

A large, vibrant splash of red ink or paint against a light blue background, creating a dynamic and energetic visual effect.

# UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Part 5

Name:

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

WINTER 2022



wentzville  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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# LETTER FROM KURT

The book of Acts, in my opinion, is the most indispensable book of the New Testament. We have 4 Gospel accounts, 13 letters from Paul, and many letters from other writers which are all equally important. But Acts stands alone as a unique book which tells stories and teaches theology that are only found in this book. It describes what the early church looks like, and prescribes what all churches should aspire to.

Acts is more than just a historical documentary...it is a narrative that tells the story of God's followers. This narrative includes many scenes, acts [no pun intended], characters, and plot lines which lead us back to God. There is one person who ties everything together and is woven throughout the narrative as the main character with the leading role...and it may not be who you think it is.

It may surprise you that the leading role in Acts is not Paul. It's not Peter. It is not even Jesus. The main character in the book of Acts is the person of the Holy Spirit! You see his presence, power, and influence throughout every story and plot twist.

Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and then released his Spirit to God at the cross. Then he promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would be unleashed upon them after he leaves [John 14:15-17; Acts 1:4-8]. We learn more about who the Holy Spirit is and how he operates in the book of Acts than any other book.

Luke's gospel account was the first episode in his biblical drama, which focused on all that Jesus began to do [Acts 1:1]. The book of Acts is the second episode which changes the focus to what Jesus' followers continue to do through the power and direction of the Holy Spirit.

It is my hope and prayer that throughout this Life Group season you not only learn about Jesus and his first followers...but that you receive, discern, and UNLEASH the Holy Spirit in your life!

**Kurt Charlton**

Discipleship Minister

*[See the next page for an introduction to the book of Acts]*

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## INTRODUCTION

Acts is written by Luke, the physician, who is the only Gentile author of the New Testament. Luke covertly includes himself into the narrative a few times by saying we/us. The Gospel of Luke is episode 1; Acts is episode 2. Acts follows the general flow of Jesus' instructions in Acts 1:8. Jerusalem [Acts 1:1-8:1a]; Judea/Samaria [Acts 8:1b-12:25]; Ends of the world [Acts 13-28].

## MAJOR THEMES:

### -*HOLY SPIRIT [and his power]*

Holy Spirit is mentioned 56 times, which is more per chapter than any other book of the Bible. He is responsible for every major turning point in the narrative. [1:2; 1:8; 2:1-4; 4:28-31; 5:32; 8:15-17; 10:44-46; 11:15; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:4-6; 20:22]

### -*PERSECUTION [and its results]*

Early Christians suffered intense persecution, but Luke always records the positive attitudes and results. [4:3-4; 4:23-24; 5:40-42; 8:1-4; 11:19-21; 12:1-19; 14:1-7; 14:8-22; 16:25-34; 18:1-8; 21:11]

### -*BAPTISM [and its importance]*

Baptism was clearly commanded as a response to faith in Jesus [2:38] and was the common practice for all new believers. [2:37-41; 8:5-13; 8:36-38; 9:10-12; 9:17-19; 10:47-48; 16:13-15; 16:27-34; 18:5-8; 19:1-5; 22:14-17]

### -*THE CHURCH [and its ups/downs]*

Luke gives church summary statements like a narrator who wants to inform the readers of what they missed in-between each scene. [2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16; 5:42; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:19-20]

### -*PRAYER [and its effects]*

Prayer is intentionally scattered throughout the entire narrative. It is almost like a supporting character beside the Holy Spirit. [1:14; 1:21; 4:31; 6:6; 9:40; 10:1-9; 12:12; 13:1-3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8]

## DESCRIPTIVE VS. PRESCRIPTIVE

Be careful not to read the book of Acts as a prescription for how every single church should operate today. There are times when Luke is merely describing the events as they unfold. It is up to us to interpret and apply what these descriptions mean for us today. One way to do this is to seek the underlying principle that is described, and then turn that into a prescription.

Should we cast lots or draw names out of a hat when choosing leaders for our church? Should we meet together every single day of the week? Should we sell all of our possessions and give our money to the poor? Should we speak in tongues when we accept the Holy Spirit? These are examples of descriptions not prescriptions for everyone, everywhere.

