



UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Part 6

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.



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A STUDY OF ACTS

Week 21 - Perseverance in Evangelism

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 14:1-28

WENT AS USUAL [14:1]

Luke includes the brief detail that it was the usual practice of Paul and Barnabas to visit the Jewish synagogue when they entered a new city. Synagogues would have been the hub of Jewish interactions in each city. The further away from Jerusalem they traveled, the more they would have seen Greeks also participating at the synagogue. This was the religious and commercial hub for heritage Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. It was a natural place to spread the gospel message of Jesus and have the largest impact.

When the missionaries would receive a negative response from the Jews, they would take the message to the Gentiles. This is very similar to the Parable of the Wedding Banquet Jesus tells in Matthew 22:1-14. “^aThen he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ^bSo go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find’” [Matthew 22:8-9 NIV]. [See also Romans 1:16; Acts 13:46]

THE GOSPEL IS OFFENSIVE

The Gospel of Jesus Christ should offend people...but that does not give you the right to be offensive [compare Galatians 5:11 and 1 Peter 3:15]. The core of evangelism is the assumption that others are doing something wrong and you are doing something right. That can easily be offensive and turn others away from wanting to hear what you have to say. We should not be afraid to offend others with the truth of Jesus. But we should be very careful to not offend others with our actions. Just because you are right does not give you the right to be a jerk.

Christian artist Trip Lee said, “So the gospel itself is already offensive enough. We don’t need to add offense to it by being jerks about everything. We don’t need to add offense to it by being very condemning and self-righteous. We don’t need to add offense to it by being incapable of actually loving and being in relationships with people. We really want to show people the compassion of Jesus even as we say very hard things.”

PROSPERITY GOSPEL [14:22]

In the face of real, violent, and intense persecution...Paul and Barnabas encourage the disciples to remain true to their faith in Jesus. They said, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” [Acts 14:22 NIV]. Early Christians who were suffering did not have a victim mentality. Instead, they took it in stride and actually used persecution as an opportunity to prove their faith and encourage others!

Many churches and pastors today preach a false gospel of prosperity which leads people to believe that only good things happen to Christians. This is NOT at all what we see in Scripture. In fact, we see the exact opposite. [See Acts 5:41; John 16:33; 1 Peter 4:14-16; 2 Timothy 3:12]

ACTS 14:1-28 [NIV]

In Iconium

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

In Lystra and Derbe

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

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

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

¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

The Return to Antioch in Syria

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

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

WEEK 21 - PERSEVERANCE IN EVANGELISM [ACTS 14:1-28]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. What is something others find offensive but does not bother you?
2. What is something you find offensive but may not bother others?
3. When have you inadvertently offended someone?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 14:1-7. Why do you think Paul and Barnabas went to the Jewish synagogues first? What does this show us about possible approaches to evangelism today? [See “Went As Usual” on pg. 6]
2. How do you feel about Paul and Barnabas fleeing in the face of persecution?
3. Do you think the gospel message of Jesus should divide or unite people? Explain. [See “The Gospel is Offensive” on pg. 6]

4. **Read Acts 14:8-18. What are some dangers that can arise when spiritual leaders allow others to revere them higher than they should?**

5. **What dangers do you face when people praise you for doing good? How can you avoid serving God for the wrong reasons?**

6. **Read Acts 14:19-20. Why did things go so quickly from good, to bad, to worse? What might this teach us about life, ministry, and evangelism?**

7. **Read Acts 14:21-28. How does the attitude of Paul and Barnabas in vs. 22 compare with how many people think of Christianity today? [See “Prosperity Gospel” on pg. 6]**

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. How can you keep from serving or doing good for the wrong reasons?
2. If you are honest, how much suffering could you endure for sharing the truth of Jesus?
3. What is the “synagogue” in your sphere of influence where you should be evangelizing?

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

Haitian Island Ministries: Steve & Terry Smith, WCC members

This organization operates medical programs providing free vitamins, medicine, and medical care and feeding programs which provide a daily meal for thousands of Haitian children each month. They also build schools and churches in some of the most remote areas of Haiti. Their medical program has served hundreds of thousands of Haitians. haitianislandministries.org

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”
[Ephesians 2:1, NIV]

- ▶ Why do you think we need to be reminded that we were once dead because of our sins?

- ▶ What kind of death do you think this is talking about? How can you avoid the different kinds of death that sin leads to?

