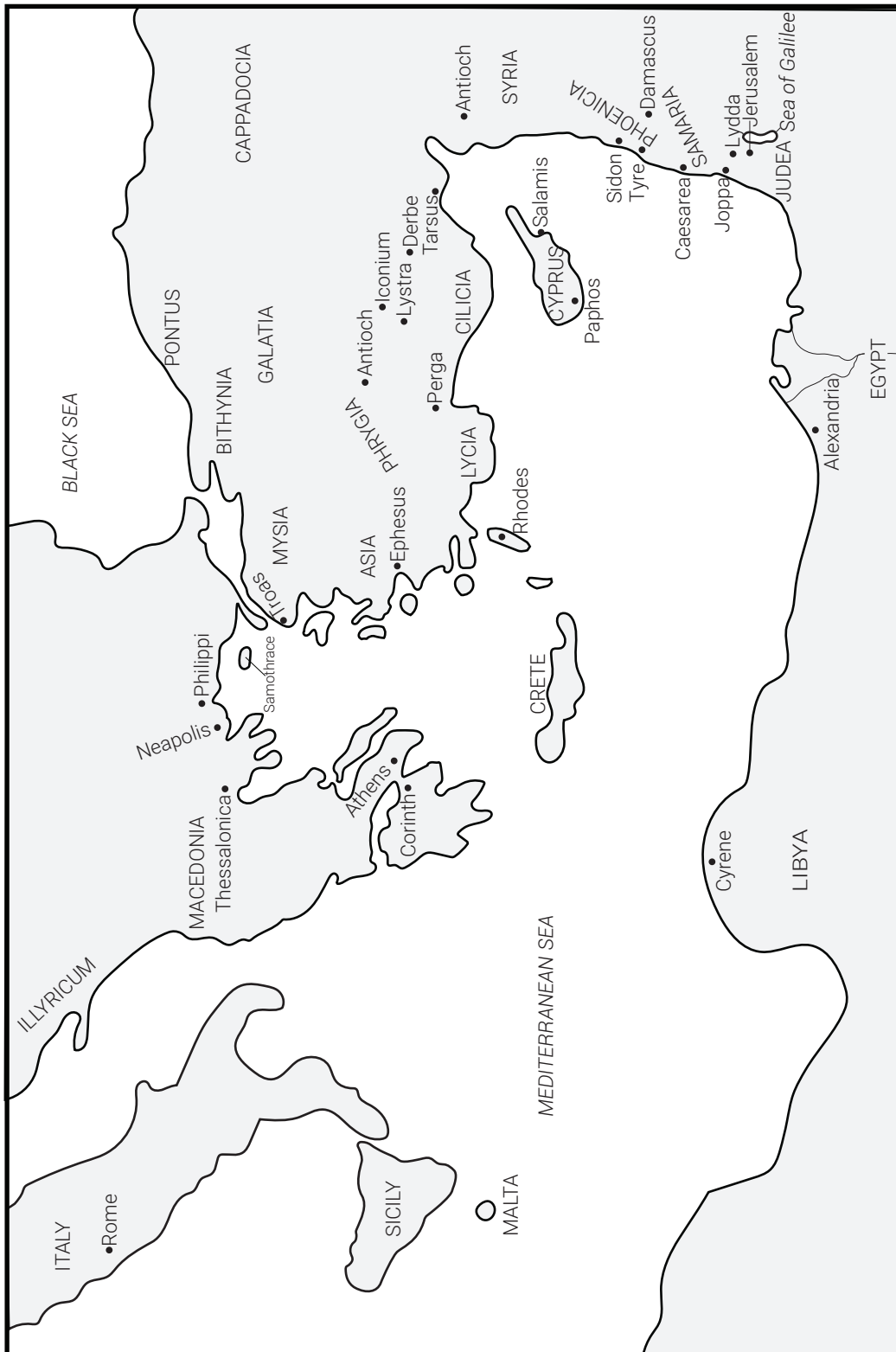
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MAP

This map identifies several of the principal locations referenced throughout Acts and illustrates the geographic expansion of the early Christian movement. From Jerusalem outward through Judea, Samaria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome, the narrative traces the widening reach of the gospel across the Mediterranean world.



WEEK 1

INTRODUCTION

ACTS 1:8

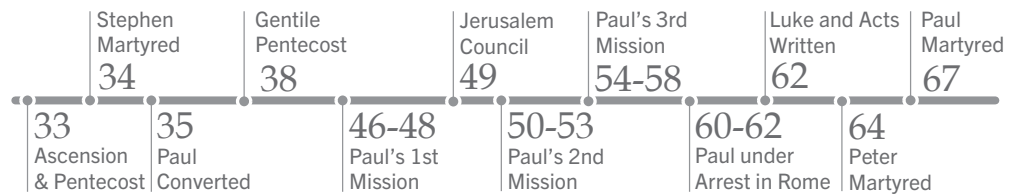
But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

ACTS 1:1-28:31

BACKGROUND / HISTORY

The book of Acts begins where the Gospel of Luke ends. At this point, Christianity was still centered in Jerusalem and almost entirely identified with the Jewish people. Jesus' disciples were relatively few, and they possessed little earthly influence or power. Despite this, Jesus charged them in Acts 1:8 to become His "witnesses" not only in "Jerusalem," but throughout "Judea and Samaria" and, eventually, "to the end of the earth."

Acts records the remarkable fulfillment of that commission over roughly three decades. The Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, persecution scatters Christians beyond Jerusalem, Samaritans and Gentiles are incorporated into the church, and missionaries carry the message of Jesus throughout the Roman world. By the end of the book, the gospel has traveled from Jerusalem to Rome, the cultural and political center of the empire.



AUTHOR

Although the author never identifies himself, the early church consistently attributed Acts to Luke. Paul refers to Luke as "the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14) and counts him among his "fellow workers" (Phm. 24). Luke was also likely a Gentile, which would make him the only non-Jewish author of the New Testament.

Luke was closely connected to many of the events he records in Acts. At several points, the narrative shifts from "they" to "we," showing that he personally accompanied Paul during portions of his missionary work (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). His proximity to Paul and other eyewitnesses placed him in an excellent position to carefully investigate and accurately record the history of the early church.

"The credibility of a witness rests upon his opportunity to know and his fidelity in reporting."
– Charles Hodge

1. WHY ARE BOTH LUKE'S INVESTIGATION AND INVOLVEMENT SIGNIFICANT? HOW SHOULD THIS AFFECT OUR CONFIDENCE IN THE RELIABILITY OF HIS ACCOUNT?

GENRE

Acts is written as historical narrative. It represents the second volume of a two-part work that begins with the Gospel of Luke. Both books, often referred to as Luke-Acts, are addressed to “Theophilus” (Lk. 1:3; Acts 1:1) and provide an “orderly account” (Lk. 1:3) intended to give “certainty” (Lk. 1:4). To that end, Luke meticulously records real journeys, people, places, rulers, and speeches.

At the same time, while the events Luke reports are substantiated and verifiable, his account is selective rather than exhaustive. Beyond simply cataloging events, he intentionally arranges the story to exhibit the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit in establishing, preserving, and expanding the church.

2. WHY DOES IT MATTER THAT ACTS IS HISTORICALLY SELECTIVE? WHAT IS LUKE TRYING TO SHOW THROUGH THE EVENTS HE INCLUDES?

“The wisdom of narrative appears not in the multitude of its particulars, but in the fitness of each to the design of the whole.”
– Jonathan Edwards

DIGGING DEEPER

While everything Luke records is authoritative and instructive, Acts doesn’t present every episode as something Christians should attempt to reproduce or expect to experience. Some actions belong to the unique, foundational period in which God was forming the church and launching the gospel. For instance, the ministry of the apostles and their associates was often accompanied by extraordinary signs and wonders (e.g. Acts 2:43; 8:13; 14:3).

At the same time, Acts repeatedly commends enduring practices of faithfulness that continue to characterize Christian life and ministry, including dependence (Acts 4:31), discipleship (Acts 11:23-26), endurance (Acts 14:22), evangelism (Acts 8:4), generosity (Acts 4:32-35), holiness (Acts 5:1-11), and prayer (Acts 2:42).

Because both are presented alongside each other, we must read Acts carefully, distinguishing between events that were unique to the church’s foundation and principles that continue to apply to Christians today.

3. HOW CAN DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN WHAT IS UNIQUE AND WHAT IS ENDURING HELP US INTERPRET AND APPLY ACTS FAITHFULLY?

“Revelation has a beginning, a middle, and a completion. To read every page as though it were the same moment is to misread it.”
– Herman Bavinck

Luke 1:3 – Though his exact identity is unknown, “Theophilus” was likely a real person of some social prominence. He had already received Christian instruction and may have served as Luke’s patron.

OVERVIEW

Acts has two major sections. Part I (Acts 1-12) primarily follows Peter as the church is established in Jerusalem and pushed outward into Judea and Samaria. Part II (Acts 13-28) primarily follows Paul as the gospel moves into the Gentile world and finally reaches Rome.

Though the central figures and settings change between these broader sections, Acts remains one continuous story. From Jerusalem to Rome, Luke traces the gospel's steady movement outward as God overcomes opposition, crosses long-standing barriers, and gathers people from every background into His church.

READ ACTS 1:1-12:25

Part I begins with Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1-2). As the apostles' ministry takes root in Jerusalem, the church grows rapidly, even as opposition intensifies (Acts 3-5). After Stephen's martyrdom, persecution scatters believers into Judea and Samaria (Acts 6-8). As the gospel continues to spread, Saul, who was previously "ravaging the church" (Acts 8:3), is confronted and converted (Acts 9), Gentiles receive the Spirit (Acts 10-11), and the Word continues to increase and multiply despite Herod's violence (Acts 12).

"God does not require of His servants what He has not first supplied."
– John Calvin

4. WHAT DOES JESUS COMMISSION THE APOSTLES TO DO (ACTS 1:8)? HOW DOES HE ENABLE THEM FOR THIS MISSION (ACTS 2:1-4)?

5. WHAT MARKED LIFE IN THE EARLY CHURCH (ACTS 2:42-47; 4:32-35)? WHAT DO THESE PRACTICES REVEAL ABOUT THEIR PRIORITIES?

6. HOW DID THE AUTHORITIES RESPOND TO THE APOSTLES (ACTS 4:1-3, 18; 5:17-18, 33, 40)? WHAT IMPACT DID THIS HAVE ON THE CHURCH (ACTS 4:4; 5:14; 6:7)?

"Providence uses the enemy's own hand to plant what he came to uproot."
– John Flavel

Acts 1:8 – Acts unfolds in a world unusually suited for the gospel's spread. Roman rule brought relative stability, while extensive roads and sea routes connected the empire. Koine Greek eased communication, while widespread synagogues gave missionaries audiences familiar with the Old Testament.

7. WHAT FOLLOWS STEPHEN'S MARTYRDOM (ACTS 8:1-3)? HOW DOES GOD USE HIS DEATH TO ADVANCE THE GOSPEL (ACTS 8:4FF, 11:19FF)?

"The devil murdered one preacher and unwittingly created a hundred."
– Martin Luther

DIGGING DEEPER

Throughout Acts, each time opposition intensifies, Luke follows with a report of the church's growth.

For example, after Peter and John are arrested, Luke notes that the number of believers had reached "about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). After the apostles are jailed and beaten, "more than ever believers were added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14). After persecution "[scatters]" (Acts 8:1) the church, the believers "went about preaching the Word" (Acts 8:4) and "a great number who believed turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21). Even after Herod's hostility intensifies, Luke concludes that "the word of God increased and multiplied" (Acts 12:24).

This pattern is deliberate. Luke shows that opposition isn't just an obstacle God overcomes, but often a means He uses to advance His purposes. Because of this, the church's mission doesn't depend on cultural influence, favorable circumstances, human ability, or political approval. Whatever the situation, the Father will accomplish His will, the Son will build His church, and the Spirit will empower His people to carry the gospel forward.

8. WHAT HAPPENS TO SAUL (ACTS 9:1-19)? WHAT DOES HIS CONVERSION REVEAL ABOUT GOD'S POWER TO OVERCOME OPPOSITION?

9. WHAT DOES GOD REVEAL TO PETER (ACTS 10:9-16, 28, 34-35)? HOW IS THIS CONFIRMED IN WHAT FOLLOWS (ACTS 10:44-48)?

10. HOW DOES THE GOSPEL TAKE ROOT AND GROW IN ANTIOCH (ACTS 11:19-26)? WHAT DIFFERENT PEOPLE DOES GOD USE TO ESTABLISH THE CHURCH THERE?

"God's work is often carried farthest by those who had no plan to carry it."
– Matthew Henry

"God needs no army to humble a king. When He appoints the hour, a worm will do."
 – Thomas Watson

"A church is not finally measured by whom it gathers, but by whom it is willing to release."
 – Charles Simeon

DIGGING DEEPER

Throughout Acts, God moves the gospel across barriers the church was neither able or prepared to cross on its own.

For instance, Jesus personally confronts Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4-5), stopping the church's most determined enemy. God gives Peter a vision (Acts 10:15) and then confirms it by pouring out His Spirit on Cornelius' household (Acts 10:44-46). Even in Antioch, where unnamed believers from "Cyprus and Cyrene" (Acts 11:20) first preach to Gentiles, Luke credits the outcome to "the hand of the Lord" (Acts 11:21).

Each of these scenes confirms what Luke signals from the start. When he describes his gospel as an account of "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1), he implies that Jesus' work didn't conclude at the ascension. Instead, He continues it through the power of His Spirit and the participation of His church.

11. WHAT DOES HEROD'S DOWNFALL REVEAL ABOUT THE LIMITS OF HUMAN OPPOSITION TO GOD'S PURPOSES (ACTS 12:20-24)?

READ ACTS 13:1-28:31

Part II opens as the church in Antioch sends out Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1-3). Paul's missionary work carries the gospel through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece (Acts 13-20), while the Jerusalem Council settles how Gentiles are received into the church (Acts 15). After returning to Jerusalem, Paul is arrested and defends himself before a series of Roman officials (Acts 21-26). After some time, he's finally sent to Rome, where he preaches "without hindrance" (Acts 28:31).

12. HOW ARE BARNABAS AND SAUL CALLED AND SENT OUT (ACTS 13:1-3)? WHAT DOES THIS ESTABLISH ABOUT HOW MINISTRY BEGINS AND ADVANCES?

13. WHAT ISSUE PROMPTS THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL (ACTS 15:1-5)? WHY IS THIS AN IMPORTANT TOPIC? HOW IS IT RESOLVED (ACTS 15:8-11, 19-20)?

14. HOW DOES PAUL ADAPT HIS PREACHING TO DIFFERENT AUDIENCES (ACTS 13:16-41; 14:15-17; 17:22-31)? WHAT REMAINS CONSISTENT?

*"Study your hearers
as carefully as you
study your text."
— Richard Baxter*

15. WHAT OPPOSITION DOES PAUL FACE (ACTS 14:19; 16:22-24; 19:23-29)? HOW DOES HE RESPOND TO ADVERSITY AND PERSECUTION (ACTS 14:20-22; 16:25; 20:22-24)?

DIGGING DEEPER

The transition from "Saul" to "Paul" is sometimes treated as a name change connected to his conversion (e.g. Gen. 17:5; Jn. 1:42). Though this is a common assumption, Acts never says God gave Saul a new name. In fact, Luke continues calling him "Saul" for years after his astonishing encounter on the Damascus Road (e.g. Acts 11:25-26; 13:2).

The shift actually occurs during the first missionary journey, when Luke writes, "Saul, who was also called Paul" (Acts 13:9). The implication is that he already went by both names, which was common in the first-century Roman world (e.g. Acts 9:36, 12:12). "Saul" was his Jewish name, fitting his identity as an Israelite (Phil. 3:5), while "Paul" was his Roman name, corresponding to his citizenship (Acts 21:39; 22:28).

Even so, the timing matters. As the narrative turns toward the Gentile world, Luke begins using the name Paul's audiences would have known him by. The change doesn't mark a new identity, but a new stage in his mission.

16. WHY IS PAUL ARRESTED IN JERUSALEM (ACTS 21:27-36)? HOW DOES HE USE EACH OPPORTUNITY BEFORE HIS ACCUSERS (ACTS 22:1-21; 26:1-23)?

17. WHAT ASSURANCE DOES GOD GIVE PAUL (ACTS 23:11; 27:23-24)? HOW IS THAT PROMISE FULFILLED BY THE END OF ACTS (ACTS 28:16, 30-31)?

*"The promise of God
binds Him more surely
than any oath of man."
— John Owen*

"The church is not a museum for the respectable, but a rescue operation staffed entirely by the rescued."
– Tim Keller

"Many a man has set out to bury the Bible, and every one of them was in the ground first."
– Charles Spurgeon

DIGGING DEEPER

Acts concludes without recording Paul's fate. He remains under house arrest in Rome, awaiting a trial Luke never describes. Instead, the book ends with Paul "proclaiming the kingdom of God... with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31). Though the messenger remains in "chains" (Acts 28:20), the message is not bound.

This ending is deliberate. Acts opens with Jesus' commissioning His apostles to be His witnesses "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), and the book traces the execution of that command. Through Peter, the gospel reached Jews and Samaritans (Acts 1-12). Through Paul, it's carried increasingly to the Gentiles (Acts 13-28). By the final chapter, Paul is openly preaching the gospel in Rome. Luke ends there not because the apostles failed to complete their task, but because he has shown their work reaching its intended fulfillment.

In light of that, the church today isn't called to finish a mission the apostles left incomplete or unfinished. Instead, our responsibility is to preserve and proclaim the same apostolic message given to them and build upon the foundation of the church they helped to establish.