An example of turning a description into a principle can be found in Acts 2:42. Luke says the first converts devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship. The principle for us is that we should be devoted to God's Word and to living in community with other Christ followers. Acts 2:46 says they met daily in the temple courts and in homes. The principle for us is that we should regularly gather corporately and privately with other believers.



# UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

## Week 17 - Peter Explains His Actions

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 11:1-18

## RACIAL/CULTURAL TENSION

As a country, America has made great advances in racial equality over the last 50 years—yet racial tension is still a growing problem in our society. Racial prejudice is nothing new; it was even present in the early days of the church. We will see in this study how believers had to face their own prejudices when God worked among those they despised. We will come to understand that our God is a God who celebrates diversity and His salvation is for everyone. [See Galatians 3:28; Acts 17:26; John 7:24; Romans 10:12; Revelation 7:9]

## IT IS AGAINST OUR LAW [10:28]

In Acts 10:28, Peter says “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile.” This is interesting because there are no such commands in the Old Testament. Instead, Peter was referring to the oral tradition of the religious leaders, which was ingrained into the hearts and minds of the Jewish culture.

“The word Peter used [*athemitos*] does not mean ‘illegal’ but ‘contrary to custom’ – it was taboo.” [Mark Moore, *Acts*, pg. 196.] So when word got around that Peter had entered the home of Cornelius and ate with him, the Jewish Christian leaders were furious. Peter made a major cultural and religious faux-paux, and now he was receiving blowback because of it.

## DID GOD DISCRIMINATE?

The short answer is no. But at times the Old Testament may make it seem like God had some racist actions. For example, in the book of Deuteronomy God gives the Israelites the 10 commandments. Then he explains more restrictions He has for His holy nation. In Deuteronomy 7:3, God says “Do not intermarry with them,” speaking of the other nations. This seems racist, but the prohibition had nothing to do with race or skin color. It had everything to do with religious purity and pagan idol worship.

God goes on to explain the reason why he does not allow intermarriage with pagans. “For they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods” [Deuteronomy 7:4]. So God’s prohibition seems racist on the surface, but it is instead a protection so that his people do not turn to idol worship [both individually and overall as a nation]. See 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 about being unequally yoked.



# ACTS 11:1-18 [NIV]

## Peter Explains His Actions

*11 The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him <sup>3</sup> and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”*

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

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

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

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

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

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

# WEEK 17 - PETER EXPLAINS HIS ACTIONS [ACTS 11:1-18]

## CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. What are some cultural or social rules you have experienced which were different from how you grew up?
2. What are some household rules you have that other homes may not have?
3. When has your opinion of a person changed for the better once you got to know them?

## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 11:1-3. Why did the Apostles and believers assume it was wrong for Peter to eat with the Gentiles? [See Acts 10:28]
2. When have you been really excited to tell a story but people kept focusing on the wrong details?
3. What are some examples of Jesus breaking the cultural and religious rules of the Jewish leaders?



4. **Read Acts 11:4-17. As Peter defends his actions, what details of his story did he share? Why do you think he includes these details?**
5. **Read Acts 11:18. Why do you think the Christians who had such a big problem were so quickly convinced by Peter's story?**
6. **What are the specific words that describe the reactions of the believers? How does this show their head and heart transformation?**
7. **Where do you see issues of division in our churches, culture, nation, and world? How can the message of Jesus bridge those divides?**
8. **How is the God of the Bible a God of diversity?**

## CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. When have you been guilty of thinking someone was not worthy of your time, energy, or association?
2. How can you build bridges with people from different backgrounds or cultures?
3. What customs or unwritten rules do you need to overcome in order to accept those who are different from you?

## PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

*[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]*

## PRAY FOR THE MISSION OF THE WEEK

### **CMF International: Eric & Cait Pitts - Kenya**

Eric & Cait serve with the Kenya Church Catalyst Team among the Turkana in northern Kenya. Eric's focus is on developing church leaders and pastors as well as working with a group of local disciple makers to begin a Disciple Making Movement that spreads throughout Kenya and beyond. Cait's focus is on community Health Evangelism, mainly with girls and women throughout Turkana. You can find more information at [cmfi.org/ecpitts](http://cmfi.org/ecpitts).