DAY 2:

“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”
[Ephesians 2:3, NIV]

- ▶ Why do you think Paul would need to tell everyone we were ALL once deserving of wrath and gratifying our sinful nature?

- ▶ How does your life look different now that you are a follower of Christ? How should it look 10 years from now?

DAY 3:

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”
[1 Peter 3:15, NIV]

- ▶ When have you seen someone turn another person away from Christianity because of their cockiness or rude demeanor?

- ▶ How can you show gentleness and respect when you are reaching those who are unsaved?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all non-sense.”
[1 Corinthians 1:23, NLT]

- ▶ Why would the Messiah being crucified be offensive to the Jews? Why would the Gentiles think it is non-sense?

- ▶ How can you explain these to others while not watering down the truths of Jesus found in the Bible?

DAY 5:

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” [Romans 12:3, NIV]

- ▶ When have you gotten this mixed up and thought you were better than someone else because you thought you were a bigger servant?

- ▶ How can you think of yourself with sober judgment and not as highly as you ought...but still keep a healthy self-esteem?

DAY 6:

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”
[Acts 14:22, NIV]

- ▶ How does this verse give you encouragement? How does it make you a little uncomfortable?

- ▶ Are you enduring hardships for the kingdom of God [not generic hardships that are common to everyone]? Why or why not?



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Week 22 - Jerusalem Council

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 15:1-35

DOWN FROM JUDEA [15:1]

Antioch is north of Judea and Jerusalem, so this is an odd statement that is sometimes used to discredit the Bible. However, this expression was common in Jewish culture for two reasons. First, Jerusalem was geographically on higher ground, so quite literally you went up to Jerusalem and down to anywhere else. Second, Jerusalem was the epicenter of Judaism and thus revered as a literal and figurative place higher than anywhere else.

IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT [15:28]

This small statement is buried in the details of this grand narrative, but it gives us a huge understanding of how the early church understood the Holy Spirit. The Greek word used here can be translated as “think, appears, seems.” This statement, along with a long and lengthy discussion on the topic, shows us that the early church leaders were almost convinced, but not 100% sure, what they were doing was right.

It is often very difficult to discern the will of God and understand the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Our understanding and response is not always neat, clean, and clear. That is why we have wisdom, Christian counsel, and especially the Word of God to direct us in anything we do. The early church leaders were correct, but they were also honest to the fact that they may be mistaken. Their hesitation did not lead them to inaction. They did not suffer from paralysis by analysis. They debated, researched, prayed, and then acted according to what they thought was right. [See 1 John 4:1; 1 Thes 5:20-21; 2 Cor 11:13-15; Acts 17:10-11]

WHY THESE REQUIREMENTS? [15:20; 29]

James and the final letter give 4 restrictions for the Gentiles:

- Food polluted by idols
 - Most, if not all, of the food found in Gentile marketplaces would have been sacrificed as a part of pagan idol worship [See 1 Corinthians 8-10].
- Blood
 - Unhealthy and used for pagan rituals and idol worship
- Meat of strangled animals
 - Unhealthy and used for pagan rituals and idol worship
- Sexual immorality
 - Greek word “porneia” which would have included various Old Testament moral restrictions like adultery, fornication, incest, prostitution, etc. [Lev 18:6-30; 1 Cor 5:1, 6:13; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3].

These restrictions were not ways to earn salvation...but ways to avoid the corruption of one's salvation. All four of these are related to pagan temple practices and idol worship. They were culturally acceptable, but were not the kind of conduct Christians should participate in. Gentile Christians might ruin their witness in the community [1 Corinthians 10:31-33]. They also might lead other Christians astray and get caught up in demonic activity [1 Corinthians 10:23-30].

ACTS 15:1-35 [NIV]

The Church in Antioch

¹⁵ Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

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

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

¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’—

¹⁸ things known from long ago.

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

The Council’s Letter to Gentile Believers

²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. ²³ With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

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

Farewell.

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

WEEK 22 - JERUSALEM COUNCIL [ACTS 15:1-35]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. When have you been a part of a healthy debate? What made it healthy?
2. When have you been a part of an unhealthy debate that did not find resolution?
3. What is a long-time opinion you have held in the past in which you have now softened up on?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 15:1-5. Who were the ones causing the problems in this debate? What shocks you about these people?
2. Read Acts 15:6-11. What was Peter's argument? What leadership lesson can we learn from verses 6-7?
3. Read Acts 15:12-21. What were Barnabas, Paul, and James' arguments?