18. HOW SHOULD THE APOSTLES' FULFILLMENT OF THEIR COMMISSION SHAPE THE WAY WE UNDERSTAND THE CHURCH'S MISSION TODAY?

CONCLUSION

Acts begins with a small group of disciples waiting in Jerusalem and ends with the gospel proclaimed in Rome. Though everything about the church's circumstances changes between those scenes, the source of its advance never does.

As we study this year, we will see that Jesus still builds His church through the Spirit-empowered faithfulness of His people. Our calling is to faithfully proclaim the same gospel, depending on the same Spirit, wherever God has placed us.

19. WHAT PASSAGES IN ACTS SEEM ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT OR RELEVANT TO YOUR LIFE? WHY?

Acts 1-28 – Much of the New Testament was written while the events of Acts were unfolding. James likely dates to the period of Acts 11-15, Galatians to Acts 14-15, 1 and 2 Thessalonians to Acts 17-18, 1 and 2 Corinthians to Acts 19-20, and Romans to the end of Acts 20. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon were written during the Roman imprisonment that closes Acts 28. 1 Peter and Hebrews belong to those same years or shortly after.

20. WHAT PASSAGES IN ACTS DO YOU HOPE TO COMPREHEND OR UNDERSTAND MORE COMPLETELY? WHY?

While we believe your study through Acts will be edifying, we also think that time spent in community is equally important. Our prayer is that your group would serve as a place where you are encouraged and challenged to live out God's Word.

21. WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO CULTIVATE OR DEVELOP AS A RESULT OF BEING IN COMMUNITY THIS YEAR? WHY?

22. WHAT ABOUT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES OR PERSONALITY MIGHT INHIBIT FULL INVESTMENT IN YOUR GROUP? EXPLAIN.

*"There is no shortcut
from ignorance of
the Word to maturity
in the faith."
— A.W. Pink*

*"Our love of God is
measured by our
everyday fellowship
with others and the
love it displays."
— Andrew Murray*

WEEKS 2-11

ACTS

PART I

WEEK 2

BETWEEN PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT

ACTS 1:3

He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs,
appearing to them during forty days and speaking about
the kingdom of God.

ACTS 1:1-26

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of Acts, the “apostles” (v. 2) stand between promise and fulfillment, as they anticipate being “clothed with power” (Lk. 24:49) by the “Holy Spirit” (v. 5). While they wait, the foundation for the church’s mission is established.

READ ACTS 1:1-11

After referencing the gospel of Luke, which covered all that Jesus “[did] and [taught]” (v. 1), Luke recounts the “forty days” (v. 3) between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. During this time, Jesus instructed the “apostles” (v. 2) about the “kingdom of God” (v. 3) and prepared them to receive the “Holy Spirit” (v. 5).

“The great burden of the apostles’ testimony was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”

– Charles Hodge

1. WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE “FORTY DAYS” (V. 3) AFTER THE RESURRECTION (V. 3)? WHY WAS THIS TIME ESSENTIAL FOR THE APOSTLES’ EVENTUAL MISSION?

2. WHAT DID JESUS “[ORDER]” (V. 4) HIS DISCIPLES TO DO (V. 4)? WHY (VV. 4-5)?

DIGGING DEEPER

Jesus’ resurrection stood at the center of the early church’s message as a historical claim grounded in eyewitness testimony (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Luke emphasizes this by noting that Jesus “presented Himself alive” (v. 3), giving “many proofs” (v. 3) over “forty days” (v. 3). If the resurrection had not been verifiable, the apostles’ initial proclamation of the gospel in Jerusalem would have collapsed immediately. However, because they had heard, seen, and touched Jesus (1 Jn. 1:3), they possessed a settled confidence in their salvation that overflowed into bold witness.

The resurrection remains vitally important for us today. Because Jesus lives, we can be confident that we are fully accepted as God’s children (Rom. 8:15-17). At the same time, the resurrection does more than secure our identity. It reshapes the direction and purpose of our lives (2 Cor. 5:15). In everything we do, we are called to live in light of Jesus’ risen life, bringing its power into every part of our own (Rom. 6:4; Col. 3:1-3). As we do, we bear witness to the transforming reality of the gospel with both our words and deeds (Matt. 5:16).

3. HOW CERTAIN ARE YOU THAT THE RESURRECTION IS A REAL, HISTORICAL EVENT? WHAT SHAPES THAT CONFIDENCE? WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

"The resurrection is the decisive act of God in history on which the church stands or falls."
– Herman Ridderbos

4. WHERE DOES YOUR LIFE NOT REFLECT THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION? WHAT WOULD CHANGE IN THIS AREA IF YOU APPLIED IT MORE CONSISTENTLY?

In the Bible, God's "kingdom" (vv. 3, 6) refers not primarily to a place or political system (Lk. 17:20-21), but to God's sovereign rule exercised through His saving power (Ps. 103:19; 1 Cor. 15:24-25). Throughout His ministry, Jesus proclaimed that His kingdom was "at hand" (Mk. 1:15), demonstrated its authority through His works (Lk. 11:20), and secured it through His death and resurrection (Col. 2:15). Now, at the end of the "forty days" (v. 3), Jesus initiates a new phase in the revealing of His kingdom.

5. WHAT DOES THE APOSTLES' QUESTION REVEAL ABOUT THEIR EXPECTATION OF GOD'S "KINGDOM" (V. 6)? HOW DOES JESUS CORRECT THEM (VV. 7-8)?

6. WHAT IS JESUS' COMMISSION TO THE APOSTLES BEFORE HIS ASCENSION (V. 8)? HOW WOULD THEY EXECUTE JESUS' CHARGE DESPITE HIS ABSENCE (V. 8)?

"Those whom Christ employs in His service, He will furnish with power for it."
– Matthew Henry

7. HOW IS JESUS' ASCENSION DESCRIBED (V. 9)?

Acts 1:3 – Key historical considerations supporting the resurrection include the empty tomb, the early and consistent eyewitness testimony, the radical transformation of the disciples, and the rapid rise of the early church in the very city where Jesus was crucified.

*"The church lives
between the ascension
and the return, sustained
by the promise of both."
– J. Gresham Machen*

*"Christ's kingship
extends over all things
and calls the church to
bear witness to
that reign in every
sphere of life."
– Herman Bavinck*

8. WHAT DO THE "MEN... IN WHITE ROBES" (V. 10) SAY TO THE APOSTLES (V. 11)? WHY WOULD THIS MESSAGE BE SIGNIFICANT IN THIS MOMENT?

DIGGING DEEPER

To fully understand Jesus' ascension, the events of Acts 1:6-11 must be considered alongside Daniel 7:13-14. In a vision given by God, the prophet Daniel sees "one like a son of man" (v. 13) coming "with the clouds of heaven" (v. 13) to be presented before "the Ancient of Days" (v. 13). Once there, He is given "everlasting dominion" (v. 14) over a "kingdom" (v. 14) made up of "all peoples, nations, and languages" (v. 14).

What Daniel saw ahead of time from heaven's perspective, Acts shows in real time from the disciples' view. With this understanding, Jesus' being "lifted up" (v. 9) by "a cloud" (v. 9) is the fulfillment of prophecy, depicting His coronation at the completion of His earthly ministry. As a result, though the full manifestation of His kingdom is still to come (v. 7), Jesus currently possesses authority both "in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18).

This clarifies the mission given to the apostles and passed down to us. As His "witnesses" (v. 8), we are not advancing or building a kingdom not yet established, but faithfully pointing to what has already been secured (Col. 1:13). While this distinction might seem minor, it changes how we approach "[making] disciples" (Matt. 28:19). Instead of measuring success by outcomes, we are free to focus on faithful obedience, leaving the results to a King who is already on the throne (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

9. HOW DOES JESUS POSSESSING AUTHORITY AND DOMINION IN THE WORLD SHAPE THE WAY WE SHOULD VIEW THE MISSION AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH?

10. WHY DOES OUR MOTIVATION MATTER AS WE SERVE? WHAT DO WE GAIN WHEN OUR GOAL IN MINISTRY SHIFTS FROM OUTCOMES TO OBEDIENCE?

Acts 1:10 – The ascension reframes "heaven" and earth not as distant locations, but as overlapping realities. Heaven is the seat of divine authority (Ps. 103:19) from which Jesus now reigns, exercising His sovereignty over all things on earth (Eph. 1:20-22).

11. WHERE CAN YOU GROW IN MORE FAITHFULLY BEING A “[WITNESS]” (V. 8) TO THE KINGDOM ALREADY ESTABLISHED BY JESUS? HOW?

*“Every Christian
is either a missionary
or an impostor.”
– Charles Spurgeon*

2

READ ACTS 1:12-26

Following Jesus’ ascension, the apostles returned to Jerusalem and gathered in the “upper room” (v. 13) to “wait” (v. 4) as they had been instructed. In the days that followed, they began to “[devote] themselves” (v. 14) to a handful of practices that would define the early church.

12. WHO RETURNED TO JERUSALEM AFTER JESUS’ ASCENSION (VV. 12-13)? WHAT DID THOSE WHO GATHERED “[DEVOTE] THEMSELVES TO” (V. 14)?

13. WHAT SHAPES PETER’S THOUGHTS ON BOTH JUDAS’ ACTIONS AND THE NEED TO SELECT HIS REPLACEMENT (VV. 15-20)? WHY IS THIS NOTEWORTHY?

14. WHAT QUALIFICATION WAS REQUIRED FOR JUDAS’ REPLACEMENT (VV. 21-22)? WHY WAS THIS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL TO THE MINISTRY OF AN APOSTLE?

*“They were chosen to be
witnesses, that nothing
might be delivered but
that which they had
certainly known.”
– John Calvin*

15. WHAT PROCESS DO THE APOSTLES USE TO MAKE THEIR SELECTION (V. 26)? HOW DOES THIS REFLECT TRUST IN GOD (VV. 24-26)?

Acts 1:26 – In the Old Testament, “[casting] lots” was a recognized means of entrusting a decision to God’s sovereignty (e.g. Lev. 16:8; Prov. 16:33). Here, it occurs in a unique pre-Pentecost setting and is never repeated in Acts. Afterward, decisions are ordinarily marked by Spirit-led discernment (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18).

*"Resolved, to inquire of the Lord in all things, and not to lean on my own understanding."
— Jonathan Edwards*

*"Many of His promises bear a long date, but they are sure and infallible. Wait, therefore."
— John Trapp*

DIGGING DEEPER

Before the mission moved outward, the apostles first obeyed by remaining in Jerusalem as Jesus commanded (v. 4).

Their obedience didn't leave them idle. While they waited, they gathered with "one accord" (v. 14), together "devoting themselves" (v. 14) to both "prayer" (v. 14) and "Scripture" (v. 16). Additionally, they addressed the important matter of replacing Judas (vv. 21-26), restoring the representative group of apostolic witnesses Jesus had originally appointed. In doing these things, they neither ran ahead of God nor remained passive until He moved.

Their patience and diligence are instructive to us. We often treat waiting as inefficient and impractical. However, as these initial days after the ascension show, Scripture presents waiting as a season with its own opportunities for faithfulness (Lam. 3:25-26). Whenever God calls us to wait, our task isn't to manufacture the next step, but to be dutiful in what He has already made clear (Ps. 37:7; Jas. 1:22).

16. WHY ARE PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE INTEGRAL TO SEEKING GOD? HOW DO THESE DISCIPLINES SHAPE SEASONS OF WAITING?

17. ARE YOU MORE TEMPTED TO RUN AHEAD OR WITHDRAW INTO PASSIVITY WHEN GOD MAKES YOU WAIT? WHY?

18. WHAT CAN GOD PRODUCE IN US THROUGH WAITING THAT IMMEDIATE ANSWERS MIGHT NOT? WHAT HAS GOD TAUGHT YOU DURING A SEASON OF WAITING?

19. WHERE ARE YOU CURRENTLY WAITING ON GOD? WHAT HAS HE ALREADY MADE CLEAR FOR YOU TO DO IN THE MEANTIME?

CONCLUSION

Acts 1:8 functions as the thesis statement of Acts, outlining the gospel's movement from "Jerusalem... to the end of the earth." Notably, this mission is not driven by human effort or strategy, but by the empowering presence of the Spirit working through the faithful obedience of a dependent Church. As each of us participates in this endeavor, we must be careful to move forward in the same way as the apostles, relying on God to work through us to reveal the kingdom Jesus has already secured.

20. HOW SHOULD BEING PART OF GOD'S WORK TO REVEAL HIS KINGDOM SHAPE THE WAY YOU LIVE? WHAT ABOUT THAT EXCITES YOU MOST?

21. WHAT TYPICALLY IMPEDES OR PREVENTS YOU FROM BEING JESUS' "[WITNESS]" (V. 8)? HOW DOES THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT SPEAK TO THOSE OBSTACLES?

*"Spend and be spent in the service of God. It is the sweetest life."
– Richard Baxter*

WEEK 3

PENTECOST

ACTS 2:4

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

ACTS 2:1-47

INTRODUCTION

In Acts 2:1-47, God fulfills the promise Jesus made to His disciples by pouring out the Spirit and empowering the church for its mission. What begins with the coming of the Spirit quickly becomes a public proclamation of the gospel, calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus.

READ ACTS 2:1-13

The “day of Pentecost” (v. 1) was an annual Jewish feast, held fifty days after Passover. Because it was one of the major pilgrimage festivals, Jerusalem was crowded with “devout men from every nation under heaven” (v. 5). In choosing this moment to send the Spirit, God ensured the message of the gospel was heard widely.

“At Pentecost, God was not being theatrical. He was being merciful, giving eyes that could not see something they could not miss.”
— Sinclair Ferguson

“The Spirit descended not into a closet but into a city.”
— John Owen

1. WHAT PHYSICAL SIGNS ACCOMPANIED THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT (VV. 2-3)? WHY WOULD GOD CHOOSE TO REVEAL THE SPIRIT IN THIS WAY?

2. WHAT EFFECT DOES THE SPIRIT HAVE ON THE DISCIPLES (V. 4)? HOW DO THEY SUBSEQUENTLY USE THEIR NEW ABILITY (V. 11)?

3. WHO IS PRESENT AT THE TIME OF THESE EVENTS (VV. 5-11)? WHY IS THIS NOTABLE?

4. HOW DOES THE CROWD RESPOND TO WHAT THEY HEAR AND SEE (VV. 6, 7, 12, 13)? WHY DOES THE SAME EVENT PRODUCE SUCH DIFFERENT REACTIONS?

DIGGING DEEPER

The coming of the “Holy Spirit” (v. 4) at Pentecost fulfills what God had long promised through the prophets (Jer. 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-29) and confirms what Jesus had recently assured the disciples (Jn. 16:7; Acts 1:8). His outpouring in Jerusalem marks a paradigmatic shift in both God’s redemptive plan and His relationship with His people.

To appreciate the significance of Pentecost, we must first understand who the Spirit is. To start, He’s not an impersonal power or spiritual force, but the third Person of the Trinity, fully divine with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19). Additionally, His activity didn’t begin in the first century. The Spirit was present at creation (Gen. 1:2) and active throughout the Old Testament, equipping God’s servants (Ex. 31:1-5), empowering leaders (Judg. 6:34; 1 Sam. 16:13), and speaking through the prophets (Zech. 7:12).

That said, what changes at Pentecost isn’t the beginning of the Spirit’s work or presence, but the breadth and fullness of His new-covenant indwelling (Ezek. 36:26-27). From this point forward, He graciously dwells within every believer (1 Cor. 6:19) and among His gathered people (1 Cor. 3:16). Also, as we’ll see throughout Acts, the Spirit speaks (Acts 13:2), directs and restrains (Acts 16:6-7), appoints leaders (Acts 20:28), and empowers believers for witness (Acts 4:31).

Ultimately, all Christians receive the Spirit by hearing the gospel with faith (Gal. 3:2) and are sealed with Him upon believing (Eph. 1:13-14). Through Him, we are given spiritual life (Tit. 3:5) and united to Jesus (1 Cor. 12:13). Even more, He assures us of our adoption (Rom. 8:15-17), helps us in weakness (Rom. 8:26-27), sanctifies us (Gal. 5:16-25), conforms us to Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18), equips us to serve one another (1 Cor. 12:4-11), and enables us to proclaim the gospel with courage (Acts 1:8).

5. WHAT CHANGED AT PENTECOST? HOW DID THE SPIRIT’S OUTPOURING RESHAPE THE IDENTITY AND MISSION OF GOD’S PEOPLE?

“Pentecost did not merely change what the disciples could do. It changed who they were.”
– J.I. Packer

6. WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT THAT EVERY BELIEVER NOW RECEIVES THE SPIRIT? HOW SHOULD HIS INDWELLING SHAPE THE WAY YOU LIVE?

Acts 2:2-4 – The “wind,” “fire,” and “tongues” that accompanied Pentecost mark a unique redemptive-historical event rather than a normative pattern for conversion. Similar manifestations appear only at major transitions in Acts (Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-46; 19:1-6), and the New Testament never commands believers to seek their repetition.

Acts 2:9-11 – Pentecost intentionally parallels Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). There, human pride resulted in linguistic division. At Pentecost, God uses many languages to make His name understood across those divisions.

*"God pours out His Spirit on all flesh that no man might glory except in the Lord."
– Jonathan Edwards*

*"The last days are not marked by fear and retreat but by the advance of the gospel through the Spirit."
– John Stott*

READ ACTS 2:14-41

In response to the confusion and curiosity caused by the "Spirit" (v. 4), Peter stands up to address the crowd. What follows is the church's first public proclamation of the gospel, calling people to "repent and be baptized" (v. 38).