**We are planning a mission trip to visit the Pitts in Kenya for September 2022.** If you are interested in joining us, please come to our informational meeting this coming Sunday, February 6 at 11am in room 209.

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile.”  
Romans 3:22 [NIV]

- ▶ When have you held out on giving to someone because you did not think they deserved it? How do you feel about that now?

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- ▶ How does faith in Christ bring unity to brothers and sisters in Christ? How can you develop these relationships with those who may be different than you?

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DAY 2:

“He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.”  
[Acts 10:28, NIV]

- ▶ Who did your parents say you could not associate with growing up? What was the reason?

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- ▶ Who do you find it difficult to associate with today? How can you break down social barriers to show God’s love to someone today?

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DAY 3:

“A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.”  
[Matthew 8:2-3, NIV]

- ▶ When have you seen a neglected person receive kindness from a stranger? How did they respond?

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- ▶ Who is in need of your outreached hand? How can you show them care and kindness?

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# DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

## DAY 4:

“For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)  
[Mark 7:19, NIV]

▶ What food, drink, places, objects were declared as off-limits for you growing up? Why?

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▶ If Jesus declared all foods clean, why do you think they still operated under the Old Testament rules? What cultural rules would it be tough for you to let go of?

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## DAY 5:

“So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”  
[Acts 11:17, NIV]

▶ When have you gotten in someone else’s way who actually knew more than you did? How did they treat you?

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▶ When have you gotten in the way of God before? How can you seek His will instead of following your own preferences?

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## DAY 6:

“When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”  
[Acts 11:18, NIV]

▶ When have you been so upset about something, but after you heard the explanation you felt bad for being upset?

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▶ The Jewish Christians quickly changed their attitude and praised God. What do you need to praise God for instead of being angry with people around you?

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# UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

## Week 18 - Suffering, Persecution, Support

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 11:19-30

## DIASPORA [11:19]

The word translated as “scattered” in Acts 11:19 is the same Greek word [diaspora] used in Acts 8:1 and 8:4. These are the only three times this word appears in the New Testament, and all three occurrences refer to this same event. In the most known Greek translation of the Old Testament [Septuagint], Jews used this same word [diaspora] to describe the Old Testament scattering of the Jews. It is no accident that Luke uses this word to describe the scattering of the New Testament church to the Gentiles. He is connecting the Old Testament persecution and scattering of the Jews into the Gentile territories with the New Testament Christians...God’s new chosen nation [see 1 Peter 2:9].

## DECENTRALIZED LEADERSHIP [11:27-30]

The final details in chapter 11 show the subtle shift that is happening in the early Christian leadership structure. The Christians in Judea [heart of the Jewish world] have been the head of the Christian church since its conception. Luke describes that they needed financial help from the Christians in Antioch [heart of the Gentile world]. This is perhaps some foreshadowing of what is to come throughout the rest of the book of Acts.

The leadership structure and the focus of the Holy Spirit’s work is going to continue to be spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth [Acts 1:8; 8:1]. Here we see the healthy and successful church in Antioch passing along brotherly support to the Christians in Judea/Jerusalem. This not only shows us a model of generosity, but it shows us that the Holy Spirit is growing other churches throughout the world in numbers and in health.

## HAND OF GOD [11:21, 30]

Sometimes Bible translations help us to better understand Scripture in our own language. Sometimes they miss the mark and we miss nuances the author intended us to see. Acts 11:30 may be one of those instances. Compare the following translations:

- “This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.” [NIV]
- “And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” [ESV]

The NIV is technically correct in this translation, but unfortunately it leaves out the word “hand” which was in the original Greek. It is apparent Luke is intentionally connecting the following verses in this section:

- “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.” [Acts 11:21 ESV]
- “And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” [Acts 11:30 ESV]

Furthermore, look at the very next verse [Acts 12:1] in the ESV translation! King Herod “laid violent hands” on the Christians. Luke continues his intentional literary connection with the word “hand.” Another interesting note is that when Luke says “hand of the Lord” in vs. 21, he is clearly talking about Jesus since he just said “Lord Jesus” in vs. 20. This shows us that Luke was equating the hand of Jesus with the hand of God himself! [The word “hand” is used 46 times in the book of Acts!]

