



The Church Begins

Acts 1-12

The Church Begins

Acts ~ Chapters 1-12

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Acts ~ The Ascension *Lesson Intro – Chapter 1:1-26*

Acts 1 bridges Jesus's earthly ministry and the church's birth, opening with forty days of post-resurrection teaching about God's kingdom before Jesus ascends to heaven with the promise that He will return "in the same way." As believers gathered together in unified prayer, they waited for the promised Holy Spirit who would soon empower them to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. In this chapter, we will find the foundational blocks of the early church as they waited – be on the lookout for their commitment to Scripture and prayer, the importance of community, and seeking God's guidance.

Today as you read the chapter together, make as many observations as possible. Consider what does the text say, what does it mean, and how should you respond? Ask yourself “What does this teach me about God? How does this challenge my view of myself or the world? How should I respond to God in light of this?”

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 1

¹In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

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

⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my

witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

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

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

¹² Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. ¹³ When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

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

¹⁸ (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. ¹⁹ Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

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

“‘May his place be deserted;
let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and,

“‘May another take his place of leadership.’”

²¹ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, ²² beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was

taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

²³ So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” ²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

Questions

Background information

- Who wrote this book, and what's their background?
- Who was the original audience, and what was their situation?
- When and where was it written (historical setting)?
- What is the main purpose or theme of the book?
- What is the literary genre (history, law, wisdom, poetry, narrative, epistle, prophecy & apocalyptic)?
- How does this book fit into the larger biblical story

Group Discussion:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. ~ Acts 1:8

1. Acts 1:8 is a blueprint for the entire Book of Acts and Jesus’ mandate to all believers. Break the verse into significant components and share your thoughts about each. What does this teach me about God? How does this challenge my view of myself or the world? How should I respond to God in light of this?
2. Jesus gives us both a command (Matthew 28:19-20) and a promise (Acts 1:8). Which do you tend to focus on more—the "what" you're supposed to do or the "how" God will empower you? What changes when you hold both together?

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Acts ~ Pentecost *Lesson 1 – Chapter 2:1-47*

Without the Holy Spirit, God is far away... With the Holy Spirit, the Gospel is the power of life.
~ St. Athanasius

Acts 2 opens fifty days after Passover and ten days after the Ascension. Jesus had instructed his disciples to stay in Jerusalem for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, and so they waited, praying and preparing their hearts for the next astonishing event to unfold. As they assembled, wind and fire—two miraculous symbols of God’s presence and power—were experienced by everyone gathered, and nothing was ever the same. This chapter gives us a beautiful picture of how dynamic a church on mission can be—loving one another, sharing faith boldly, and worshipping God in unity and truth. In this week’s lesson, we will unpack this incredible story of the early church and find inspiration in the promise and power of the Holy Spirit for our Christian community today.

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 2

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our

own tongues!”¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

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

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

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

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious
day of the Lord.

²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

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

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

²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue
rejoices;

my body also will rest in hope,
²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay.

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

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

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

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

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

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

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

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with

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

Step Two – Key Verse

Looking back over this week’s reading, pick one verse that stands out to you. Write it down below and explain why you chose it. Commit it to memory as your verse for the week.

Step Three – Questions

1. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit lit a fire that has burned brightly ever since. The significance of this event cannot be overstated. Because of Jesus’ atoning work on the cross, the Spirit of God has arrived (John 16:7-15). He is now able to dwell within the hearts of all believers, guiding, instructing and empowering us in how to continue Jesus’ Kingdom work in the world. Being filled with the Holy Spirit doesn’t have to be scary or weird - it’s what we are made for! What does being “filled with the Holy Spirit” mean to you? Consider what you’ve been taught about this throughout your life (traditions, background, exposure). How has your understanding of the Holy Spirit been challenged and matured and what questions do you still have?

Take some time with the Lord. Seek Him, listen, and write a prayer based on what you've learned or anything else on your heart this week.

Step Five – Personal Enrichment

Use the bordered space to deepen your connection to what you're learning. Think inside or outside of the box and bring in a creative, personal or academic element. Perhaps it's a poem, song or drawing. Possibly it's sharing your findings learned from additional outside study. This exercise is purposefully open-ended. Use your imagination and bring something unique and relevant to this week's lesson.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write or draw their personal enrichment response.

NOTES

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Acts ~ Early Church & Persecution *Lesson 2 – Chapters 3:1-4:31*

Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it. ~ Helen Keller

In Acts 1 and 2, we read about incredible events: the resurrected Jesus ascends to heaven, the early church takes its first steps, and Peter preaches a message of repentance that leads to the salvation of 3,000 people. This week, we will look at how persecution began to impact the early church soon after the Day of Pentecost. In Acts 3–4:3, we will cover nearly two chapters across three different locations in this pivotal historical narrative. We will clearly see that when the Lord moves in power and brings healing, challenges are sure to follow—and, just as He did for the disciples, the Lord provides exactly what we need.

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 3

¹ One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

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

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

¹⁷ "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹ Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.'

²⁴ "Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. ²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' ²⁶ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to

you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

Chapter 4

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

5 The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. **6** Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest’s family. **7** They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

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

“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.”