7. WHAT ACCUSATION DOES PETER ADDRESS (V. 15)? HOW DOES HIS QUOTING "JOEL" (V. 16) EXPLAIN THE EVENTS OF THE DAY (VV. 17-21)?

8. WHO ARE THE RECIPIENTS OF THE SPIRIT (VV. 17-18)? WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT THE SCOPE OF HIS IMPACT?

9. WHAT PROMISE IS GIVEN (V. 21)? HOW DOES IT SHAPE PETER'S MESSAGE?

DIGGING DEEPER

The "last days" (v. 17) is a biblical term that refers to the final chapter of redemptive history. While it was anticipated in the Old Testament (e.g. Joel 2:28-32), Peter makes clear that it was inaugurated at Pentecost (Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20) and will extend until Jesus' final return (v. 20). During this time, the Spirit will empower God's people to proclaim the gospel to the nations.

As Christians living in this age, we have no reason to be passive or timid. The Spirit who descended at Pentecost now dwells within every believer (Rom. 8:9), empowering the church's witness. For this reason, Peter's invitation to "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord" (v. 21) remains the church's message to the world (Rom. 10:13-15).

10. WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT WE LIVE IN THE "LAST DAYS" (V. 17)? HOW SHOULD IT SHAPE THE URGENCY WITH WHICH YOU SHARE THE GOSPEL?

After recalling Joel's warning and plea (vv. 17-21), Peter specifically addresses the "men of Israel" (v. 22), appealing to Jesus' "mighty works and wonders" (v. 22) as evidence that God had authenticated His ministry and mission.

11. HOW DOES PETER DESCRIBE JESUS' LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION (VV. 22-24)? WHAT DOES HE EMPHASIZE ABOUT GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY IN THESE EVENTS?

12. WHAT ACCUSATION DOES PETER MAKE OF HIS AUDIENCE (V. 23)? WHY WOULD HE DELIVER THIS CHARGE SO DIRECTLY?

"A physician who refuses to tell his patient the truth about his condition is no physician at all."
– Richard Baxter

DIGGING DEEPER

Compatibilism is the theological conviction that God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together rather than against each other. Peter clearly illustrates this concept by speaking about the cross.

In his sermon, Peter asserts that Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (v. 23). In other words, Jesus' death wasn't an accident or an unexpected tragedy that God scrambled to redeem. Even still, Peter doesn't absolve his audience of their culpability in Jesus' death, boldly stating, "you crucified and killed" (v. 23) Him.

This doctrine should comfort us. If God can weave the crucifixion of His own Son into the greatest act of redemption the world has ever seen, there's no circumstance in our lives that lies beyond His good purposes (Rom. 8:28). At the same time, it should free us to act with confidence (1 Cor. 3:6-7), recognizing that our actions and choices are genuinely meaningful in the outworking of God's will (Prov. 19:21).

13. WHAT CIRCUMSTANCE ARE YOU TEMPTED TO VIEW AS OUTSIDE OF GOD'S CONTROL? HOW DOES COMPATIBILISM COMFORT YOU IN THIS SITUATION?

"The sovereignty of God is not a cold doctrine for the mind. It is a warm pillow for the suffering soul."
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Acts 2:29 – David's "tomb" was known in Jerusalem, giving Peter's argument from Psalm 16 a concrete historical foundation.

Acts 2:41 – Roughly "three thousand" people were baptized and added to the church in a single day, dramatically increasing the small gathering of approximately 120 believers (Acts 1:15).

"Revelation does not merely furnish a guide for the way. It discloses the Lord to whom the whole of the way leads."
 – Geerhardus Vos

"You cannot be near the living God and remain unchanged."
 – Richard Sibbes

Having established Jesus' identity through His "mighty works and wonders" (v. 22), Peter now refers to the Psalms to demonstrate that Jesus' suffering and exaltation were not unexpected, but anticipated centuries earlier by David.

14. WHAT CASE DO PSALMS 16 AND 110 MAKE ABOUT JESUS' RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION (VV. 25-28, 34-35)?

15. WHAT DOES PETER DECLARE WITH CERTAINTY ABOUT JESUS (V. 36)? WHY IS THIS STATEMENT THE PINNACLE OF HIS SERMON?

16. HOW DOES THE CROWD RESPOND TO PETER'S DECLARATION (VV. 37, 41)? WHAT DOES PETER COMMAND THEM TO DO IN RESPONSE (VV. 38-40)?

READ ACTS 2:42-47

Having responded to Peter's call to repentance, the newly converted believers committed themselves to several habits that would define not only their community, but every faithful church that followed.

17. WHAT DID THE EARLY CHURCH DEVOTE ITSELF TO (V. 42)? HOW DID THESE COMMITMENTS IMPACT THEIR COMMUNITY (V. 43)?

18. WHAT CHARACTERIZED THEIR LIFE TOGETHER (V. 44)? HOW DID THIS ENABLE THEM TO LIVE (V. 45)?

19. HOW IS THE EARLY CHURCH'S GATHERING DESCRIBED (V. 46)? WHAT DOES THEIR DISPOSITION REVEAL ABOUT THE GOSPEL'S EFFECT ON THEIR COMMUNITY?

20. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CHURCH'S GROWTH (V. 47)? WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT HOW WE SHOULD APPROACH EVANGELISM AND MINISTRY?

DIGGING DEEPER

In this brief glimpse of life in the early church, we see a pattern of devotion marked by four principles (v. 42).

First, they submitted to the "apostles' teaching" (v. 42), recognizing that sound doctrine was essential to following Jesus. Second, they committed to "fellowship" (v. 42), expressed not only through community life but also through generosity (v. 44). Third, they gathered for the "breaking of bread" (v. 42), likely including both shared meals and communion. Finally, they dedicated themselves to "[prayer]" (v. 42).

This portrait reminds us that the church is not sustained by personalities or programs, but by a shared devotion to God expressed through these principles. As we prioritize these activities as a church, we ascribe to God the "[praise]" (v. 47) He's due, experience the "[gladness]" (v. 46) that comes from gathering together, and cast a compelling witness to the world around us (v. 47).

21. WHICH OF THE FOUR PRINCIPLES (V. 42) DO YOU FIND MOST DIFFICULT TO PRIORITIZE? WHY?

22. HOW DOES THE EARLY CHURCH'S EXAMPLE INSPIRE YOU TO MORE FULLY INVEST IN CORPORATE WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP?

"Where the Word is rightly ministered, the table rightly kept, and prayer rightly offered, there the gates of hell shall not prevail."

– John Calvin

"Not by argument alone did the early church conquer the world, but by a common life so fair that unbelief itself was compelled to ask why."

– Augustine

"The Father is the source, the Son is the channel, and the Spirit is the power. The church flows from all three and depends on all three."
 – Stephen Charnock

CONCLUSION

What happens in Acts 2:1-47 isn't simply the story of the early church. It's the story of every faithful church that's followed. The same Spirit who descended at Pentecost, empowered Peter's proclamation, and drew thousands to repentance dwells in every Christian today (Rom. 8:11). As we pursue the dependence and devotion that marked this community of believers (v. 42), we can trust that the God who added to their number daily (v. 47) is still at work building His church through the faithful witness of His people (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

23. HOW DOES ACTS 2 DISPLAY THE FATHER, SON, AND SPIRIT WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD THE CHURCH?

24. HOW DOES ACTS 2 INFORM THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR ROLE AT GBC? WHERE CAN YOUR PARTICIPATION GROW OR MATURE?

WEEK 4

FROM ACCUSATION TO INVITATION

ACTS 3:19-21

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago.

ACTS 3:1-26

INTRODUCTION

In Acts 3:1-26, the expansion of the church continues as God's power is displayed publicly (v. 6). What begins as an act of mercy at the temple gate (vv. 1-3) quickly becomes an opportunity to proclaim the identity of Jesus and call Israel to repentance (vv. 12, 19).

READ ACTS 3:1-10

Following Pentecost, Peter and John go to the temple to pray at the "ninth hour" (v. 1), which would be approximately 3:00 PM. At the "Beautiful Gate" (vv. 2, 10), a prominent and well-trafficked entrance to the temple complex, they encounter a man who has been "lame from birth" (v. 2). What appears to be an everyday occurrence becomes an opportunity for God to display His power.

1. HOW DOES LUKE DESCRIBE THE "LAME" (V. 2) MAN? WHAT DETAILS EMPHASIZE THE SEVERITY OF HIS CONDITION (V. 2)?

2. WHAT DOES THE MAN ASK PETER AND JOHN (V. 3)? HOW DOES PETER INITIALLY RESPOND TO HIS REQUEST (VV. 4-6)?

3. WHAT DOES PETER DO TO HEAL THE MAN (V. 7)? WHAT HAPPENS IMMEDIATELY AS A RESULT (V. 8)?

4. HOW DO THE MAN AND THE SURROUNDING PEOPLE RESPOND (VV. 8-10)? WHAT DOES THEIR "WONDER AND AMAZEMENT" (V. 10) REVEAL?

"We ask for silver and God gives us Christ. We come with our poverty, and He answers with His abundance."
– Charles Spurgeon

"The power of the living God is not something that can be observed and then walked past."
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones

DIGGING DEEPER

When the lame man asks for money, Peter begins by acknowledging what he doesn't have before offering what he does (v. 6). Ultimately, this isn't a power, resource, or skill of his own. It's the "name of Jesus" (v. 6). Though easy to overlook, that detail shapes how we understand what follows.

Peter doesn't heal the man by summoning something within himself. Though he physically takes the man "by the right hand" (v. 7), Luke immediately notes that his feet and ankles "were made strong" (v. 7). This emphasizes that, while Peter assists, God supplies the strength. The source of healing becomes even clearer in the man's response. He immediately enters the temple "[praising] God" (v. 8), directing the glory where it belongs.

This scene illustrates a principle we can't forget as we engage in discipleship. We rarely have what the moment requires, and we're never the source of what God accomplishes (2 Cor. 3:5). Our responsibility is to obey and trust, depending on God to do what only He can (Jn. 15:5).

5. WHERE ARE YOU MOST PRONE TO RELY ON YOUR OWN ABILITY AS YOU MINISTER TO OTHERS? HOW CAN YOU GROW IN DEPENDENCE ON JESUS INSTEAD?

6. HOW WOULD YOUR APPROACH TO MINISTRY CHANGE IF YOU WERE FULLY CONVINCED THE RESULTS WERE GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY AND NOT YOURS?

*"A man who truly believes in the sovereignty of God will labor with diligence and rest with peace."
– Jonathan Edwards*

READ ACTS 3:11-26

The healing of the lame man becomes the occasion for Peter's second public sermon. As the crowd, "utterly astounded" (v. 11), gathers "together" (v. 11), Peter redirects their attention away from the miracle itself and explains the source of their power to heal.

7. WHERE DOES PETER IMMEDIATELY DIRECT THE CROWD'S ATTENTION (VV. 12-13)? HOW DOES HE EXPLAIN THE SOURCE OF THE HEALING (VV. 12-16)?

*"God's glory is not a treasure He divides. It is an excellency He alone possesses and jealously guards."
– A.W. Pink*

"By grounding his Christology in the God of the patriarchs, Peter presents Jesus as the culmination of Israel's entire story."

– Herman Bavinck

"God will do remarkable things through a man who does not care who receives the credit."

– A.W. Tozer

8. HOW DOES PETER DESCRIBE JESUS (VV. 13-15)? WHAT IMPACT WOULD HIS DESCRIPTION HAVE ON THE LARGELY JEWISH AUDIENCE?

DIGGING DEEPER

With the crowd "utterly astounded" (v. 11) and running toward him, Peter's first instinct is to redirect their attention away from himself and toward Jesus. In doing so, he recognizes a subtle danger. The crowd isn't opposing him. They're impressed by him, and Peter refuses to receive praise that belongs to God alone.

Peter's response is instructive for us. When someone praises us for an answered prayer, a restored relationship, spiritual growth, or an edifying exhortation, we should resist the temptation to take ownership of what God has done (1 Cor. 3:6-7). Instead, we can receive the encouragement while still directing the glory where it belongs (1 Pet. 4:11). Whatever God accomplishes through us should draw attention to Jesus, not ourselves (Jn. 3:30).

9. WHY CAN ADMIRATION BE MORE DANGEROUS THAN OPPOSITION? HOW CAN IT QUIETLY AFFECT THE WAY WE SERVE?

10. WHEN ARE YOU MOST TEMPTED TO TAKE CREDIT FOR WHAT GOD ACCOMPLISHES THROUGH YOU? HOW CAN YOU REDIRECT THAT PRAISE TOWARD HIM?

Peter moves from confronting the crowd to extending an invitation of grace and hope. Though they "acted in ignorance" (v. 17), God was working through these events to fulfill what He had "foretold by... the prophets" (v. 18).

11. WHAT CALL DOES PETER ISSUE TO THE CROWD (V. 19)? WHAT PROMISES ARE CONNECTED TO HIS EXHORTATION (VV. 19, 20, 21)?

12. HOW DOES PETER CONNECT JESUS TO THE PROMISES MADE THROUGH “MOSES” (V. 22) AND THE “PROPHETS” (V. 24) GOD SENT TO ISRAEL (VV. 22-26)?

13. WHAT WAS GOD’S INTENT IN SENDING JESUS TO ISRAEL “FIRST” (V. 26)? HOW WOULD HIS COMING IMPACT “THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH” (V. 25)?

14. HOW DOES PETER MOVE FROM ACCUSATION (V. 15) TO INVITATION (V. 19) WITHOUT CONTRADICTION? WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT THE GOSPEL?

“Nowhere else is a man told so plainly that he stands guilty of the worst offense and, in the same word, freely offered its full pardon.”
– John Calvin

DIGGING DEEPER

Peter’s call to the crowd to “repent... and turn back” (v. 19) isn’t simply a plea for moral improvement or religious reform. Instead, he’s urging them to a complete reorientation away from sin and back to God (2 Cor. 7:10). While this was the response God had always called His people to (Deut. 30:2-3; Is. 55:6-7), it remains the response He invites every person to today.

Peter connects this call with two additional promises. The first is “times of refreshing” (v. 20), which is a picture of the forgiveness, rest, and renewal immediately experienced by those who turn to God (Rom. 5:1-2; 8:1). The second is the assurance of Jesus’ return and the final “[restoration of] all the things” (v. 21), when God will fully renew what sin has broken (Rev. 21:1-5).

As we live between these two promises, repentance is the posture that keeps us oriented toward both. It isn’t a one-time event, but an ongoing discipline that deepens our experience of God’s forgiveness and grace. At the same time, it secures our hope in the certainty that God will eventually complete the work He started (Phil. 1:6).

15. DO YOU HAVE ANY UNCONFESSSED SIN? IF SO, HOW DOES THE PROMISE THAT YOUR “SINS [WILL] BE BLOTTED OUT” (V. 19) ENCOURAGE YOU TO REPENT?

“God does not merely set sin aside for a season. He blots it out forever.”
– John Owen

"Repentance is not the door you walk through once to enter the Christian life. It is the air you breathe inside it."
 – R.C. Sproul

"What a man does in an unplanned moment reveals what he has been building in every planned one."
 – Sinclair Ferguson

16. WHEN HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE "TIMES OF REFRESHING" (V. 20) THAT COME FROM REPENTANCE? EXPLAIN.

17. HOW DOES THE FUTURE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS SHAPE THE WAY YOU ENDURE PRESENT DISAPPOINTMENT, HARDSHIP, OR PAIN?

18. HOW CAN YOU GROW IN VIEWING REPENTANCE AS AN ONGOING DISCIPLINE? WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAKE IT A MORE CONSISTENT PRACTICE IN YOUR LIFE?

CONCLUSION

Acts 3:1-26 reminds us that God often works in ways we do not expect. What began as a routine trip to the temple for prayer became a public display of God's power and an open door for the gospel. More often than we realize, God advances His purposes through ordinary moments and unplanned encounters. As we remain attentive to these opportunities and dependent on Him, He can work through us to accomplish far more than we could ever expect (Eph. 3:20).

19. HOW CAN YOU PREPARE YOURSELF TO RESPOND FAITHFULLY WHEN AN UNEXPECTED MINISTRY OPPORTUNITY PRESENTS ITSELF?

20. WHO HAS GOD ALREADY PLACED IN YOUR PATH THAT YOU MAY HAVE OVERLOOKED? WHAT IS ONE STEP YOU CAN TAKE TOWARD THEM?

WEEK 5

OPPOSITION ENCOUNTERED

ACTS 4:31

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.

"No doctrine is more threatening to those who rule by death than the claim that death has been defeated."
 – Charles Spurgeon

ACTS 4:1-37

INTRODUCTION

In Acts 4:1-37, the early church encounters their first organized opposition. Until this point, the church has experienced remarkable favor and growth. Now, the same message that brings salvation to thousands also provokes resistance from those in power. Despite this, hostility doesn't halt the work of God. Through the courageous witness, united prayer, and sacrificial generosity of His people, God continues to build His church.

READ ACTS 4:1-22

Following the healing of the lame man (Acts 3:1-10), the attention drawn to the gospel now provokes opposition. Amazement in the temple quickly turns antagonistic as the religious authorities confront Peter and John. For the first time, the apostles must decide how they will respond when faithfulness to Jesus carries a real cost.

1. WHY ARE THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS "GREATLY ANNOYED" (V. 2)? WHAT ACTION DO THE AUTHORITIES TAKE AGAINST PETER AND JOHN (V. 3)?

2. HOW DO THE PEOPLE WHO "HEARD THE WORD" (V. 4) RESPOND? WHAT DOES THIS IMPLY ABOUT OPPOSITION TO THE GOSPEL'S SPREAD?

DIGGING DEEPER

Immediately after Peter and John are "put... in custody" (v. 3), Luke tells us that "five thousand" (v. 4) believed in Jesus. This detail does more than report a fact. It demonstrates a key principle seen throughout Acts. Opposition does not hinder the spread of the gospel. Instead, it often accompanies its advance, revealing that human resistance cannot overturn the saving purposes of God (Phil. 1:12-14; 1 Thess. 2:14-16).