## ACTS 11:19-30 [NIV]

### The Church in Antioch

**11**<sup>19</sup> Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. <sup>20</sup> Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

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

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

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



# WEEK 18 - SUFFERING, PERSECUTION, SUPPORT [ACTS 11:19-30]

## CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. What are some examples of people who have adapted and overcame obstacles?
2. What is the most difficult thing you have had to overcome?
3. What hurdles did you face, and how have they made you stronger?

## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 11:19-21. Why did persecution break out as a result of Stephen's death?  
[Read Acts 8:1-4]
2. How did persecution lead to the spread of the Gospel? What lessons can we learn from this today?
3. Read Acts 11:22-24. Why would the church in Jerusalem send Barnabas to Antioch?

4. Read Acts 11:25-26. How do we see Barnabas making an impact on the early church... again?
5. Read Acts 11:27-30. Why do you think Luke includes these details in his narrative? Why would we care that Antioch Christians are helping Christians in Judea/Jerusalem?
6. Acts 11:21 and 11:24 show numerical growth of the church in Antioch. What kind of growth does 11:27-30 show?
7. Read “Hand of God” on pg. 14. What does Luke want us to know about the hand of the Lord? How does this relate to Barnabas and Saul?

## CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. What can you learn from how the early church responded to persecution and opposition?
2. How can you help our church grow numerically? How can you help our church grow spiritually?
3. How can you be the hand of the Lord to those in need around you this week?

## PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

*[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]*

## PRAY FOR THE MISSION OF THE WEEK

### High Hill Christian Camp

High Hill Christian Camp and Retreat Center's goal is to offer a fun, Christian atmosphere in a modern camp setting surrounded by God's wilderness — all designed so that children will leave with a closer relationship with Jesus. [highhillcamp.org](http://highhillcamp.org)

2022 camp registration is open. You can see the camps we are attending as a church at [wentzvillecc.org/events](http://wentzvillecc.org/events). Earlybird rates are available. Register at [highhillcamp.org](http://highhillcamp.org)

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.”  
[Acts 11:19, NIV]

▶ When have you made the best out of a bad situation? When have you encouraged others to do the same?

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▶ How can you take a poor situation that has recently happened and turn it into an opportunity?

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DAY 2:

“The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”  
[Acts 11:21, NIV]

▶ When have you felt the comforting hand of God come upon you? How did it make you feel?

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▶ How can you help others to believe in Jesus and turn to him when they are going through a tough time?

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DAY 3:

“The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”  
[Acts 11:26b, NIV]

▶ What do you think it means to be a disciple? Christian? Follower? Believer?

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▶ Which of those labels best suit you right now? What label would others give to you based on what they know about you?

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DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea.” [Acts 11:29, NIV]

- ▶ What percentage of your income do you give to the church? To other good causes? To other not-so-good things?

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- ▶ What do you think of the saying “there are no equal gifts, only equal sacrifices”? How much do you sacrifice for the sake of God’s ministries at WCC?

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DAY 5:

“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” [Hebrews 13:16, NIV]

- ▶ When have you intended to do something good, but you forgot? When have you intentionally missed out on an opportunity to share with others?

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- ▶ How can you make sacrifices so you will be able to share with others this week? How can you please God by providing help like the disciples in Antioch did for Judea?

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DAY 6:

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” [John 13:35 NIV]

- ▶ When have you made your employer, church, or family look good because of something good you did for others?

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- ▶ How can you show you are Jesus’ disciple by doing good and providing help for others, just like the disciples in Antioch?

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# UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

## Week 19 - Peter's Escape from Prison

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 12:1-24

## KING HEROD

King Herod was a generic name used by many of the Jewish kings. It is sometimes difficult to keep these wicked rulers straight. King Agrippa I is who we see in Acts 12.