4. Read Acts 15:22-29. Why would the Jews mention these specific restrictions for the Gentiles? Why would they need to specify any restrictions at all? [See “Why These Requirements” on pg. 14]
5. Read Acts 15:30-35. Why would the Gentiles be encouraged to receive this letter even though it still had restrictions in it?
6. In what ways do people make it difficult for others to turn to God today?
7. Read Acts 15:28 again. What does this teach us about how the Holy Spirit works and how we are to discern God’s will? [Read “It Seemed Good To The Holy Spirit” on pg. 14]

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. How can you make it easy for people to turn to God without sacrificing truth?
2. When have you let your traditions, preferences, or opinions get in the way of inclusion and diversity?
3. How can you seek to understand the direction of the Holy Spirit through Christian counsel and studying Scripture?

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

LOVEtheLOU

LOVEtheLOU is a community development initiative that connects resources to the needs of St. Louis. During the constant process of growth and development, they strive to see St. Louis restored through transforming actions. LTL is proud of the progress in St. Louis and are excited about what will continue to happen as they grow and develop. lovethelou.org

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
[Galatians 3:28, NIV]

► Why would Paul need to remind the Galatians of this? Why do we need to be reminded of this today?

► How do you think Paul would reword this statement to 21st century American Christians today?

DAY 2:

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”
[Acts 15:19, NIV]

► What was the hardest part about turning to God and becoming a Christian? What is still difficult today?

► How can you use your experience to help others turn to God instead of turning them away from God?

DAY 3:

“Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.”
[Acts 15:20, NIV]

► If James were to write a letter to us today, what do you think he would tell us to abstain from?

► How have you allowed cultural influences to blind or distract you from the truth of Scripture? How can you keep this from happening?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

““I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive.”
[1 Corinthians 10:23, NIV]

► When have you done something that was not technically a sin, but it was right on the border?

► What “rights” do you think Christians should give up in order to seek purity, unity, and a clear conscience?

DAY 5:

“³¹So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ³²Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.”
[1 Corinthians 10:31-32, NIV]

► How have you abstained from something in order to keep from being a stumbling block to someone else?

► How can you be sure to do everything for the glory of God in your life? What specifically do you need to do or not do this week?

DAY 6:

“Even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.”
[1 Corinthians 10:33, NIV]

► What is ultimately at stake here? Why should we seek the good of others?

► How can being a people-pleaser be a bad thing? How can it be a good thing? What do you need to do to strike a good balance?



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Week 23 - Paul & Barnabas Split

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 15:36-16:15

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

1. **Acts 13:1–14:28 [Barnabas, Saul, John Mark]**
 - a. Estimated: 1200 miles, approximately 2–3 years in duration
 - b. Planted at least 6 churches
2. **Acts 15:36–18:22 [Paul, Silas, Timothy]**
 - a. Estimated: 2600 miles, approximately 3 years in duration
 - b. Planted at least 6 churches
 - c. Barnabas took John Mark on a separate trip to Cyprus
3. **Acts 18:23–21:17. [Paul, Timothy, Luke, others]**
 - a. Estimated: 2700 miles, approximately 4 years in duration
 - b. Planted no new churches but strengthened countless established churches
 - c. [Source: Mark Moore - *Acts Notebook/Next Level/Ozark Christian College*]

WHO WAS JOHN MARK?

The first time we see John Mark is in Acts 12:25 as a ministry companion of Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey. Inexplicably, he leaves them to return to Jerusalem [13:13]. Barnabas wants to bring John Mark on the next missionary journey, but Paul refuses and this causes a division. John Mark goes with Barnabas to Cyprus [15:39]. It is likely Barnabas and John Mark are cousins [Col 4:10].

John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark, even though he was not one of the 12 disciples/apostles and not an eyewitness to many of the accounts he gives. Most scholars, and church history, agree that John Mark recorded his Gospel from the first hand accounts of Peter. Peter mentored John Mark and calls him “son” in 1 Peter 5:13. Some scholars believe John Mark is the unnamed disciple in Mark 14:51-52.

PAUL AND JOHN MARK RECONCILE

Whatever the disagreement between Paul and John Mark was, it was not broken beyond repair. Since John Mark wrote a Gospel and was mentored by Peter, he was obviously well respected with the rest of the church. Eventually, we even see Paul speak very favorably of John Mark.

- Colossians 4:10 [NIV] “My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)”
- 2 Timothy 4:11 [NIV] “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”
- Philemon 24 [NIV] “And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.”