This reminds us that God is ultimately the one building His church and that no earthly authority can prevent Him from accomplishing His purposes (Matt. 16:18). This should give us both confidence and freedom as we faithfully participate in ministry. The gospel has never required ideal conditions to advance. God has always and will always work through faithful people who trust that He remains sovereign over every obstacle they face.

Acts 4:2 – The "Sadducees" controlled the temple establishment during this period. Because they denied the resurrection (Matt. 22:23), Peter and John's message directly challenged both their theology and authority.

3. WHERE DOES FEAR OF OPPOSITION TEMPT YOU TO REMAIN SILENT? HOW DOES THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH DURING HOSTILITY CHALLENGE THAT HESITATION?

*"Opposition does not
shrink the gospel.
It exposes our
confidence in it."
– John Stott*

4. HOW CAN YOU CULTIVATE CONFIDENCE THAT GOD IS AT WORK EVEN WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES SEEM UNFAVORABLE OR DISCOURAGING?

Brought before the "rulers and elders and scribes" (v. 5), Peter doesn't defend himself. Instead, he accuses the authorities of their role in Jesus' death (v. 10) and claims Jesus is the exclusive means of salvation (v. 12).

5. WHAT DOES THE HIGH COUNCIL ASK (V. 7)? WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT WHAT MOST CONCERNS THEM?

6. HOW DOES PETER EXPLAIN THE SOURCE OF THE MAN'S HEALING (VV. 9-10)?

7. HOW DOES PETER REFER TO JESUS (V. 11)? HOW DOES THIS CONFRONT THE LEADERS' AUTHORITY?

*"In rejecting Jesus,
they had not removed
an obstacle. They
had refused the
only foundation that
could hold."
– John Owen*

8. WHAT EXCLUSIVE CLAIM DOES PETER MAKE (V. 12)? WHY WOULD THIS STATEMENT HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY PROVOKING IN THIS SETTING?

"God delights to take what the world counts as nothing so that every observer is compelled to look past the man to the God who used him."

– Thomas Watson

"The man who has truly seen and heard cannot be made to act as though he has not."

– Richard Baxter

The focus shifts from Peter's proclamation to the stunned reaction of the religious leaders. Confronted with the undeniable healing of the lame man (Acts 3:1-10), the authorities are forced to reckon with the reality that something greater is at work.

9. HOW ARE PETER AND JOHN DESCRIBED (V. 13)? WHY IS THIS NOTEWORTHY?

10. WHY ARE THE AUTHORITIES UNABLE TO DENY WHAT HAS HAPPENED (V. 14)? WHAT CONCERN DO THEY EXPRESS AMONG THEMSELVES (VV. 15-17)?

11. WHAT COMMAND DO THE AUTHORITIES GIVE TO PETER AND JOHN (V. 18)? HOW DO THE APOSTLES RESPOND (VV. 19-20)?

12. WHY DO THE RULERS ULTIMATELY RELEASE PETER AND JOHN (VV. 21-22)?

DIGGING DEEPER

Though the religious authorities held legitimate power in Jerusalem, Peter and John refused their command "not to speak or teach... in the name of Jesus" (v. 18). Their response reveals an important biblical principle about the limits of human authority.

The Bible consistently calls Christians to respect and submit to governing authorities (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). However, human authority is never absolute. When it commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, obedience to God must take precedence (Ex. 1:17; Dan. 3:16-18).

That said, while most of us will never face the kind of direct opposition Peter and John encountered, we will face quieter pressures to remain silent, soften the truth, compromise our convictions, or value approval over faithfulness. In these moments, the apostles' example calls us to the same courageous obedience they displayed before the council.

13. HOW CAN YOU CULTIVATE BOTH RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY AND COURAGE TO STAND FIRM WHEN OBEDIENCE TO GOD REQUIRES IT?

"The man who has never genuinely submitted to authority has nothing meaningful to offer when he must resist it."
— R.C. Sproul

14. WHERE COULD OBEDIENCE COST YOU COMFORT, OPPORTUNITY, OR REPUTATION? HOW CAN YOU REMAIN FAITHFUL IN THAT SITUATION?

READ ACTS 4:23-31

After being threatened and released (v. 21), Peter and John return to their "friends" (v. 23) and report all that has happened. Rather than responding with fear or retreat, the church gathers to pray.

15. HOW DOES THE CHURCH ADDRESS GOD AT THE BEGINNING OF THEIR PRAYER (V. 24)? WHY WOULD THEY FOCUS ON THIS ASPECT OF HIS WORK?

16. WHAT RELEVANCE DOES PSALM 2 HAVE TO THE CHURCH'S SITUATION (VV. 25-26)? WHAT WISDOM CAN THEY GLEAN FROM DAVID'S WORDS?

17. HOW DOES THE CHURCH ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR HARDSHIP IN LIGHT OF GOD'S CHARACTER (VV. 27-28)? WHAT DO THEY ASK GOD TO DO (VV. 29-30)?

"O believer! Ask not the Lord for escape from the furnace, but for courage to stand within it!"
— George Whitefield

Acts 4:21 – Resistance to human authority when it conflicts with God's commands is not a New Testament novelty. The Hebrew midwives defied Pharaoh to protect Hebrew infants (Ex. 1:17), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image (Dan. 3:16-18), and Daniel continued praying despite Darius's decree forbidding it (Dan. 6:10). In each case, fear of God displaced fear of man, and Scripture vindicates them for it.

*"Thou, O Lord, art found
most near to those who
seek from Thee not
comfort, but courage."
– Augustine*

*"The man who turns
to God instinctively
under pressure has
been turning to God
habitually in private."
– Matthew Henry*

18. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THEY PRAY (V. 31)? HOW WOULD THIS AFFIRM OR CONFIRM THEIR CURRENT POSTURE TOWARD THEIR MISSION?

DIGGING DEEPER

When Peter and John are released and return, the church's reaction is remarkable. Faced with real hostility, they don't panic, retreat, or strategize. Instead, they pray, anchoring themselves in God's sovereignty (vv. 24, 27-28), interpreting their circumstances through Scripture (vv. 25-26), and asking for boldness to keep obeying (vv. 29-30).

Our instincts often run the other direction. When life brings criticism or rejection, we're prone to control, defensiveness, or withdrawal. The church shows us a better response. Instead of trying to manage the opposition themselves, they bring it to God and ask Him for what they need. This scene reminds us that God may not remove what we're facing, but He always supplies the grace we need to remain faithful through it (Phil. 2:13; Heb. 4:16).

19. WHAT IS YOUR FIRST INSTINCT WHEN LIFE BRINGS CRITICISM OR REJECTION? WHAT DOES THAT REVEAL ABOUT WHERE YOU LOOK FOR SECURITY?

20. WHY MIGHT PRAYING FOR "BOLDNESS" (V. 29) BE HARDER THAN PRAYING FOR RELIEF? WHAT MIGHT CHANGE IF YOU PRAYED THAT WAY?

21. WHEN HAS GOD GIVEN YOU WHAT YOU NEEDED WITHOUT CHANGING YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES? WHAT DID THAT TEACH YOU ABOUT HIM?

Acts 4:31 – To be "filled with the Holy Spirit" doesn't mean receiving more of the Spirit, but experiencing His influence and empowerment more fully (Eph. 5:18). This so-called filling is repeatable and distinct from receiving the Spirit at conversion (Rom. 8:9).

READ ACTS 4:32-37

Luke shifts from external opposition to the internal life of the church. After threats and persecution, we might expect fear or division. However, this passage offers another glimpse into the character of the early church, showing that the same Spirit who grants boldness in witness also produces unity and generosity within the body of Christ.

22. WHAT WAS THE CHURCH'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THEIR POSSESSIONS (V. 32)? WHERE DID THIS DISPOSITION COME FROM (V. 33)?

23. HOW DID THE COMMUNITY ENSURE THAT NO ONE WAS IN NEED (VV. 34-35)? HOW DOES THIS REFLECT THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF OWNERSHIP AND STEWARDSHIP?

24. WHAT DOES BARNABAS' EXAMPLE ILLUSTRATE ABOUT GENEROSITY (VV. 36-37)?

"There is no surer test of what a man believes about heaven than the readiness with which he opens his hand upon earth."
– Thomas Chalmers

DIGGING DEEPER

The generosity described in Acts 4:32-37 was not a social experiment or a model for economic policy. It was the natural overflow of the gospel taking root in transformed lives. Because the church "[was] of one heart and soul" (v. 32), they were increasingly free to hold their earthly possessions with open hands.

When people truly believe that their eternal inheritance is secure, their relationship to earthly possessions begins to change. The early Christians didn't give out of obligation or external pressure. They gave because they had encountered someone of far greater worth than anything they owned. Their generosity was not the cause of their transformation, but the evidence of it.

This pattern is not unique to Acts. Throughout Scripture, generosity is connected to the condition of the heart (Matt. 6:21; 2 Cor. 9:7-8). As we consider applying this truth, the question is not simply how much we give, but what our giving reveals about what we value, where we have placed our hope, and how tightly we hold our possessions (Lk. 12:32-34; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

*"Our resistance to generosity is never really about money. It is always about trust."
– John Calvin*

*"The Christian who is generous but prayerless, or bold but not generous, or prayerful but silent about his faith, has compartmentalized what the Spirit intends to integrate."
– J.C. Ryle*

25. WHERE DO YOU STILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO HOLD YOUR POSSESSIONS LOOSELY? WHAT DOES THAT RESISTANCE REVEAL?

26. WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOUR GIVING TO REFLECT CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ETERNAL INHERITANCE RATHER THAN ANXIETY ABOUT EARTHLY SECURITY?

CONCLUSION

Acts 4:1-37 reminds us that the church advances not through approval or comfort, but through courageous faithfulness rooted in God's sovereignty. In response, we must remain bold in our witness, fervent in our prayers, and generous in our life together. These are not three separate obligations but three expressions of the same Spirit-filled life. Where one is absent, the others will weaken. Where all three are present, the church becomes what God has always intended.

27. WHICH OF BOLD WITNESS, FERVENT PRAYER, OR RADICAL GENEROSITY COME MOST NATURALLY TO YOU? WHICH REQUIRES THE MOST GROWTH? EXPLAIN.

WEEK 6

EMBOLDENED AND UNDETERRED

ACTS 5:14

And more than ever believers were added to the Lord,
multitudes of both men and women.

ACTS 5:1-6:7

INTRODUCTION

As the church in Jerusalem continues to grow, pressure from inside joins opposition from outside. Despite this, God preserves His people. Instead of slowing the church's advancement, every challenge becomes the very means by which God purifies and strengthens it.

READ ACTS 5:1-16

After describing the remarkable unity and generosity of the early church (Acts 4:32-37), Luke records a sobering contrast. While Barnabas made his offering fully and sincerely, Ananias and Sapphira give deceptively and partially.

1. WHAT DO ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA DO WITH THEIR LAND (VV. 1-2)? WHY DOES PETER CONSIDER THEIR OFFERING A "LIE" (V. 3)?

2. WHO DOES PETER SAY ANANIAS' OFFENSE WAS ULTIMATELY AGAINST (V. 4)? WHAT OCCURS AFTER PETER CONFRONTS HIM (V. 5)?

3. HOW DOES SAPPHIRA RESPOND WHEN QUESTIONED (VV. 7-8)? WHAT HAPPENS TO HER (VV. 9-10)?

4. WHAT EFFECT DOES THIS EVENT HAVE ON THE "WHOLE CHURCH" (V. 11)? WHY WOULD GOD RESPOND SO SEVERELY TO THIS PARTICULAR SIN?

"This is the deepest diagnosis of every sin against our brothers. It is first and always a sin against the One who sees the heart."
— John Calvin

"When a man discovers that God sees through every performance, the only appropriate response is trembling reverence, not resentment."
— J.C. Ryle

DIGGING DEEPER

While the account of Ananias and Sapphira reveals how seriously God views sin, its true insight lies in the nature of their offense.

To start, their sin was not that they withheld "some of the proceeds" (v. 2) from the land transaction. In fact, Peter makes clear that the property was theirs to keep or give freely (v. 4). Instead, their sin was hypocrisy and deceit (vv. 4, 8). They presented a partial gift as if it were whole, seeking the outward appearance of sacrifice without the inward reality.

This passage demonstrates that God is not only concerned with religious performance, but with the sincerity of our hearts (1 Sam. 16:7). To avoid Ananias and Sapphira's mistake, we must seek congruence between what we profess and how we live (Tit. 1:16). Ultimately, this can only happen when our devotion flows not from a desire for the approval of others (Jn. 12:43), but from reverence for the God who sees what is done in secret (Matt. 6:4).

5. WHY IS IT OFTEN EASIER TO PROJECT A SPIRITUAL IMAGE THAN PURSUE INWARD TRANSFORMATION? WHERE DO YOU SEE THAT TENDENCY IN YOUR LIFE?

6. HOW CAN YOU GROW IN GREATER SINCERITY AND TRANSPARENCY BEFORE BOTH GOD AND OTHERS? WHAT DOES THIS REQUIRE?

After the sobering account of Ananias and Sapphira, Luke shifts back to the public ministry of the apostles. Rather than shrinking in fear or slowing in momentum, the church continues to grow. Many "signs and wonders" (v. 12) accompany the apostles, and the gospel spreads even more widely.

7. HOW DOES LUKE DESCRIBE THE CHRISTIANS' REPUTATION AMONG THE PEOPLE (V. 13)? WHAT TENSION IS THERE BETWEEN CAUTION AND RESPECT?

Acts 5:5, 10 – Ananias and Sapphira's death parallels other moments when God enacted swift judgment at pivotal points in redemptive history (e.g. Lev. 10:1-2; Josh. 7:24-26). In each case, severe judgment came not because the sin was uniquely worse, but because it threatened the purity of a newly formed community at its founding.

"The old man does not die easily, and he is remarkably skilled at wearing the clothes of righteousness while remaining entirely himself underneath."
– Martin Luther

"A church marked by genuine holiness will always provoke both admiration and hesitation in those who observe it from outside."
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones

*"Where God's power
is boldly shown,
the curious will
come running."
— John Knox*

*"No bolt the jailer trusts
nor wall he builds can
hold a prisoner whom
the Lord Himself has
resolved to set free."
— John Bunyan*

8. HOW DO PEOPLE RESPOND TO THE APOSTLES' MINISTRY (VV. 14-16)? WHAT DO THESE DETAILS REVEAL ABOUT THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH?

READ ACTS 5:17-42

Just as Peter's healing of the lame man led to opposition and arrest (Acts 3:1-4:22), the apostles' miracles once again provoke resistance from the religious leaders. However, this time the opposition intensifies. It's no longer just Peter and John who are targeted. Instead, Luke notes that "the apostles" (v. 18) are arrested, suggesting that the entire apostolic band is now under threat.

9. WHAT MOTIVATES THE RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS TO ARREST THE APOSTLES (VV. 17-18)? WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT THE NATURE OF THEIR OPPOSITION?

10. WHAT HAPPENS "DURING THE NIGHT" (V. 19)? WHAT DOES THE "ANGEL OF THE LORD" (V. 19) COMMAND THE APOSTLES TO DO (V. 20)?

11. HOW DO THE APOSTLES RESPOND TO THE ANGEL'S INSTRUCTIONS (V. 21)? WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT THEIR DISPOSITION AND OUTLOOK?

12. HOW DO THE OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS REACT TO THE EMPTY PRISON (VV. 22-26)? WHAT DOES THIS SCENE REVEAL ABOUT THE LIMITS OF THEIR AUTHORITY?

Acts 5:17 – The "Sadducees" denied the existence of angels (Acts 23:8). Luke's mention of "an angel of the Lord" (v. 19) opening the prison doors is no accident. It's pointed irony. The very party denying angels is outmaneuvered by one.

DIGGING DEEPER

As we read this account of miraculous rescue (v. 19), it can be tempting to treat this kind of intervention as something faithful Christians should ordinarily expect when ministry is obstructed. However, this scene portrays an extraordinary deliverance, not a normative pattern. Scripture never promises that God will eliminate every difficulty His people face.

Instead, the scene points us to something more fundamental. God's purposes cannot be frustrated (Job 42:2). At times, He advances them by removing the obstacle. At others, He accomplishes His will while the obstacle remains (Dan. 3:17-18). Either way, His faithfulness cannot be measured by whether our circumstances change (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

The apostles' response is especially instructive. When told to return to the very place where obedience had already cost them, they do so without delay or negotiation (v. 21). That reframes how we should view barriers in ministry. Whether God removes them or leaves them in place, our calling is still to remain steadfast in the work He has given us (1 Cor. 15:58).

13. THINK OF A SITUATION IN WHICH YOU FEEL HOPELESS, POWERLESS, OR OUTMATCHED IN MINISTRY.

HOW DOES GOD'S COMMITMENT TO HIS PURPOSES ENCOURAGE YOU?

*"The whole of providence bends toward one end."
– Herman Bavinck*

HOW DOES THE APOSTLES' UNHESITATING OBEDIENCE CHALLENGE YOU?

WHAT STEP(S) OF OBEDIENCE COULD YOU TAKE RIGHT NOW? BE SPECIFIC.

WHAT WOULD IT COST YOU TO OBEY INSTEAD OF DELAYING OR QUITTING?

*"The cost of obedience is always visible and immediate. The cost of delay is hidden and cumulative. For that reason, we consistently underestimate it."
– Sinclair Ferguson*

WHAT MIGHT IT COST YOU TO KEEP WAITING OR STOP TRYING?