- Herod the Great [ruled 37-4 B.C.]
  - Tried to kill Jesus in the famous Christmas narrative [Matthew 2:1-20].
- Herod Archelaus [ruled 4 B.C.-A.D. 6]
  - Son of Herod the Great and ruled Judea and Samaria after his father died. He also wanted Jesus dead, so Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fled from Egypt to Nazareth [Matthew 2:21-23]. He was replaced by the Roman procurator, which is why Pontius Pilate was in charge in Jerusalem during Jesus' crucifixion.
- Herod Antipas [ruled 4 B.C.-A.D. 39]
  - Son of Herod the Great and ruled in Galilee and Perea. Jesus called him "the Fox" [Luke 13:32]. He divorced his first wife and married Herodias, the wife of his brother, who was yet another Herod. He killed John the Baptist after John spoke out against his sinful marriage [Mark 6:14-29].
- Herod Agrippa I [ruled A.D. 37-44, 41-44 in Judea]
  - THIS is the King Herod from Acts 12. He was the grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herodias, Herod Antipas' wife. He killed James and then arrested Peter since it made him popular with the Jewish populace.
- Herod Agrippa II [ruled A.D. 50s-70s]
  - Last of the Herodian dynasty. He interviewed Paul along with the Roman procurator Festus when Paul was in prison in Caesarea [Acts 25-26].

## GUARDIAN ANGELS [12:15]

Do we have guardian angels? Possibly, but probably not. Since the Bible does not clearly teach this theology, we should be careful not to promote it. We certainly see the presence and power of angels throughout the Old and New Testaments. But there is no clear Scripture that indicates each individual person has their own angel assigned to them.

Acts 12:15 shows a common Jewish belief that each person had their own angel assigned to them. Many believed after a person died their doppelganger angel would wander around for a few days before departing. Luke's reference to this known Jewish belief is not confirmation it was true.

We certainly have angels who stand guard on God's behalf and carry out his missions on earth. But the idea that each person has a specific angel assigned to them is just not found in the Bible. If this were true, there are many times where God could have clearly taught it. Instead, Scripture gives the impression that angels are specifically assigned for specific tasks, not personally assigned to specific people. [Psalm 91:11 - many angels for one person. Dan 3:28 - one angel for 3 people. Heb 1:14 - multiple angels for multiple people. Matt 18:10 - children have angels, but they remain in heaven not earth.]



# ACTS 12:1-24 [NIV]

## Peter's Miraculous Escape From Prison

**12**<sup>1</sup> It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. <sup>3</sup> When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

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

<sup>6</sup> The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. <sup>7</sup> Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

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

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

<sup>12</sup> When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. <sup>13</sup> Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. <sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

<sup>15</sup> "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

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

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

## Herod's Death

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

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

<sup>24</sup> But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

# WEEK 19 - PETER ESCAPES PRISON [ACTS 12:1-24]

## CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. Who is the most surprising person to ever show up at your door?
2. How do you typically greet people who show up unannounced like solicitors?
3. What are some movies which show someone escaping from prison or custody?

## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 12:1-5. What similarities do you see between this story and Jesus?
2. Why would Peter have been given so much security? [See Acts 5:17-19]

3. Read Acts 12:6-11. What stands out to you about the details of Peter's escape?
4. Read Acts 12:12-17. Why do you think Luke includes the confusion and disbelief of everyone in this story?
5. How does vs. 5 correspond with vs. 15? If they were praying for Peter, why do you think they were so shocked to see him? [Also refer to vs. 2]
6. Read Acts 12:18-24. Why do you think Luke includes what happened to Herod?

## CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. Does your prayer life reflect a God who is powerful or a God who is mundane?
2. When have you been surprised by what God can do in someone's life?
3. What are some big miracles you are praying for right now?

## PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

*[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]*

## PRAY FOR THE MISSION OF THE WEEK

### **Team Expansion: Allen & Cherry Messimer – Taiwan**

The Messimers have served as missionaries in Taiwan since 2004. Their mission is to evangelize, disciple, and provide training so every believer can use his or her gifts in a simple church ministry. This also means every church can start new, indigenous churches. Over 90% of Taiwanese people still worship idols. [teamexpansion.org](http://teamexpansion.org)

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”  
[Acts 12:5, NIV]

- ▶ When have you earnestly prayed for God to do something? What happened?