ACTS 15:36-16:15 [NIV]

Disagreement Between Paul and Barnabas

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

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

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

Paul’s Vision of the Man of Macedonia

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

Lydia’s Conversion in Philippi

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

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

WEEK 23 - PETER ESCAPES PRISON [ACTS 15:36-16:15]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. How do you typically handle conflict? Confronter? Avoider?
2. When have you lost a friend because of an intense disagreement? Was it ever resolved?
3. When have you seen conflict lead to a healthy resolution?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 15:36-41. What was the nature of the argument between Paul and Barnabas? [See Acts 13:13]
2. What does this passage teach us about restoring people to ministry despite their past failures? [See “Paul and John Mark Reconcile” on pg. 22]
3. How could this potentially detrimental situation be turned into a positive outcome?

4. **What are some unhealthy ways to deal with conflict? What are some healthy ways? What can happen if conflict is not dealt with in a healthy way?**

5. **Read Matthew 18:15-17. How do these verses give us a template to follow when we have conflict? What steps would you add to this process?**

6. **Why do you think Luke, and other biblical authors, chose to include the conflict and imperfections of these great men of the faith? How do we benefit from hearing these stories?**

7. **Read Acts 16:6-10. What do we learn about the Holy Spirit in this passage?**

8. **FURTHER STUDY: Leviticus 19:17; Matthew 18:21; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1; Matthew 5:23-24**

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. What do you need to change in order to have a healthy approach to conflict with others?
2. Whom have you given up on and need to offer a second chance to? How will you seek restoration with him/her?
3. How can you discern the direction and intention of the Holy Spirit as you seek to reach others?

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

Jireh India Missions

This ministry in India shares the good news of Jesus with those who have never heard His name. They provide homes and education for orphans at House of Peace, teach widows to sew so they can provide for their children, provide bread for much of their community through Five Loaves Bakery, and work with a leper colony. They strive to fulfill Psalm 82:3 — *Defend the poor and orphans; do justice to the afflicted and needy.*

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?”
[James 4:1, NIV]

▶ Who have you quarreled with or had extended fights with? What did they do to continue the fight? What did you do to continue the fight?

▶ What desires are battling within you when you have fights and disagreements with others? What can you do to curb those desires in the heat of the moment?

DAY 2:

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”
[Ephesians 4:25, NIV]

▶ What instructions does Paul give in order for the church to be united as one body?

▶ What is the difference between the two instructions? How can you seek both of these with those in your life?

DAY 3:

“26”In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27and do not give the devil a foothold.”
[Ephesians 4:26-27, NIV]

▶ Why does anger so easily lead to sin? When have you seen this happen in your life?

▶ Why would lingering anger give the devil a foothold? What can you do to avoid this?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.”
[Matthew 18:15, NLT]

- ▶ Why should the conversation happen directly, privately, and with the offense clearly being pointed out?

- ▶ How is this approach different from what so many people do today when they are harmed? Who do you need to do this with?

DAY 5:

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”
[Ephesians 4:29, NIV]

- ▶ What kind of unwholesome talk do you think this is referring to since this passage is about unity and building others up?

- ▶ If someone played back your words [spoken and typed] from the past week, would they say you built others up and benefited those who listened?

DAY 6:

“³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”
[Ephesians 4:31-32, NIV]

- ▶ How do you reconcile these verses with Matthew 18:15? How can you have healthy conflict without being an avoider?

- ▶ How can you have healthy conflict without being a jerk? How can you be kind, compassionate, and forgiving in the midst of conflict?



UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Week 24- Paul & Silas Save the Jailer

PAUL & SILAS SAVE THE JAILER [ACTS 16:16-40]

LUKE JOINS THE STORY!

Acts 16:10 marks the beginning of a very exciting time in Luke's narrative. He very subtly begins to insert the words "we" and "us" into the narrative. He does not make himself the center of attention, but he humbly wants the readers [Theophilus and others] to know he has joined Paul on his missionary journey. It is unclear, but possible, that Luke was imprisoned and freed with Paul and Silas. This is the first of three distinct times Luke does this:

16:10 to 16:18 - Troas to Philippi - 49 AD

20:4 to 21:19 - Philippi to Jerusalem - 54 to 57 AD

27:1 to 28:30 - Caesarea to Rome - 59 to 62 AD

POWER IN DARK ARTS [16:16]

Do not be deceived...there is real power in dark magic. A lot of what we see from horoscopes, fortune tellers, séances, divinations, mediums, etc. are charlatan tricks and scams. They are general enough to seem true, which is enough to trick people into handing over their money. But occasionally there is actual power in the dark arts.