"A council that feared bloodguilt more than it feared God had already revealed where its priorities lay."

– Alexander Maclaren

"The vessel that sails against the tide of heaven will find itself wrecked upon the very rocks it thought to escape."

– John Flavel

After being found "teaching" (v. 25) again in the temple, the apostles are brought before the Sanhedrin, which is the same "council" (v. 27) that had condemned Jesus and previously warned them to stop preaching (v. 28). Having already ignored one direct warning, the apostles now stand before a council whose patience has clearly run out.

14. WHAT ACCUSATION DOES THE HIGH PRIEST BRING AGAINST THE APOSTLES (V. 28)? WHAT FURTHER INSIGHT DOES THIS REVEAL REGARDING THEIR CONCERN?

15. HOW DOES PETER RESPOND TO THEIR CHARGE (V. 29)? WHAT PRINCIPLE GOVERNS HIS ANSWER?

16. HOW DOES PETER SUMMARIZE THE GOSPEL (VV. 30-32)? HOW DOES THE COUNCIL INITIALLY RESPOND TO PETER'S DECLARATION (V. 33)? WHY?

17. WHAT COUNSEL DOES GAMALIEL GIVE (VV. 35-39)? WHAT REASONING SUPPORTS HIS "ADVICE" (V. 39)?

18. HOW ARE THE APOSTLES TREATED BEFORE THEIR RELEASE (V. 40)? WHY DO THEY LEAVE "REJOICING" (V. 41)? WHAT DO THEY DO AFTER (V. 42)?

Acts 5:34 – "Gamaliel" was one of the most respected rabbinic teachers of his generation. Notably, Paul studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), making his appearance here a subtle foreshadowing of his own story.

Acts 5:40 – The beating the apostles received likely followed the formal synagogue punishment of Deuteronomy 25:3, capped at forty lashes. This was a controlled, judicial procedure meant to correct and shame rather than kill.

DIGGING DEEPER

In Acts 4:19-20, Peter and John established a clear principle that they reiterate before this same council. When human authority commands what God forbids, obedience to God must come first (v. 29).

While their conviction remains the same, the cost associated with it escalates. Previously, the council released the apostles with a warning (Acts 4:21). Now, they have them beaten (v. 40), hoping to shame and silence them through force. Instead, their joy increases (v. 41) and their ministry continues (v. 42).

The apostles' example forces us to examine our own lives. They were willing to lose approval and comfort rather than compromise obedience to Jesus. If our following God consistently leaves those things untouched (Lk. 9:23), we may need to reconsider the standard by which we measure faithfulness (Gal. 1:10).

19. WHERE ARE YOU TEMPTED TO PRIORITIZE APPROVAL AND COMFORT OVER OBEDIENCE TO WHAT GOD HAS CLEARLY COMMANDED? WHY?

20. HOW CAN YOU GROW IN TRUSTING GOD ENOUGH TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO HIM EVEN WHEN OBEDIENCE MAY LEAD TO DIFFICULTY OR OPPOSITION?

READ ACTS 6:1-7

As the number of disciples increases, a new challenge emerges. A "complaint" (v. 1) by the "Hellenists" (v. 1) was made against the "Hebrews" (v. 1). What could have led to division instead becomes an opportunity for wise leadership and strengthened structure within the church.

21. WHAT PROBLEM OCCURS (V. 1)? HOW DO THE APOSTLES RESPOND (VV. 2-4)? WHAT PRIORITY DO THEY REFUSE TO NEGLECT (VV. 2, 4)?

"The soul that has learned to rest in God's sovereignty during minor inconveniences will find that same rest available during major trials."
– A.W. Tozer

"A wise leader distinguishes between what only he can do and what others can do just as well, perhaps better."
– Charles Simeon

"The church does not advance by truth alone or mercy alone, but by the gospel that holds both together without compromising either."
– Tim Keller

22. WHAT QUALIFICATIONS ARE REQUIRED FOR THE SEVEN MEN CHOSEN TO SERVE (V. 3)? WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THIS DECISION (V. 7)?

DIGGING DEEPER

In the first century, "widows" (v. 1) were among the most vulnerable members of society. Because of this, the "complaint" (v. 1) raised by the Hellenists was significant. In response, the apostles address the problem by appointing qualified men to oversee the need (vv. 3, 5-6), while being careful not to abandon their primary responsibility "to prayer and to... the word" (v. 4).

Their solution establishes an important pattern that's reflected throughout the New Testament. God designed the church to function as a unified body in which every member matters (1 Cor. 12:12-27). Each believer is given different gifts (Rom. 12:6), intended "for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7) and "to serve one another" (1 Pet. 4:10). When all believers are engaged in the "work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12), the whole body is strengthened and built up in maturity and unity.

At GBC, our expectation is that everyone would wholeheartedly affirm these truths and actively embrace their part in the "priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9) of all believers. We firmly believe that when you move beyond passive attendance to meaningful engagement in service, you will experience greater fulfillment and joy. Even more, as we labor together, the work of the church is able "to increase" (v. 7), and we become more effective in fulfilling God's mission to "[make] disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

23. WHY DOES GOD DESIRE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION FROM ALL PARTS OF THE BODY? HOW DOES THIS LEAD TO MATURITY AND UNITY?

24. WHAT ARE YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS? HOW ARE YOU CURRENTLY USING THEM TO SERVE INSIDE OR OUTSIDE GBC?

"The church is not a spectator sport. God gives spiritual gifts so that every believer may be an active participant in the life of the body."
– R.C. Sproul

Acts 6:1 – The tension between "Hellenists" and "Hebrews" reveals that the early church was culturally diverse from its earliest days. Hellenists were Greek-speaking, Jewish Christians shaped by Hellenistic culture. The Hebrews were Aramaic-speaking, Jewish Christians rooted in native Palestinian tradition. This divide made the Hellenist widows especially vulnerable to being overlooked.

CONCLUSION

Though sometimes obscured by rapid action, the active presence of the Spirit is threaded throughout Acts 5:1-6:7. In each scene, holiness (Acts 5:3-5), boldness (Acts 5:29-32), and service (Acts 6:3) are portrayed not as separate achievements of the apostles, but as expressions of the Spirit at work in His people. As He purifies, emboldens, and equips the church, “believers were added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14) and “the word of God continued to increase” (Acts 6:7).

That same Spirit has not departed from the church today (Jn. 14:16-17). He continues to call and empower us toward the same reverent obedience, courageous faithfulness, and steadfast trust that marked the earliest believers.

25. HOW DOES THE SPIRIT’S WORK IN ACTS 5:1-6:7 GIVE YOU CONFIDENCE WHEN THE CHURCH FACES SIN, OPPOSITION, OR CONFLICT? EXPLAIN.

26. WHICH ASPECT OF THE SPIRIT’S WORK IN THIS PASSAGE DO YOU MOST NEED? WHY? WHAT WOULD GREATER DEPENDENCE ON HIM LOOK LIKE?

“True dependence upon the Spirit is not a sentiment stirred up at will, but a settled acknowledgment of our own insufficiency.”
— John Owen

WEEK 7

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 7:55-56

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

ACTS 6:8-8:3

INTRODUCTION

In Acts 6:8-8:3, the opposition the apostles have faced since Acts 4:1-22 reaches its worst outcome. Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr, producing “great lamentation” (Acts 8:2). At the same time, his stoning triggers a “great persecution” (Acts 8:1) that “[scatters]” (Acts 8:1) the church beyond Jerusalem.

READ ACTS 6:8-15

Having just been appointed to oversee practical ministry (Acts 6:5), Stephen now emerges as a prominent vocal witness. His teaching quickly attracts hostility from members of a “synagogue” (v. 9) of Greek-speaking Jews.

1. HOW IS STEPHEN’S MINISTRY DESCRIBED (V. 8)? WHY ARE STEPHEN’S OPPONENTS UNABLE TO WITHSTAND HIM (V. 10)?

2. WHAT FALSE ACCUSATIONS ARE BROUGHT AGAINST STEPHEN (VV. 11, 13-14)? WHY IS THE APPEARANCE OF STEPHEN’S “FACE” (V. 15) NOTEWORTHY?

DIGGING DEEPER

Before He was arrested and crucified, Jesus promised His disciples that He would provide them with “a mouth and wisdom” (Lk. 21:15) that opponents would not be able to “withstand or contradict” (Lk. 21:15). Stephen’s ministry in Jerusalem is a direct fulfillment of this pledge and a further witness to the influence of the “Spirit” (v. 10) in the church.

Many of us hesitate to speak about Jesus, afraid of inadequacy or failure. However, God never commands us to rely on our own competence or knowledge (2 Cor. 3:5). Instead, He calls us to trust the Spirit to provide what we need (Matt. 10:19-20). As we depend on Him, we can trust that He will enable us, meeting us with the same presence and power He gave Stephen.

Acts 6:9 – Saul was from Tarsus in “Cilicia” (Acts 21:39), possibly placing him among the group of Jews who “disputed with Stephen.”

Acts 6:15 – Stephen’s “face” recalls Moses’ shining face (Ex. 34:29-35), ironically marking the man accused of opposing Moses with a Moses-like sign of God’s favor.

3. WHAT FEARS OR INSECURITIES HOLD YOU BACK FROM SHARING YOUR FAITH? HOW DOES THE SPIRIT'S EMPOWERMENT OF STEPHEN REFRAME THOSE FEELINGS?

4. HOW CAN YOU CULTIVATE A MORE CONSCIOUS DEPENDENCE ON THE SPIRIT IN SITUATIONS WHERE YOU NATURALLY RELY ON YOURSELF?

READ ACTS 7:1-53

Facing the sweeping charge of “blasphemous words” (Acts 6:11), Stephen defends himself by building a case against his accusers from the very Scriptures they claimed to revere. In particular, he develops two main threads. The first is an accusation that Israel has always rejected the deliverers God sent. The second corrects Israel's confusion about where and how God makes Himself known.

5. WHAT DOES ABRAHAM'S STORY REVEAL ABOUT GOD'S PRESENCE AND PROMISES (VV. 2-8)? WHY WOULD STEPHEN BEGIN HIS SPEECH WITH HIM?

6. WHAT DOES STEPHEN EMPHASIZE ABOUT JOSEPH'S LIFE (VV. 9-16)? WHAT SPECIFIC PATTERN DOES HE BEGIN TO ESTABLISH (V. 9)?

7. HOW DOES STEPHEN DESCRIBE ISRAEL'S RESPONSE TO MOSES' LEADERSHIP (VV. 23-29, 35-43)? WHAT THEME IS HE CONTINUING TO HIGHLIGHT?

*“Many hold their tongues
not because they lack
conviction, but because
they lack confidence that
God will meet them in
the moment.”
– Richard Baxter*

7

*“Stephen wants his
hearers to notice that
Israel's resistance was
not an isolated failure
but a settled habit.”
– John Calvin*

Acts 7:2 – Addressing the council as “brothers and fathers” signals respect. Stephen isn't attacking his audience. He's arguing from within their shared tradition.

8. WHY DOES STEPHEN STRESS THE LOCATION WHERE GOD MET MOSES (VV. 30-34)? WHAT DOES THIS SUGGEST ABOUT GOD'S PRESENCE?

9. WHY DOES STEPHEN TRACE THE HISTORY OF THE TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE (VV. 44-47)? WHAT DOES HIS QUOTING ISAIAH IMPLY (VV. 48-50)?

10. WHAT WARNING IS EMBEDDED IN THE PATTERNS STEPHEN HAS TRACED? HOW SHOULD THE COUNCIL RESPOND?

"Stephen's history lesson was never meant to inform. It was meant to convict."
— J.C. Ryle

7

DIGGING DEEPER

By drawing from the stories of Abraham (vv. 2-8), Joseph (vv. 9-16), Moses (vv. 17-44), David (vv. 45-46), and Solomon (v. 47), as well as insight from Isaiah (vv. 48-50), Stephen exposes recurring patterns of resistance and misunderstanding that his listeners are now repeating.

This kind of argumentation required a deep, instinctive command of the Old Testament. As he makes his claims, Stephen isn't just referencing a proof text or reciting a rehearsed answer. He's tracing the storyline of Scripture with precision under pressure, using it to convict his accusers and lead them toward repentance.

His speech should challenge the way we approach the Bible. While many of us possess familiarity with individual verses and stories, we often struggle to see how those pieces fit together and speak into real life. Stephen's example calls us toward the kind of sustained study that helps us understand Scripture as a whole and apply it faithfully when real situations arise.

At GBC, this is part of why we prioritize consistent, cumulative study of God's Word in both worship and small group. Week after week, the goal isn't simply to convey information. It's to steadily equip you to speak with clarity and faithfulness when opportunities to challenge, counsel, or encourage others arise (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Acts 7:2-50 – Several times, Stephen locates God's work outside Jerusalem (vv. 2, 10, 29, 30), proving His presence was never confined to the land or temple.

Acts 7:9-43 – Stephen repeatedly pairs human rejection with divine vindication (vv. 9-10, 27, 35), exposing a persistent disconnect between God's purposes and His people's response.

11. HOW MIGHT A FULLER UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE CHANGE THE WAY YOU MINISTER TO THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU?

*"You cannot give away what you do not possess."
– John Newton*

12. WHAT HABITS CAN YOU DEVELOP TO TAKE GREATER ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDY SCRIPTURE DURING WORSHIP AND AT SMALL GROUP?

13. HOW CAN YOU GROW IN DILIGENTLY STUDYING GOD'S WORD WITHOUT ALLOWING YOUR KNOWLEDGE TO BECOME A SUBSTITUTE FOR TRUSTING THE SPIRIT?

Having established the case against his accusers, Stephen now turns to address the council directly. The patterns he has traced through the Old Testament are no longer left implicit. His tone becomes sharper and more confrontational as he exposes the council's own place within that history, culminating in his restating a charge the apostles have consistently made against the religious leaders (Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-15; 4:10-11; 5:30).

14. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "STIFF-NECKED [AND] UNCIRCUMCISED" (V. 51)? WHY DO THESE DESCRIPTIONS FIT STEPHEN'S ACCUSERS (VV. 52-53)?

15. WHAT DIRECT CHARGE DOES STEPHEN LEVEL AGAINST THE COUNCIL (V. 52)? HOW DOES IT BRING THE PATTERN TRACED THROUGHOUT HIS SPEECH TO ITS CLIMAX?

*"'Betrayed and murdered' summarizes centuries of rebellion in three words, aimed directly at the men who had just added their own chapter to it."
– John Stott*

Acts 7:52 – "The Righteous One" identifies Jesus as Isaiah's promised, suffering "righteous" servant (Is. 53:11), whom Israel rejected and killed.

Acts 7:53 – "Delivered by angels" reflects Jewish tradition that angels attended the giving of the Law at Sinai (Deut. 33:2; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).

"We often mistake understanding a truth for having received it."
– A.W. Tozer

"When conviction lands, violence often becomes the last resort of a cornered conscience."
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones

DIGGING DEEPER

Stephen's conclusion draws from language God repeatedly used in the Old Testament to expose His people's stubbornness and hypocrisy (e.g. Ex. 32:9; Jer. 6:10). Beyond this, his final charge is even more devastating. The council hasn't merely repeated Israel's rebellion. They've brought it to its apex by "[betraying] and [murdering]" (v. 52) the Messiah.

It's important to understand that Stephen's accusers were not irreligious or pagan. They were among the most devout men in Jerusalem and experts in the Old Testament. Despite this, they used their knowledge of Scripture to reject the One to whom it pointed (Jn. 5:39-40).

As a church that rightly places a high value on Scripture, this should serve as a warning to us. Knowing the Bible well is not the same as submitting to the God who gave it. To avoid their mistake, we should regularly ask whether we're reading the Bible to be changed by it or simply to defend what we already believe. In the end, the goal isn't simply to master the text, but to be mastered by the God who speaks through it (Jas. 1:22-25).

16. WHERE HAS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE OUTPACED YOUR OBEDIENCE TO IT? WHERE IS THAT MOST EVIDENT RIGHT NOW?

READ ACTS 7:54-8:3

Having heard Stephen's speech, the council becomes "enraged" (Acts 7:54) and quickly turns to violence. Their impulsive and unrestrained reaction brings the pattern of escalating opposition (Acts 4:18; 5:40) to its predictable end.

17. WHAT VISION DOES STEPHEN RECEIVE (ACTS 7:55-56)? HOW WOULD THIS HAVE STRENGTHENED HIM IN THE MOMENT?

18. HOW DO THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS REACT TO STEPHEN'S VISION (ACTS 7:57)? WHAT DO THEY ULTIMATELY DO TO HIM (ACTS 7:58)?

19. WHAT DOES STEPHEN PRAY BEFORE HE DIES (ACTS 7:59-60)? HOW DOES THIS MIRROR THE WORDS OF JESUS (CF. LK. 23:34, 46)?

During the execution, Luke introduces “Saul” (Acts 7:58), who watches over the garments of the “witnesses” (Acts 6:13, 7:58) who stoned Stephen. This detail signals Saul’s approval and participation in Stephen’s death (Acts 8:1; 22:20).

20. WHAT OCCURRED AFTER STEPHEN’S MARTYRDOM (ACTS 8:1)? WHY IS THE “[SCATTERING]” (ACTS 8:1) OF THE CHURCH NOTEWORTHY (CF. ACTS 1:8)?

21. WHAT ROLE DID SAUL PLAY IN THE CHURCH’S “PERSECUTION” (ACTS 8:1)? WHAT IMPRESSION DOES LUKE ESTABLISH AS HE ENTERS THE STORY?