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- ▶ What do you think it looked like for the early church to earnestly pray for Peter? How can you develop a healthier prayer life?

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DAY 2:

“Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.” [Acts 12:11, NIV]

- ▶ When has God helped you with something but you did not realize it at the time? What made you realize it later?

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- ▶ How can you be more aware of when God is leading, helping, or rescuing you? How can you help others realize this?

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DAY 3:

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

- ▶ When have you experienced a powerful time of prayer with other people? What were you praying for, and what made it such a powerful time?

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- ▶ Who can you pray with today? This week? Why do you think we are called to pray individually and corporately as a family of God?

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# DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

## DAY 4:

“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”  
[Acts 12:15, NIV]

- ▶ When have you been so convinced of something but no one else would believe you? How did you convince them?

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- ▶ Why do you think the disciples were so shocked and accused Rhoda of being crazy? How would you respond if you saw an immediate miracle happen after you prayed for one?

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## DAY 5:

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”  
[John 15:7, NIV]

- ▶ When has someone offered to give you something, but it came with stipulations? Did you accept it, and what did you have to do?

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- ▶ Why would Jesus place stipulations on whether or not he would answer our prayers? What does it mean for you to remain in Jesus and his words today?

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## DAY 6:

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.”  
[Matthew 7:7, NLT]

- ▶ What prayers have you been persistent about? What prayers have you forgotten about?

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- ▶ Why would God care about our persistence when we pray? What are some benefits of repeated, persistent prayer?

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# UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

## Week 20- First Missionary Journey



# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 12:25 - 13:52

## PETER → BARNABAS → SAUL

Luke carefully and intentionally crafts together his narrative to show the shared roles of leadership and influence in the early church. It was never just about one single person. The main roles of leadership generally pass from Peter, to Barnabas, to Saul throughout the narrative. But Luke is cautious to highlight one as more important than the other.

Notice that Barnabas was listed first [before Saul] by Luke and the Holy Spirit himself in Acts 13:2. Also notice that the Holy Spirit called Saul by the name Saul, not Paul. [See “Saul to Paul” in workbook # 4.]

## HOLY SPIRIT SPEAKS!

We do not know what this would have sounded like, but the Holy Spirit gave clear, audible instructions to the early church leaders in Acts 13:2. This is one of four times in the Bible where the Holy Spirit is quoted, all of which are in the book of Acts [Acts 8:29; 10:19-20; 13:2; 21:11]

We see many instances in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit acts as sort of a travel guide to the church missionaries. In Acts 13:4 the Holy Spirit gave specific directions to Barnabas and Saul. See also Acts 8:29; 8:39; 9:31; 16:6-8; 20:22-23.

## DIVERSITY [13:1-3]

Mark Moore gives a wonderful breakdown of the 5 diverse church leaders who were praying and fasting in Antioch. Here is a breakdown of their diversity:

- Economic: Manaen was raised in Herod’s household and was a wealthy aristocrat. Barnabas was a wealthy, yet generous, land owner [Acts 4:36-37.] Simeon was perhaps a displaced Jew from Africa who had less economic means.
- Cultural: Barnabas and Saul were Hellenistic Jews [Jews raised within a Greek background and culture]. Manaen was raised alongside the Herodian royal family. Lucius was likely a Roman national and probably a founding member of the church in Antioch.
- Nationality: Africa, Syria, Cyprus, Cilicia, Israel.

[Mark Moore, *Acts*, pg. 228-229]

In Acts 13:9 Luke explains that Saul was also called Paul. Luke uses the name Paul for the rest of the book of Acts. Paul and others use that name in the rest of the New Testament. This transition is likely because Luke wants to further illustrate the diversity of the leaders in the early church.