Supernatural power can only come from one of two places...God and Satan. Luke makes it clear that this woman was possessed by an evil spirit, and that she actually had the ability to predict the future. Most people believe Satan and his demons cannot actually predict the future. They likely use their network of communications and influence in the world to predict and then help bring about those predictions.

WHAT WAS WRONG WITH WHAT SHE SAID? [16:17-18]

1. Wrong Content: The original Greek text literally says, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you 'a' way to be saved."
2. Wrong Tone: We can't critique this because we were not there. Perhaps she said it sarcastically in such a way as to make light of the content of the preaching.
3. Wrong Source: Maybe Paul does what he does because he doesn't want any free press for the enemy. Like Jesus, the best thing Paul could do with a demon is to hush it immediately.
4. Wrong Audience: Would a Gentile crowd understand the significance of "Most High God?" They may have written off this terminology as nonsense. Maybe it opened the possibility of too much misunderstanding given their polytheistic background.

[Source: Mark Scott - *Acts Notebook/Next Level/Ozark Christian College*]

ACTS 16:16-40 [NIV]

Paul and Silas in Prison

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

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

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

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

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

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

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

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

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

WEEK 24 - PAUL & SILAS SAVE THE JAILER [ACTS 16:16-40]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. When has a bad day turned into a really good day?
2. When have you seen someone show joy and resolve when going through a difficult time?
3. Have you ever demanded an apology from someone? How did it feel when they gave it?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 16:16-24. What stands out to you in this scene? [See “Power in the Dark Arts” on pg. 30]
2. Why do you think Paul was so upset about what she was saying? Why would he wait so long to cast out her evil spirit? [See “What Was Wrong With What She Said” on pg. 30]
3. Read Acts 16:25-34. How did Paul and Silas respond to the jailer’s question in vs. 30? How does this relate to Acts 2:37-38?

4. What actions show the jailer's faith in Jesus was genuine? Why do you think he performed those specific acts of service?
5. Describe the events of Paul and Silas' day so far. How would you be feeling throughout all of this?
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?
7. FURTHER STUDY: List all of the odd occurrences in this story which must be understood as a miracle, not coincidence:

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. How would you answer someone who asked “what must I do to be saved”?
2. How can you turn bad situations into opportunities for evangelism and witnessing?
3. How can you constantly be looking for people who need to hear about Jesus?

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 MISSION OF THE WEEK

Christian Prison Ministry of Mid-America

Missouri is home to 29 prisons and 2 county jails in 5 states. CPM's goal is to evangelize, encourage, and equip the believers in all of these prisons. To date, over 400 inmates have been baptized!

christianprisonministryofmissouri.org

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.”
[Leviticus 19:31, NIV]

- ▶ What do you think it looks like to be defiled by a spiritist or medium? Why would God be so concerned with this?

- ▶ How can you avoid any contact or association with demonic spiritual activity?

DAY 2:

“A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.”
[Leviticus 20:27, NIV]

- ▶ Why would God take this so seriously? Why would he want his people to actually put these people to death?

- ▶ A spiritist is someone who talks to the dead. What is the allure of people who seek out these practices? How can you guard against these practices?

DAY 3:

“I will praise the LORD at all times. I will constantly speak his praises.”
[Psalm 34:1, NLT]

- ▶ When do you find it most difficult to worship God? Why do you need to praise him the most during these times?

- ▶ How can you constantly speak and sing of the praises of God?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.”
[1 Peter 4:12, NLT]

► Why would Peter warn us to not be afraid when we are suffering from a fiery trial? Why should suffering be normal for Christians?

► When have you passed a fiery trial that came upon you? When have you failed? How can you be prepared for the next test?

DAY 5:

“Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.”
[1 Peter 4:13, NLT]

► Why would Peter want us to be glad when we suffer for Christ? What is promised to those who suffer?

► How can you seek wonderful joy in the midst of pain and suffering? How can you be glad when you suffer?

DAY 6:

“If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you.”
[1 Peter 4:14, NLT]

► When have you been insulted because you were a Christian? Did you feel blessed? Did you feel the Spirit of God rest upon you?

► How can you keep an attitude of blessing when you are insulted or offended? How can you use these times to be a witness to others?