*“What Stephen prayed
under a shower
of stones, we are
called to repeat in
far smaller trials.”
– John Flavel*

*“The more thoroughly
wicked Saul
appears now, the
more staggering
his transformation
will seem.”
– Sinclair Ferguson*

7

DIGGING DEEPER

The stoning of Stephen emboldened the church’s opponents, unleashing a “great persecution” (Acts 8:1) that dispersed believers into Judea and Samaria. At the same time, Saul quickly gained notoriety for “ravaging the church” (Acts 8:3). From the church’s perspective, both developments undoubtedly appeared to be devastating setbacks.

Despite this, God will use each of these difficulties to advance the gospel “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). What looked like the collapse of the mission in the moment was actually being used by God to advance it.

This pattern should shape the way we endure difficult circumstances in our own lives. Though we may never understand why God has allowed a particular trial (Rom. 11:33), the Bible reminds us that our pain is never outside God’s care and rule (Rom. 8:28). When life feels overwhelmingly chaotic or excruciatingly hard, we must remember that He doesn’t stand at a distance or arrive afterward to repair the damage (Isa. 43:2). Instead, He remains sovereign in the middle of it (Ps. 34:18).

As a result, even when we can’t make sense of His purposes, we can still cling to His character (Lam. 3:21-24), bring our grief honestly before Him (Ps. 62:8), and trust Him for the grace to take the next faithful step (2 Cor. 12:9).

**22. WHERE ARE YOU CURRENTLY STRUGGLING TO UNDERSTAND GOD’S PURPOSES?
WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO TRUST HIM WITH THAT SITUATION?**

*"The Christian life was
never meant to be lived
with a stiff upper lip
before God."*

– Stephen Charnock

**23. HOW CAN YOU BRING CONFUSION, DISAPPOINTMENT, OR GRIEF TO GOD HONESTLY
WITHOUT LOSING CONFIDENCE IN HIS CARE AND RULE?**

CONCLUSION

In Acts 6:8-8:3, Stephen shows us that Spirit-filled living and Bible-centered conviction belong together. Twice described as “full of the Spirit” (Acts 6:5; 7:55), Stephen’s defense is saturated with Scripture. When opposed, he reasons from God’s Word (Acts 7:2-50), applies it directly (Acts 7:51-53), and gives his life for the truth he proclaims (Acts 7:58-60).

This is no contradiction. The Spirit who fills believers is the same who inspired Scripture (2 Pet. 1:21) and works through its proclamation (Rom. 10:17). At the same time, the very Word the Spirit inspired is rightly understood and employed by His enablement (1 Cor. 2:12-14). Far from competing with one another, Word and Spirit necessarily work together.

Because of this, we should resist separating what God has joined together, depending on the Spirit as we seek to understand and obey, while giving ourselves diligently to the Word through which He ordinarily works.

**24. WHAT PROBLEMS ARISE WHEN WE PURSUE EITHER THE SPIRIT OR SCRIPTURE
WITHOUT THE OTHER?**

**25. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO PURSUE SPIRIT-FILLED LIVING AND BIBLE-CENTERED
CONVICTION TOGETHER? HOW CAN EACH STRENGTHEN THE OTHER?**

WEEK 8

BEYOND JERUSALEM

ACTS 8:4

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the Word.

ACTS 8:4-40

INTRODUCTION

In Acts 8:4-40, Luke records the aftermath of Stephen's "execution" (Acts 8:1) and the church's "[scattering]" (Acts 8:1). What initially appears to be a devastating setback becomes the means by which the gospel is carried beyond Jerusalem, just as Jesus promised (Acts 1:8).

READ ACTS 8:4-8

Philip was one of the seven men previously chosen to help serve the widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5). However, like Stephen, his ministry quickly extends beyond that initial assignment. "Scattered" (v. 4) by persecution, he carries the gospel into Samaria.

1. HOW DO THE BELIEVERS RESPOND TO BEING "SCATTERED" (V. 4)? WHY DOES LUKE FOCUS ON PHILIP'S MINISTRY IN SAMARIA (CF. ACTS 1:8)?

2. WHAT DO THE "SIGNS" (V. 6) PHILIP PERFORMS REVEAL ABOUT HIS MESSAGE? HOW DO THE PEOPLE RESPOND (VV. 6, 8)?

"Persecution never quenches the gospel's flame. It only scatters the coals to kindle new fires."

— Charles Spurgeon

8

DIGGING DEEPER

Philip's ministry reinforces an emerging pattern in the early church (cf. Acts 6:8-10). Gospel proclamation doesn't belong exclusively to the apostles.

This example challenges the modern tendency to divide Christians into narrow categories organized around personalities and preferences. By contrast, Philip simply responded faithfully wherever God placed him. When there was a practical need, he served (Acts 6:5). When there was an opportunity to proclaim, he "[preached]" (v. 4).

The same should characterize every Christian at GBC. While God gives different gifts that help shape where we should serve most often (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-7), they should never become excuses for refusing the needs God places in front of us (Jas. 2:15-16). Like Philip, we should remain available to whatever ministry God places before us, trusting the Spirit to enable us even in areas that don't come naturally (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

3. HOW CAN YOU DISTINGUISH BETWEEN WISELY SERVING WITHIN YOUR GIFTS AND USING YOUR GIFTS AS AN EXCUSE TO AVOID OBEDIENCE?

4. WHAT IS ONE MINISTRY OPPORTUNITY YOU COULD STEP INTO WITH GREATER JOY RIGHT NOW? WHAT WOULD THAT LOOK LIKE PRACTICALLY?

READ ACTS 8:9-25

The practice of “magic” (v. 9) was widespread in the ancient world and often associated with claims of supernatural “power” (v. 10). Simon had built a longstanding reputation around such claims (vv. 9-10) and was widely regarded as a significant spiritual figure before Philip’s arrival.

5. WHAT IS SIMON’S REPUTATION IN SAMARIA (VV. 9-11)? WHAT DOES HIS INFLUENCE REVEAL ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT PHILIP ENTERED?

6. HOW DOES LUKE’S REPEATED USE OF “PAID ATTENTION” (VV. 6, 10-11) EMPHASIZE THE SHIFT IN SAMARIA? HOW DO THE PEOPLE RESPOND TO PHILIP (V. 12)?

7. HOW DOES SIMON RESPOND TO PHILIP’S MESSAGE (V. 13)? WHAT STANDS OUT ABOUT HIS REACTION?

*“I have never regretted
the hours given
to others, and I have
often regretted the
ones I kept.”
– Robert Murray
M’Cheyne*

*“When the true Physician
comes to town, the
quack’s trade suddenly
loses its customers.”
– George Whitefield*

Acts 8:9 – “[Practicing] magic” could involve spells, incantations, charms, astrology, divination, and other mystical rituals. While Luke doesn’t tell us exactly what Simon performed, his ability to “[amaze]” the Samaritans suggests that he was regarded as far more than an entertainer.

"This delay marks not a pattern for the church, but a hinge in redemptive history."
 – Geerhardus Vos

The Samaritans being "baptized" (v. 12) marked a remarkable development in the church's expansion. For centuries, Jews and Samaritans had been divided by ethnic and religious hostility (Jn. 4:9, 20). Now, their believing in the gospel demonstrated that those longstanding barriers were beginning to disappear.

8. WHY ARE PETER AND JOHN SENT TO SAMARIA (VV. 14-15)? WHAT DO THEY DISCOVER AMONG THE BELIEVERS WHEN THEY ARRIVE (VV. 15-16)?

9. WHAT OCCURS WHEN THE APOSTLES "[LAY] THEIR HANDS" (V. 17) ON THE PEOPLE? WHY IS THE ORDER OF EVENTS PECULIAR?

DIGGING DEEPER

News of the Samaritans' conversion prompts "the apostles at Jerusalem" (v. 14) to send Peter and John to Samaria. After arriving, they recognize that the Holy Spirit had "not yet fallen on any of them" (v. 16). In response, they "pray" (v. 15) for the new believers and "[lay] their hands on them" (v. 17). At that point, the Samaritans "[receive] the Holy Spirit" (v. 17).

By suspending the Spirit's reception until Peter and John arrived, God publicly confirmed that the Samaritans were being incorporated into the same church as the Christians in Jerusalem. At the same time, this sequencing also served the apostles themselves, demonstrating firsthand that God was extending His salvation beyond traditional Jewish boundaries.

While the delay is unique, there are a handful of other unusual episodes surrounding the Spirit's arrival in Acts (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48; 11:15-17; 19:1-7). However, rather than establishing a normative pattern, these incidents occur at key stages in the gospel's expansion. They visibly authenticate the Spirit's indwelling of those being incorporated into the church, including Samaritans and Gentiles.

The broader New Testament is explicit that every genuine believer receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion (e.g. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:2-5; Eph. 1:13-14; Tit. 3:5-6). Because of this, we have no need to seek a later reception of the Spirit through a so-called "second baptism" or the laying on of hands. Instead, Scripture calls us to live more fully under the influence and power of the Spirit we've already received (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18).

Acts 8:14-17 – Classical Pentecostal theology commonly appeals to this passage as evidence that "baptism in the Holy Spirit" can occur subsequent to conversion. In this view, the Samaritans' later reception of the Spirit is understood as a distinct empowering work for Christian life and witness.

10. WHY SHOULD THE SPIRIT'S DELAYED RECEPTION IN SAMARIA BE VIEWED AS TRANSITIONAL RATHER THAN NORMATIVE? EXPLAIN.

11. HOW SHOULD KNOWING THAT THE SPIRIT ALREADY DWELLS WITHIN YOU SHAPE THE WAY YOU PURSUE SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND MATURITY?

*"Abide in the Spirit
already given, and
growth will be His work,
not your striving."
– Andrew Murray*

12. WHAT DO PETER AND JOHN DO BEFORE RETURNING (V. 25)? HOW DOES THIS SPEAK TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOD'S DELAYING THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SAMARIA?

The Spirit's arrival confirms God's work among the Samaritans, but it also exposes something troubling in Simon. As he watches what happens through the apostles' ministry, Luke turns the focus back to him, testing his earlier profession of faith.

13. WHAT OFFER DOES SIMON MAKE TO THE APOSTLES (VV. 18-19)? HOW DOES THIS BUILD ON WHAT FIRST DREW HIM TO PHILIP (V. 13)?

14. WHAT SINFUL "INTENT" (V. 22) IS BENEATH SIMON'S PROPOSAL?

*"A heart that prizes the
gift above the Giver has
not truly been changed."
– Jonathan Edwards*

15. HOW DOES PETER RESPOND TO SIMON (VV. 20-21, 23)? WHAT SPECIFICALLY DOES PETER CHARGE SIMON TO DO (V. 22)? HOW DOES SIMON REPLY (V. 24)?

*"The more clearly we see
God's perfections, the
more freely our hearts
are drawn to Him."*

– A.W. Pink

*"A soldier does not
debate his orders on the
way to the battlefield."*

– William Gurnall

DIGGING DEEPER

Simon's offer to Peter exposes how easily old desires can be carried into a new profession of faith. Before his conversion, Simon had built his identity around influence and power. Now, he tries to bring that same instinct into Christianity, seeking to purchase "the gift of God" (v. 20) to serve his own ambition. Peter quickly rebukes him, exposing the sinful "intent" (v. 22) of his "heart" (v. 21) and calling him to "repent" (v. 22).

The same temptation can surface in us in subtler ways. While we may not try to buy spiritual power, we can still value Christianity for the benefit or utility it seems to offer our lives (Jn. 6:26-27). Because of this, Simon's example presses us to examine what we truly desire from God (Ps. 73:25-26). As we do, we must recognize that God's greatest gift is not what He can give us, but Himself (Ps. 16:5). Apart from a real and growing relationship with Jesus, every other blessing eventually proves insufficient (Phil. 3:8-10).

16. HOW CAN GOOD GIFTS FROM GOD BECOME SUBSTITUTES FOR DEEPER FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM? WHERE DO YOU MOST FEEL THIS TEMPTATION?

17. WHAT ASPECTS OF GOD'S CHARACTER MOST DRAW YOU TOWARD HIM? WHY? HOW CAN YOU CULTIVATE GREATER DELIGHT IN THOSE QUALITIES?

READ ACTS 8:26-40

As Luke continues to track Philip's ministry, he is now directed by "an angel of the Lord" (v. 26) to encounter a traveler on the road. Notably, as both a foreigner and eunuch, this man would've been excluded from full participation in Israel's "worship" (v. 27) under the old covenant (Deut. 23:1).

18. WHAT INSTRUCTIONS DOES PHILIP RECEIVE FROM THE "ANGEL" (V. 26) AND THE "SPIRIT" (V. 29)? HOW DOES PHILIP RESPOND (VV. 27, 30)?

Acts 8:27 – The "eunuch" was not an obscure traveler. Luke describes him as a high-ranking court official with responsibility over the queen's treasury, suggesting considerable education, influence, and status.

19. WHOM DOES PHILIP ENCOUNTER (V. 27)? WHAT DETAILS STAND OUT ABOUT HIM (VV. 27-28, 31)?

20. HOW DOES THE “PASSAGE” (V. 32) BEING READ POINT TO JESUS (VV. 32-35)? HOW DOES THE MAN REACT TO PHILIP’S EXPLANATION (VV. 36-38, 39-40)?

*“One rightly explained
verse of Scripture can do
more than a thousand
clever arguments.”
– J.C. Ryle*

DIGGING DEEPER

Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian highlights the remarkable providence of God in evangelism. Before Philip arrives, God is clearly at work, arranging an ideal set of circumstances for the gospel. At the same time, God’s preparation doesn’t make Philip’s role unnecessary. Philip still had to approach the chariot, initiate conversation, understand the passage, and share “the good news about Jesus” (v. 35).

This story shows us that we should assume that God is constantly at work, placing people and opportunities in our path (Col. 4:3). As we become increasingly expectant, we will begin to more readily recognize His providential hand, enabling us to faithfully respond to those moments with clarity, confidence, and courage (1 Pet. 3:15).

21. WHEN HAS GOD USED AN UNEXPECTED CIRCUMSTANCE OR CONVERSATION TO OPEN A DOOR FOR THE GOSPEL? WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM IT?

22. WHERE MIGHT YOU BE OVERLOOKING GOD’S PROVIDENTIAL HAND? HOW CAN YOU BECOME MORE ATTENTIVE AND EXPECTANT THERE?

*“What looks like accident
to a careless eye
is design to a
watchful one.”
– Charles Hodge*

Acts 8:37 – Some manuscripts include a verse 37 in which Philip requires a confession of faith before baptism. While this verse doesn’t appear in the earliest manuscripts, it reflects early church baptismal practice and the expectation of genuine faith preceding baptism.

*"A man who will not be led in small matters should not expect directions in large ones."
– J.I. Packer*

*"Communion with God in secret is the wellspring of boldness with men in public"
– John Owen*

DIGGING DEEPER

As he approaches the eunuch's chariot, Philip receives verbal guidance from the Spirit (v. 29). Later, the Spirit "carried Philip away" (v. 39), bringing him to a new place to "[preach] the gospel" (v. 40). Taken together, these accounts and others throughout Acts (e.g. Acts 10:19-20; 16:6-7; 20:23) remind us that God actively directs His people through the Spirit.

At the same time, these events occur during the church's foundational, apostolic expansion. Because of this, we should be careful not to treat every inward impression as divine speech or expect extraordinary experiences like relocation to characterize ordinary Christian life.

Holding these truths together guards us from two errors. We should neither live as though God is distant and uninvolved (Prov. 3:5-6) or assume that His guidance should ordinarily resemble the miraculous ways He directed Philip.

As we avoid these extremes, we can be confident that God has not left us without the Spirit's guidance. Today, He leads us through the Word He inspired (Ps. 119:105), along with wisdom sought in prayer (Jas. 1:5) and the counsel of other believers (Prov. 15:22).

23. WHEN ARE YOU MOST TEMPTED TO ACT AS THOUGH GOD IS DISTANT OR UNINVOLVED? HOW CAN YOU GROW IN SEEKING HIS GUIDANCE IN THOSE TIMES?

CONCLUSION

In Acts 8:4-40, God works through scattered, ordinary believers to cross longstanding boundaries and reach unlikely people. As the church moves beyond Jerusalem, Luke reminds us that God directs the mission, but He delights to accomplish it through those who are ready to follow wherever He leads.

24. WHO IN YOUR LIFE SEEMS DIFFICULT OR UNLIKELY FOR THE GOSPEL TO REACH? HOW SHOULD THIS PASSAGE RESHAPE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THEM?

25. WHAT HABITS CAN PREPARE YOU TO SHARE THE GOSPEL MORE READILY? WHY?

WEEK 9

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

ACTS 9:5

And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And He said,
"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

ACTS 9:1-31

INTRODUCTION

As Luke returns his focus to Jerusalem, the “great persecution” (Acts 8:1) that erupted after Stephen’s death has intensified under Saul (Acts 8:3). However, in a stunning reversal, the “young man” (Acts 7:58) who had become intent on “ravaging the church” (Acts 8:3) is confronted and redirected by Jesus Himself, marking one of the most pivotal moments in church history.

READ ACTS 9:1-9

Damascus was nearly 150 miles from Jerusalem, requiring a journey of roughly six days. Because it was located on the main route from Mesopotamia to Egypt, it was an important commercial center. If “the Way” (v. 2) flourished there, it could quickly spread throughout the region.

1. HOW IS SAUL DESCRIBED (V. 1)? WHAT DO HIS ACTIONS DEMONSTRATE ABOUT HIS VIEW OF “THE WAY” (V. 2)?

2. HOW IS SAUL’S JOURNEY INTERRUPTED (VV. 3-4)? WHAT WOULD THE NATURE OF THIS ENCOUNTER HAVE MADE EVIDENT TO HIM?

3. WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT ABOUT THE WAY JESUS IDENTIFIES HIMSELF (V. 5)? HOW DOES THIS HIGHLIGHT THE IRONY OF SAUL’S MISSION?