# ACTS 12:25 - 13:52 [NIV]

## Barnabas and Saul Sent Off

**12** <sup>25</sup> *When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*

**13** <sup>1</sup> *Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

## On Cyprus

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

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

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

## In Pisidian Antioch

Acts 13:13-41 is not included due to space limitations

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

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

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

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

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

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

# WEEK 20 - FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY [ACTS 12:25 - 13:52]

## CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. What countries would you like to travel to and why?
2. When have you been a part of a multicultural experience? What did you like about it?
3. When have you been around a group of people you did not know, but you felt right at home?

## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 12:25-13:3. What were the church leaders doing when they heard the Holy Spirit speak to them? Why would Luke include these details? [See “Holy Spirit Speaks!” pg. 30]
2. Why do you think these 5 men are mentioned? [See “Diversity” pg. 30] What do you know about them, and what message do you think Luke wants to convey?

3. Read Acts 13:4-12. Why do you think Luke chooses this section to shift from Saul to Paul [vs. 9]? What irony do you see in verse 11?
4. Read Acts 13:13-41. What stands out to you about Paul's message to these Jews in the synagogue? What principle can we learn from his remarkable speech?
5. Read Acts 13:42-52. Read vs. 46 again. Why do you think they needed to preach to the Jews first, and then the Gentiles?
6. How does vs. 50 show the strategy and success of the Jewish leaders as they opposed Paul and Barnabas? What methods do opponents of Christianity use in our culture today?

## CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. What purpose or purposes do you think God has called you to?
2. How can you use your knowledge of Jesus and knowledge of our culture to evangelize to people around you?
3. What is the biggest reason you follow Jesus? How can you use that to tell others about him?

## PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

*[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]*

## PRAY FOR MISSIONS OF THE WEEK

### Central Christian College of the Bible

The goal of Central Christian College of the Bible is to raise up servant leaders for the church and to do so as affordably as possible. CCCB believes so completely in what their students will do for Christ that they want to not only equip them with a quality education, but an affordable one so their future ministry will not be burdened by financial stress. That is why CCCB offers a Full-Tuition Scholarship and will continue to do so as long as there are means. [cccb.edu](http://cccb.edu)

### St. Louis Christian College

SLCC seeks to educate Christians and to graduate leaders who are equipped for service to God. They seek learners who are committed to Christ and highly motivated to serve God and the church; students who are capable of completing the academic rigors of a college education; adults who are willing to acquire both knowledge and skills through service and off-campus learning experiences; and men and women who are drawn from a diversity of geographic, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. [stlchristian.edu](http://stlchristian.edu)

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”  
[1 Corinthians 1:18, NIV]

- ▶ When have you been made a fool because you did not understand what someone was saying? How did you recover?

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- ▶ When has the message of the cross seemed foolish to you? How can you better understand it for yourself, and help others understand it better?

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DAY 2:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”  
[Romans 1:16, NIV]

- ▶ When have you kept something for your friends or a certain person instead of sharing it with everyone around you? Why did you do that?

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- ▶ Do you truly believe that salvation is possible for everyone who believes? Who do you struggle to talk with about salvation?

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DAY 3:

“<sup>12</sup>For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup>for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”  
[Romans 10:12-13, NIV]

- ▶ What are some good examples of how unity and diversity can exist together?

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- ▶ What groups of people struggle today because of their differences? How can the gospel of Jesus mend that brokenness? How can you help?

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# DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

## DAY 4:

**“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”**  
[Acts 13:47, NIV]

▶ When have you overlooked an obvious detail? How did you find out that you missed it?

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▶ This passage is from the Old Testament in Isaiah 49:6, but the Jews missed it or misunderstood it. How can you keep from misunderstanding God’s commands?

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## DAY 5:

**“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”**  
[Acts 13:48, NIV]

▶ When have you thought you were going to miss out on something, but you ended up getting it at the last minute? How did you celebrate?

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▶ How can you remember the fact that salvation is a gift and not something you deserve? What does it look like for you to honor the word of the Lord this week?

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## DAY 6:

**“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”**  
[Acts 13:52, NIV]

▶ When have you been filled with happiness? When have you been filled with joy? What is the difference?

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▶ What do you think it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit? How is your life different since you have received this gift?

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