4. HOW IS SAUL DIFFERENT WHEN HE ENTERS DAMASCUS THAN WHEN HE BEGAN THE JOURNEY (VV. 8-9)?

“The light that felled Saul revealed a sovereignty no letter of authority could match.”
– A.W. Pink

“God brought low in an hour what pride had built over many years.”
– John Calvin

DIGGING DEEPER

Saul's extraordinary conversion begins with his being confronted and humbled by Jesus. In an instant, everything Saul thought he knew was overturned, bringing him unmistakably to the end of himself (vv. 8-9).

The gospel brings all of us to the same realization. It forces the self-righteous person to recognize that virtue can never earn a right standing before God (Rom. 3:20), the self-assured person to accept that brokenness cannot be overcome by greater effort (Tit. 3:3-5), and the self-determined person to acknowledge that salvation is received only by grace (Eph. 2:8-9). Whatever form our self-reliance takes, the gospel necessarily strips it away (Phil. 3:3-9).

However, this humility isn't only the doorway into the Christian life. It becomes the posture in which we continue to live (2 Cor. 3:5). Saul is proof of this pattern, as his future faithfulness to God is sustained by the grace that first brought him low (1 Cor. 15:10).

5. WHY DOES THE GOSPEL FORCE US TO REJECT SELF-RELIANCE? HOW SHOULD THAT SHAPE THE WAY WE LIVE AS CHRISTIANS?

*"God will not share His glory with a Christian who still trusts his own strength."
— John Piper*

6. WHAT FORM DOES SELF-RELIANCE MOST OFTEN TAKE IN YOUR LIFE? HOW DOES THE GOSPEL EXPOSE AND CORRECT IT?

READ ACTS 9:10-19

Once moving with authority and purpose, Saul is left blind and waiting. Meanwhile, Luke introduces Ananias, the very kind of man Saul had come to arrest. Through this previously unknown disciple, God continues what He began on the road.

7. WHAT INSTRUCTIONS DOES GOD GIVE TO ANANIAS (VV. 11-12)? WHY IS HIS INITIAL HESITATION UNDERSTANDABLE (VV. 13-14)?

*"A well-charted fear can keep the heart from setting sail on God's command."
— John Flavel*

Acts 9:11 – "The street called Straight" was a major east-west thoroughfare in ancient Damascus that can still be traced today. Luke's specific reference grounds Saul's conversion in a concrete, identifiable setting.

"True grace alters the heart's disposition until it relishes as family the man it once abhorred."
— Jonathan Edwards

8. HOW DOES GOD ADDRESS ANANIAS' RELUCTANCE (VV. 15-16)? WHY WOULD THIS HAVE GIVEN HIM CONFIDENCE TO OBEY?

DIGGING DEEPER

Ananias' initial hesitation highlights how unlikely Saul's conversion really was. Everything Ananias knew about Saul pointed in one direction. Saul had done "evil... to [the] saints in Jerusalem" (v. 13) and had come intending to "bind all who [called] on [God's] name" (v. 14). By any human measure, he was an adversary of God and an enemy of the church.

God doesn't dispute that assessment. He simply announces something Ananias could never have anticipated. The man who had chosen to oppose Jesus (v. 5) had been chosen by Jesus to "carry [His] name" (v. 15). Saul wouldn't just stop persecuting the church. He would become one of the primary means God used to build it.

Saul's conversion was a powerful display of God's love and mercy that he never got over. Years later, he called himself "the foremost" (1 Tim. 1:15) of sinners and "the very least of all the saints" (Eph. 3:8). Even still, he could say just as confidently, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). His past was never erased or minimized. Instead, it became a testimony to the power of grace.

9. WHAT DOES SAUL'S CONVERSION TEACH US ABOUT THE NATURE OF GOD'S GRACE? WHY IS IT TRULY AMAZING?

"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound; That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see."
— John Newton

Having been reassured by God about Saul, Ananias obeys and seeks Saul out. Three days after Saul's encounter with Jesus, the two men finally meet. When they do, Ananias addresses the man he had every reason to fear as "brother" (v.17).

10. WHAT HAPPENS TO SAUL BOTH PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY (VV. 18-19)? HOW DO THESE EVENTS CONFIRM HIS CONVERSION?

READ ACTS 9:20-31

Though Luke compresses the intervening events considerably, noting that Saul remained in Damascus “for some days” (v. 19), it’s later made clear that he stayed for roughly three years before his first visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:17-18).

11. WHAT DOES SAUL BEGIN TO DO IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS CONVERSION (V. 20)? WHY WERE THE PEOPLE “AMAZED” (V. 21)?

12. WHY DOES SAUL’S MINISTRY PROVOKE OPPOSITION (VV. 22-24)? WHAT DOES THE RESULTING PLOT FORCE HIM TO DO (VV. 25-26)?

13. WHY ARE THE DISCIPLES “AFRAID” (V. 26) OF SAUL (V. 26)? HOW DOES BARNABAS HELP ESTABLISH HIS CREDIBILITY WITH THE “APOSTLES” (V. 27)?

*“One trusted witness
will break the back of
suspicion faster than a
hundred whispers.”
– Martin Luther*

9

DIGGING DEEPER

When Saul arrives in Jerusalem, the disciples were “afraid” (v. 26) and unwilling to believe “he was a disciple” (v. 26). However, after Barnabas receives him and hears evidence of God’s grace, he vouches for Saul before the “apostles” (v. 27), leading to his acceptance in the church.

Barnabas’ reception and advocacy of Saul offer an important example. While Christians shouldn’t be naïve about sin or dismissive of the harm people have caused, we must also avoid defining someone by who they once were. When repentance is genuine, the church must be a place where forgiveness is extended and experienced and transformation is recognized and celebrated.

14. HOW DOES BARNABAS’ EXAMPLE SHOW THE CHURCH HOW TO EXTEND GRACE WITHOUT BECOMING NAÏVE ABOUT SIN OR ITS CONSEQUENCES?

*“We are to judge of men
by the evidences
of grace wrought
in them, not by the
memory of what grace
has already overcome.”
– John Owen*

*"A church that grows in number without growing in reverence has not truly grown at all."
– Herman Bavinck*

*"Obedience that costs nothing was negotiated, not received."
– Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Having been accepted by the apostles, Saul resumes his ministry in Jerusalem, "preaching boldly in the name of Jesus" (v. 28). He now disputes with the same Hellenistic Jews who opposed Stephen (Acts 6:9), placing the former persecutor on the receiving end of the hostility he once supported (Acts 8:1).

15. WHAT FOLLOWS SAUL IN JERUSALEM (VV. 28-30)? HOW DOES THIS BEGIN TO FULFILL WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT HIS FUTURE (V. 16)?

16. HOW DOES LUKE SUMMARIZE THE STATE OF THE CHURCH (V. 31)? WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT ITS CONDITION AND GROWTH?

DIGGING DEEPER

As soon as Saul begins preaching, opposition follows (vv. 23, 25, 29). This was not unexpected. Before Saul's ministry began, God had declared that he would "suffer for the sake of [His] name" (v. 16). Hardship wasn't an interruption to Saul's calling. It was part of what Jesus told him to anticipate.

While Saul's commission was clearly unique, the principle it was founded on isn't. Jesus calls every Christian to "take up [their] cross" (Mk. 8:34) and warns that obedience may bring opposition (Jn. 15:20). Though sacrifice will differ for each of us, following Jesus will eventually require surrendering something we would rather keep (Lk. 9:23; Phil. 3:7-8). In these times, the temptation is rarely to abandon our faith outright. More often, we quietly redefine obedience until it asks very little of us (1 Jn. 2:3-6).

Saul shows us a better way. He knew what following Jesus would require, and he began preaching anyway. He could do that because the One who disclosed what lay ahead would also remain with him through it. That promise still holds today. Jesus never asks us to walk a path He avoided Himself. He went before us in obedience and suffering (Jn. 19:7; 1 Pet. 2:21), and He promises to remain with us as we follow (Matt. 28:20).

17. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO REDEFINE OBEDIENCE UNTIL IT ASKS LITTLE OF US? WHERE HAVE YOU SEEN THAT IN YOURSELF?

18. HOW DOES KNOWING JESUS IS WITH US IN COSTLY OBEDIENCE CHANGE THE WAY WE FACE IT? WHAT PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

*"The road was no easier
for the company he kept.
It was only possible."
– John Bunyan*

CONCLUSION

Though Saul begins as one of the church's fiercest enemies, Jesus not only stops him, but transforms him into an instrument for the gospel's advance. By the close of the passage, the church is at "peace" (v. 31), being strengthened and continuing to multiply. This picture of the church's health reminds us that no threat can ultimately overturn God's purposes.

19. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A CHURCH TO "[WALK] IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD AND IN THE COMFORT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT" (V. 31)? WHY DOES IT NEED BOTH?

20. HOW CAN WE GROW IN BOTH OF THESE QUALITIES AT GBC? WHAT PART CAN YOU PLAY IN THAT?

*"Reverence and
consolation proceed
from one Spirit,
and a church that
possesses the one will
not lack the other."
– Charles Hodge*

WEEK 10

THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES

ACTS 10:34-35

Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

ACTS 9:32-10:48

INTRODUCTION

In Acts 9:32-10:48, the gospel crosses the divide between Jew and Gentile. What God reveals to Peter and then confirms in Cornelius' household reminds us that His redemptive plan extends beyond every boundary and that He is gathering a people for Himself from every nation through faith in Jesus.

READ ACTS 9:32-43

As the church continues to grow, Peter travels “here and there” (v. 32) outside of Jerusalem, including to “Lydda” (v. 32) and “Joppa” (v. 36), two cities located near the Mediterranean coast. While in each location, he performs extraordinary miracles that draw attention to his ministry and lead to significant responses from those who witness them.

1. WHAT CONDITION ARE AENEAS AND TABITHA IN BEFORE PETER ARRIVES (VV. 33, 37)? HOW DOES THIS HEIGHTEN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT FOLLOWS?

2. WHAT DOES PETER SAY AND DO IN EACH MIRACLE (VV. 34, 40)? HOW DOES THIS HIGHLIGHT THE SOURCE OF HIS POWER?

3. HOW DO THE SURROUNDING PEOPLE RESPOND TO THE MIRACLES (VV. 35, 42)? WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT THEIR PURPOSE?

4. HOW DO PETER’S MIRACLES RESEMBLE JESUS’ (CF. LK. 5:17-26; 8:49-56)? WHAT DO THESE PARALLELS SUGGEST ABOUT PETER’S MINISTRY?

*“The deeper the
helplessness, the
clearer the power.”
– Thomas Watson*

*“The apostolic age
opens no new order of
power. It extends the
same messianic power
into the epoch of
the church.”
– Geerhardus Vos*

DIGGING DEEPER

The apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22) and, therefore, occupied a critical role in the establishment of the church (Eph. 2:20). As part of this unique time, their commission was accompanied by “signs and wonders” (2 Cor. 12:12) like the ones performed by Peter in Lydda and Joppa (vv. 34, 40). These miraculous works were necessary to confirm the message of the gospel (Heb. 2:3-4) and further its spread (vv. 35, 42). For that reason, we shouldn’t expect to see elements of their ministry duplicated or repeated today.

Despite this, God is no less active or powerful. Through His Spirit, He still gives life (Jn. 3:5-8), indwells believers (1 Cor. 3:16), produces holiness (Gal. 5:16-25), illuminates truth (1 Cor. 2:12-16), assists prayer (Rom. 8:26-27), assures adoption (Gal. 4:6), provides guidance (Rom. 8:14), gives hope (Rom. 15:13), and distributes gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-11), all of which progressively conform us to Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18).

While these functions may seem less supernatural than healing the lame and raising the dead, they’re no less dependent on the power of God. If we only look for the Spirit in the spectacular, we’ll miss His powerful work in ordinary life. Because of this, our goal shouldn’t be to chase extraordinary experiences, but to grow in our awareness of, dependence on, and gratitude for the Spirit’s ongoing activity and presence among us.

5. WHY WERE MIRACULOUS SIGNS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLES AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH?

6. WHICH OF THE SPIRIT’S ORDINARY WORKS LISTED ABOVE ARE EASIEST FOR YOU TO IGNORE OR OVERLOOK? WHY?

7. HOW CAN YOU GROW IN AWARENESS OF, DEPENDENCE ON, AND GRATITUDE FOR THE SPIRIT’S WORK IN YOUR LIFE?

“The signs weren’t the message. They were God’s way of certifying the messenger before the New Testament existed to do it.”
– R.C. Sproul

10

“You will never thank the Spirit for the harvest if you never once noticed Him ploughing.”
– Charles Spurgeon

Acts 9:36 – “Joppa was the port from which Jonah fled rather than preach to Gentiles (Jon. 1:3). Luke doesn’t make the connection explicit, but the connection is noteworthy given what follows in Acts 10.

Acts 9:43 – A “tanner” regularly handled dead animals, making the occupation ceremonially sensitive to Jews. Peter’s willingness to stay with Simon may suggest that some purity boundaries were already loosening.

"The declaration is decisive. Cleanness is not a property of the creature but a verdict of God, and His verdict admits no appeal."
 – Charles Hodge

"Neither preacher nor hearer ever arrives by accident."
 – John Newton

READ ACTS 10:1-33

Having left Peter in "Joppa" (Acts 9:43), the narrative suddenly shifts to "Caesarea" (v. 1), an important center of Roman rule in Judea. There, Luke introduces Cornelius, a Gentile centurion. As the chapter unfolds, God works in both men, bringing them together for a decisive moment in the spread of the gospel.

8. HOW IS CORNELIUS DESCRIBED (VV. 1-2)? WHAT IS HE COMMANDED TO DO (VV. 4-6)? HOW DOES HE RESPOND (VV. 7-8)?

9. WHAT VISION DOES PETER RECEIVE (VV. 9-13, 16)? WHAT FURTHER INSIGHT IS ADDED IN THE EXCHANGE THAT FOLLOWS (VV. 14-15)?

10. WHAT HAPPENS AS PETER CONSIDERS THE VISION (VV. 17-20)? WHY IS HIS RESPONSE TO CORNELIUS' MEN SIGNIFICANT (VV. 21-27)?

11. WHAT DOES PETER REALIZE AT CORNELIUS' HOUSE (V. 28)? HOW DOES THIS CLARIFY THE MEANING OF HIS EARLIER VISION?

12. WHY DOES GOD PREPARE BOTH CORNELIUS (VV. 3-8) AND PETER (VV. 9-23) BEFORE BRINGING THEM TOGETHER (VV. 29, 33)?

Acts 10:11 – Some interpreters see the "four corners" as suggesting the whole earth, preparing Peter for a broader understanding of clean and unclean (v. 28).

Acts 10:15 – The crucial emphasis is on God's action. Peter isn't deciding for himself that Old Covenant distinctions no longer matter.

DIGGING DEEPER

As Peter makes clear in his initial response (v. 14), the distinction between clean and unclean was deeply ingrained in Jewish life. Observing the dietary laws given through Moses had long marked Israel as set apart from the surrounding nations (Lev. 11:1-47; Deut. 14:3-21). However, in this moment, God makes clear to Peter that something new was taking place (v. 15).

Though the vision initially concerns “animals” (v. 12), Peter later understands its significance and applies its meaning to “[people]” (v. 28). Based on this realization, he moves beyond former ceremonial restrictions and lays the groundwork for the gospel to be proclaimed among the Gentiles (v. 33).

While this passage marks the beginning stages of a groundbreaking moment in redemptive history, it also reminds us that the gospel still confronts boundaries we’re tempted to absorb or preserve today (Gal. 3:28; Jas. 2:1-4). Too often, we can allow differences in background, class, culture, personality, or reputation to shape how we view and treat others. Instead, the gospel calls us to resist those distinctions, especially when they become barriers to fellowship, love, or witness (Rom. 1:16; Rev. 7:9).

13. WHAT DISTINCTIONS ARE YOU MOST TEMPTED TO LET SHAPE HOW YOU VIEW OR TREAT OTHERS? HOW CAN YOU ACTIVELY RESIST THAT TENDENCY?

14. HOW CAN WE DISTINGUISH BETWEEN BARRIERS THE GOSPEL CALLS US TO REMOVE AND BOUNDARIES THE BIBLE CALLS US TO PRESERVE?

READ ACTS 10:34-48

Given the opportunity to share what “[he had] been commanded by the Lord” (v. 33), Peter speaks with authority and clarity, bringing the significance of this entire chapter into focus.

15. WHAT DOES PETER SAY HE UNDERSTANDS ABOUT GOD (VV. 34-35)? HOW DOES THIS CONNECT TO WHAT HE LEARNED THROUGH CORNELIUS?

“We are not to reflect on what men in themselves deserve, but to attend to the image of God in them which, by its beauty and dignity, should allure us to love and embrace them.”
– John Calvin

10

“God is no respecter of persons. This is bitter news to the proud and sweet news to everyone else.”
– Martin Luther

*"Whosoever will
may come, and none
whoever came was
sent away."*

– Robert Murray
M'Cheyne

16. HOW DOES PETER SUMMARIZE JESUS' MINISTRY (VV. 36-40, 42)? WHY DOES HE EMPHASIZE THE APOSTLES' ROLE AS "WITNESSES" (V. 41)?

17. WHO DOES PETER SAY CAN "[RECEIVE] FORGIVENESS" (V. 43)? HOW (V. 43)? WHY WOULD THIS HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT TO CORNELIUS' GATHERING?

DIGGING DEEPER

Peter's message to Cornelius provides a concise presentation of the gospel. While we don't have to reproduce Peter's exact wording, his pattern is instructive. He explains who Jesus is (vv. 36, 38), what He has done (vv. 38-41), why it matters (v. 42), and how people must respond (v. 43).

Peter's example reminds us that sharing the gospel isn't primarily about our own testimony, someone else's felt needs, or a checklist of moral improvements. Though those things may have a place in conversation, they cannot replace the message itself. Faithful evangelism keeps the person and work of Jesus at the center (2 Cor. 4:5) and clearly calls people to respond in faith (Rom. 10:9-10).

In the end, confidence in evangelism doesn't come from our eloquence or ability to make the message seem more attractive, but from God's power to open someone's heart (1 Thess. 1:5). Remembering this frees us to proclaim the good news of Jesus clearly, faithfully, and plainly, leaving the results to Him (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

18. WHAT ASPECT OF PETER'S PRESENTATION ARE YOU MOST LIKELY TO NEGLECT WHEN SHARING THE GOSPEL? WHAT IS LOST WHEN THAT PART IS MISSING?

19. WHO IN YOUR LIFE NEEDS TO HEAR THE GOSPEL FROM YOU? HOW DOES TRUSTING GOD WITH THE RESULTS ENCOURAGE YOU TO SPEAK?

*"You are not required
to convert anyone.
You are only required
not to be silent."*

– J.C. Ryle

While Peter is still speaking, the scene shifts quickly from proclamation to response. What happens next provides unmistakable confirmation of everything God has been revealing throughout the chapter.

20. WHAT HAPPENS WHILE PETER IS STILL SPEAKING (VV. 44-46)? WHY ARE THE JEWISH BELIEVERS “AMAZED” (V. 45)?

21. HOW DOES THIS SCENE CORRESPOND TO WHAT OCCURRED AT PENTECOST (CF. ACTS 2:2-4)? WHY ARE THE SIMILARITIES NOTEWORTHY (V. 47)?

22. WHY DOES PETER INSIST THAT THE GENTILES BE BAPTIZED (VV. 47-48)? WHAT DOES THIS CONTINUE TO REVEAL ABOUT THEIR PLACE AMONG GOD’S PEOPLE?

*“God settled the question by an act rather than an argument.”
– J.I. Packer*

DIGGING DEEPER

While this passage speaks clearly to the inclusion of “Gentiles” (v. 45) among God’s people, it also joins the broader New Testament witness in giving important insight into the timing, meaning, and purpose of baptism.

To begin, this passage makes clear that baptism is not optional, even after the Spirit has been received. That fits the consistent pattern throughout Acts, where baptism ordinarily follows a personal response of faith and repentance (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 38; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5). Accordingly, its meaning is closely tied to identification with Jesus’ death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4) and to the inward reality of a changed heart (Col. 2:11-12). With this understanding, baptism visibly portrays what God has already accomplished and publicly identifies believers with Jesus and His people (Gal. 3:27).

At GBC, we practice believer’s baptism as a physical sign of the spiritual reality God has already accomplished through faith in Jesus. That said, baptism is more than a doctrinal position or church practice. It’s also a gift God gives us to remember, confess, and celebrate His saving work. For that reason, baptism isn’t just an obligation to fulfill, but a joyful act of obedience that provides a tangible way to respond to God’s saving grace.

Acts 10:45 – The visible signs of the Spirit being “poured out... on the Gentiles” are best understood as unique to a major redemptive-historical transition.

"Baptism doesn't make you a Christian any more than a ring makes you married. It says out loud what is already true."

– Kevin DeYoung

"Every plank in the ship does the same work, though only one of them wears the ship's name."

– Samuel Rutherford

23. WHAT DOES BAPTISM SIGNIFY? WHY DOES IT MATTER?

24. HAVE YOU BEEN BAPTIZED AS A BELIEVER? WHY OR WHY NOT?

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of Gentiles in the church isn't the beginning of a new plan, but the unfolding of God's long-promised purpose to bless the nations through Abraham (Gen. 12:3) and gather a people for Himself from every nation (Isa. 49:6). What breaks open in Cornelius' house continues through the mission of the church today and will one day culminate in the worship of God from "all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev. 7:9).

25. HOW DOES KNOWING THE END OF THE STORY GIVE CONFIDENCE AND PURPOSE TO THE MISSION WE SEE IN ACTS?

26. HOW SHOULD LIVING IN THE MIDDLE OF GOD'S UNFOLDING MISSION SHAPE THE WAY WE LIVE AS CHRISTIANS TODAY?

WEEK 11

THE WORD ADVANCES

ACTS 11:26

For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people.
And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

ACTS 11:1-12:25

INTRODUCTION

Acts 11:1-12:25 shows the gospel continuing to advance despite resistance from both inside and outside the church. As the church learns to recognize God's work among the Gentiles, encourage one another toward greater faithfulness, and endure growing persecution, God steadily carries out His purposes.

READ ACTS 11:1-18

As news from Caesarea spread to Jerusalem, Peter is questioned by "the circumcision party" (v. 2), a group of Jewish believers concerned with maintaining Jewish distinctions, especially circumcision and separation from Gentiles.

1. WHAT CONCERNS "THE CIRCUMCISION PARTY" (V. 2)? HOW DOES PETER RESPOND (VV. 4-17)? WHAT IS THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT OF HIS DEFENSE (VV. 16-17)?

2. HOW DO THE CRITICS REACT TO PETER'S EXPLANATION (V. 18)? WHAT DOES THEIR RESPONSE REVEAL ABOUT THEIR POSTURE TOWARD GOD'S WORK?

"It is a rare virtue to be silenced by God, for the flesh had rather dispute forever than confess that it had been wrong."
– John Calvin

DIGGING DEEPER

As Peter explains to his critics, God had spoken (vv. 5-10), the Spirit had acted (vv. 12, 15), and Jesus' words explained what occurred in Caesarea (v. 16). Faced with overwhelming evidence, Peter concludes that he could not "stand in God's way" (v. 17).

After hearing Peter's testimony, the "circumcision party" (v. 2) responds with the same humility. Instead of continuing to defend their position, they "fell silent and... glorified God" (v. 18), submitting their preconceptions to God's clear revelation. The result was a remarkable confession that God had "granted repentance" (v. 18) to the Gentiles.

The humility in this scene should shape the way we approach God's Word. Scripture regularly confronts our preferences, exposes faulty assumptions, and calls us to costly obedience (Heb. 4:12-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). When it does, we must allow God to have the final word, trusting that what He corrects in us is never more valuable than what He reveals (Jas. 1:22-25).

3. WHEN HAS SCRIPTURE CHANGED YOUR MIND ABOUT SOMETHING? WHAT HELPED YOU RECEIVE THAT CORRECTION?

4. HOW MIGHT YOUR BIBLE READING AND STUDY CHANGE IF YOU APPROACHED IT WITH A GREATER READINESS TO HAVE YOUR THINKING RESHAPED?

5. WHERE MIGHT GOD'S WORD BE CHALLENGING AN ASSUMPTION OR PREFERENCE IN YOU? WHAT WOULD SUBMISSION LOOK LIKE THERE?

READ ACTS 11:19-30

As the gospel continued to spread beyond Jerusalem, Antioch emerged as an important new center of ministry. Believers “scattered” (v. 19) by persecution preached the gospel there, and “a great number” (v. 21) of Gentiles turned to God, prompting “the church in Jerusalem” (v. 22) to send Barnabas.

6. WHAT DID BARNABAS FIND IN ANTIOCH (V. 23)? HOW DID HE “[EXHORT]” (V. 23) THEM? WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT (V. 24)?

7. WHY DOES BARNABAS SEEK OUT SAUL (CF. ACTS 9:15)? WHAT DID BARNABAS AND SAUL DO TOGETHER (V. 26)?

Acts 11:19 – The believers “scattered” after Stephen’s execution traveled increasingly farther from Jerusalem. “Phoenicia” lay along the Mediterranean coast, “Cyprus” was a major island to the west, and “Antioch” stood roughly 300 miles north of Jerusalem.

“Do not come to the Bible as a judge comes to try it, but as a patient comes to be healed by it.”

– Charles Spurgeon

“The most valuable labor of a minister is often not his own preaching, but the preparing of another whose usefulness will outlast his.”

– Charles Simeon

"The name declares the relation. They were not called after Peter, nor after Paul, but after Him in whom alone they had interest."
— John Owen

8. WHAT NAME IS GIVEN TO THE BELIEVERS IN ANTIOCH (V. 26)? WHY IS THIS NEW LABEL SIGNIFICANT?

DIGGING DEEPER

Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36), consistently lives up to that description. Whenever he appears in Acts, he recognizes God's work in others, calls them into greater faithfulness, and walks alongside them as they mature (e.g. v. 23). Though his ministry rarely draws attention to itself, it repeatedly shapes the advance of the early church.

This is seen most clearly in his relationship with Saul. When the disciples "were all afraid of [Saul]" (Acts 9:26), it was Barnabas who vouched for him (Acts 9:27). Years later, as the ministry in Antioch continued to grow, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul (vv. 25-26). For "a whole year" (v. 26) they taught together, helping establish what would become a major launching point for Saul's missionary ministry (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-28).

Barnabas' example shows how discipleship often happens through intentional encouragement. Scripture repeatedly calls all of us to this kind of investment, charging us to "build one another up" (1 Thess. 5:11) and "to stir up one another to love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). While encouragement like this rarely feels significant in the moment, it's often one of the means God uses to prepare someone for greater faithfulness (Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:2).

9. WHO HAS GOD USED TO ENCOURAGE OR STRENGTHEN YOUR FAITH? WHAT MADE THEIR INVESTMENT MEANINGFUL?

10. WHO COULD YOU ENCOURAGE TOWARD GREATER FAITHFULNESS OR SERVICE? WHAT SPECIFIC STEP COULD YOU TAKE TO THAT END?

Acts 11:26 – Luke's emphasis on "a whole year" of teaching shows evangelistic success didn't eliminate the need for prolonged discipleship and teaching.

Acts 11:26 – The name "Christian" likely originated as a label applied by outsiders. Notably, it identified believers not by ethnicity or geography, but by their allegiance to Jesus. The name appears only three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16).

Acts 11:28 – The Jewish historian Josephus describes a particularly severe "famine" in Judea during the mid-to-late 40s, generally associated with the famine foretold by Agabus.

"A word fitly spoken is a prop to a leaning wall. It cost the giver little and save the building much."
— Thomas Watson

"Prophets" (v. 27) continued to serve in the early church after Pentecost (e.g. Acts 13:1; 15:32). In this case, Agabus foretells a coming famine "by the Spirit" (v. 28), much as he later warns of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11).

11. HOW DO THE DISCIPLES REACT TO THE COMING FAMINE (VV. 29-30)? WHAT IS NOTABLE ABOUT THE WAY THEY RESPOND?

12. WHAT DOES ANTIOCH'S SUPPORT OF JUDEA'S NEED DEMONSTRATE ABOUT THE GROWING UNITY IN THE CHURCH? WHY IS THIS NOTEWORTHY?

READ ACTS 12:1-19

In Jerusalem, a new phase of persecution begins under Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great (Matt. 2:1). Raised partly in Rome, Herod eventually ruled a kingdom roughly equal to his grandfather's, including Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. He also worked carefully to maintain favor with the Jewish people.

13. WHAT ACTIONS DOES HEROD TAKE AGAINST THE CHURCH (VV. 1-2)? WHAT APPEARS TO MOTIVATE HIM (V. 3)?

14. WHAT DOES HEROD DO TO PETER (VV. 3-4)? WHAT PRECAUTIONS ARE TAKEN (V. 4)?

15. HOW DOES THE CHURCH RESPOND (V. 5)? WHAT DOES THIS DEMONSTRATE ABOUT THEIR PRIORITIES IN ADVERSITY AND HARDSHIP?

*"Where love is genuine it
will find some outward
expression, and
the readiness of it is
a surer evidence than
the size of it."
– Jonathan Edwards*

*"The devil has no answer
at all for a church
that goes straight
to its knees."
– Martin Luther*

*"I have often prayed
for mercies I was not
prepared to receive."
— John Newton*

Since Peter's arrest occurred during the "days of Unleavened Bread" (v. 3), Herod determined to wait until after "Passover" (v. 4) before bringing him before the people, likely to avoid disrupting the feast and to maximize the impact of a public trial and execution.

16. WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE NIGHT (VV. 7-10)? HOW DOES PETER INITIALLY REACT (VV. 9-11)? WHAT DOES HE EVENTUALLY REALIZE (V. 11)?

17. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PETER ARRIVES AT MARY'S HOUSE (VV. 12-17)? WHAT IS SURPRISING ABOUT THEIR INITIAL RESPONSE (VV. 15-16)?

18. HOW DOES HEROD RESPOND (VV. 18-19)? HOW DOES HIS REACTION CONTRAST WITH THE CHURCH'S EARLIER RESPONSE TO CRISIS (VV. 5, 12)?

DIGGING DEEPER

Acts 12:1-19 displays three distinct ways God delivers His people in trials.

Most obviously, God sometimes delivers His people from a trial. Peter experiences this when God miraculously frees him from prison (vv. 7-10). At other times, God delivers His people through a trial. Throughout Herod's persecution of the church, God sustains His people through prayer (vv. 5, 12) and continues to advance His Word through them (v. 24). Still, other times, God delivers His people by a trial, even death, to accomplish His purposes. This is what happens with James. His death isn't defeat, but the completion of a life spent faithfully serving Jesus (2 Tim. 4:6-8; Rev. 14:13).

Whether God's deliverance comes from, through, or by a trial, His character toward us doesn't change (Jas. 1:17). Even when suffering becomes part of His plan, He remains faithfully present (Ps. 34:18) and perfectly good (Ps. 119:68). In response, our task isn't to determine which pattern God should use, but to trust His perfect wisdom (Prov. 3:5-6) and believe that even suffering can be used to make us more like Jesus (Rom. 8:28-29).

Acts 12:2 – "James" was the son of Zebedee and part of Jesus' closest circle (Matt. 17:1; Mark 5:37). He is the first of the twelve disciples explicitly recorded as being martyred in Acts.

19. HOW SHOULD RECOGNIZING GOD'S UNCHANGING CHARACTER SHAPE THE WAY WE FACE HARDSHIP OR SUFFERING?

*"What God was to
His people in prosperity,
He remains to them
in the furnace."
– A.W. Pink*

20. WHAT TRIAL ARE YOU FACING RIGHT NOW? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO TRUST GOD'S WISDOM WITHOUT KNOWING WHICH KIND OF DELIVERANCE HE WILL GIVE?

READ ACTS 12:20-25

After leaving Judea, Herod returned to Caesarea, where he became involved in a dispute with the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon. Because they depended on his territory for food, their representatives sought "peace" (v. 20) with Herod.

21. HOW DO THE PEOPLE RESPOND TO HEROD'S ADDRESS (V. 22)? WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM AFTERWARD (V. 23)? WHY (V. 23)?

22. WHAT DOES LUKE RECORD IMMEDIATELY AFTER HEROD'S DEATH (V. 24)? WHAT DOES THIS DELIBERATE SEQUENCING EMPHASIZE?

*"Consider how short
the arm of the greatest
enemy proves."
– Richard Baxter*

23. WHO RETURNS FROM JERUSALEM (V. 25)? WHY IS THEIR ARRIVAL SIGNIFICANT AT THIS POINT IN ACTS (CF. ACTS 13:2-4)?

*Acts 12:4 – Peter was guarded by four squads of four soldiers each, likely rotating through watches of the night.
Acts 12:19 – Under Roman practice, soldiers responsible for a prisoner could suffer the penalty intended for the escaped prisoner (cf. Acts 16:27).
Acts 12:23 – Luke's description of Herod's death likely refers to the gruesome physical condition associated with his fatal illness. His sudden death is also recorded in similar detail by Josephus.*

*"Christ's throne has
never once been vacant."
— J.C. Ryle*

*"God's normal method is
means, not marvels."
— J.I. Packer*

DIGGING DEEPER

Throughout Acts 12, Luke repeatedly sets Herod's power alongside the life of the church. By the end of the chapter, the contrast couldn't be sharper. The ruler who seemed to hold power over life and death is "eaten by worms" (v. 23), while the gospel he tried to silence through violent persecution "increased and multiplied" (v. 24).

This pattern runs throughout Scripture. Human rulers rise and fall (Ps. 75:6-7), but God's Word endures forever (Isa. 40:7-8). That reality gives us confidence when earthly authorities appear hostile to God's purposes (Ps. 2:1-6). Political power and cultural pressure may seem formidable, but none can frustrate what God has determined to accomplish (Job 42:2). As those who belong to Jesus, our security rests not in favorable circumstances or sympathetic rulers, but in the sovereign God whose kingdom cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28).

24. WHAT CULTURAL OR POLITICAL PRESSURE FEELS MOST FORMIDABLE TO YOU RIGHT NOW? HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE PUT THAT CONCERN IN PERSPECTIVE?

CONCLUSION

While God moves in supernatural ways in this passage, miraculously rescuing Peter and dramatically judging Herod, He also works through His people's ordinary faithfulness in teaching, encouragement, generosity, prayer, and endurance through suffering. Together, these strengthen and multiply the church, preparing it to carry the gospel beyond Jerusalem and further into the Gentile world.

25. WHICH EXTRAORDINARY ACT OF GOD IN THIS PASSAGE MOST STRENGTHENS YOUR CONFIDENCE IN HIS POWER? WHY?

26. WHICH ORDINARY MEANS IN THIS PASSAGE DO YOU FIND HARDEST TO SEE AS PART OF GOD'S LARGER PURPOSES? WHY?