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

13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. **14** But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. **15** So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then

conferred together. ¹⁶ “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

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

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

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?

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

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were

meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Step Two – Key Verse

Looking back over this week's reading, pick one verse that stands out to you. Write it down below and explain why you chose it. Commit it to memory as your verse for the week.

Step Three – Questions

1. In Acts 3:1-10, a forty-year-old known beggar is healed. Put yourself for a moment in the place of both Peter and the beggar. Peter was just an ordinary guy. The beggar had not walked in forty years. How astonishing for a beggar who was only seeking some pocket change, to be offered a *complete physical healing!* When have you lost heart and lessened what you were willing to hope or ask for? Where might you need to believe for bigger things?

2. In Acts 3:11-25, Peter addresses the crowd by urging them to repent and follow Jesus, the Messiah foretold through God's prophets for generations. In verse 15, what sobering words does Peter say to his listeners? In verse 16, look at Peter's two reasons for healing the beggar. What does this reveal about Jesus? If you have chosen to follow Jesus, what did God use to teach you that He is Lord, Messiah, Savior – a person, book, song, or something else to initially reach toward you? (If you are still investigating the idea that Jesus is Lord, consider sharing your questions with your group.)

5. After their release, the disciples immediately gathered to pray (4:23-31). They were not fearful – they were faithful in prayer and God responded in power. Read Colossians 1:9 and Ephesians 6:18. How do these verses encourage us to pray for one another? Too often, we bear our burdens alone, believing the lie that we will be too much for either Jesus or others to handle. But the disciples show us how to pray boldly with others and glorify God. In verse 31, how did God respond to their corporate prayer? What has been your experience with group prayer and what are some obstacles that keep you from praying with others?

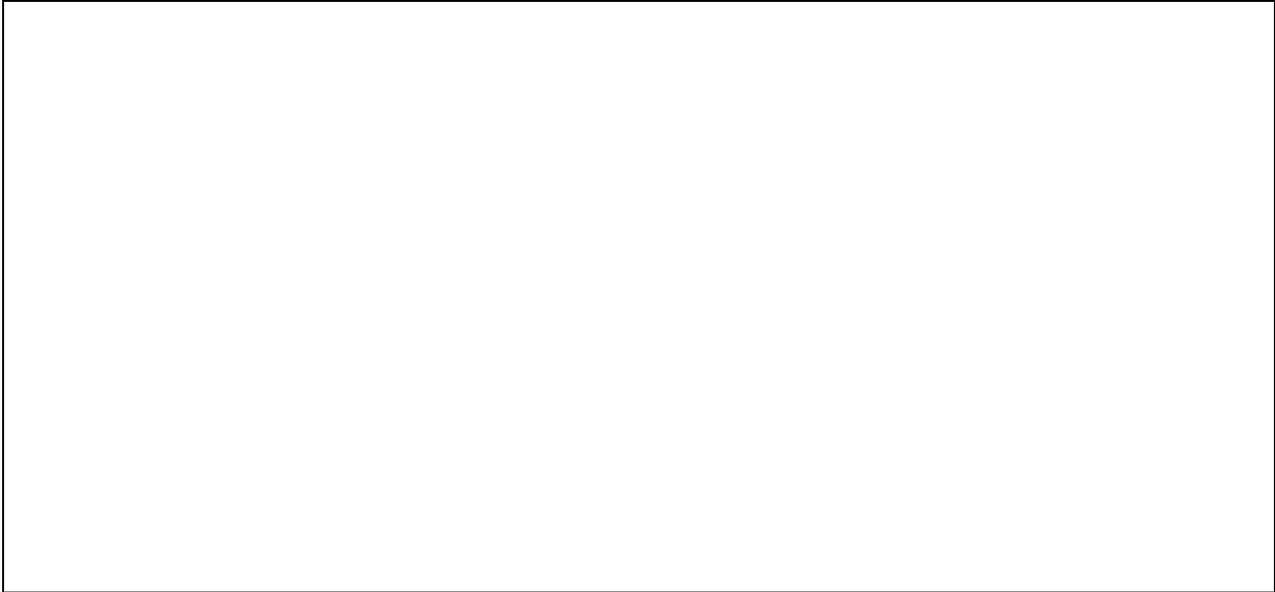
Step Four – Application & Prayer

Take what you've learned from reading and journaling to the next level – apply it to your own life. How might this week's reading impact your thinking and actions?

Take some time with the Lord. Seek Him, listen, and write a prayer based on what you've learned or anything else on your heart this week.

Step Five – Personal Enrichment

Use the bordered space to deepen your connection to what you're learning. Think inside or outside of the box and bring in a creative, personal or academic element. Perhaps it's a poem, song or drawing. Possibly it's sharing your findings learned from additional outside study. This exercise is purposefully open-ended. Use your imagination and bring something unique and relevant to this week's lesson.



NOTES

The Church Begins

Power & Purity ***Lesson 3 ~ Chapter 4:32-5:42***

We give thanks to you, Lord God, the Almighty, the one who is and who always was, for now you have assumed your great power and have begun to reign. ~ Revelation 11:17

Chapters 4 and 5 record the continued miraculous work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. Because of the rapid church growth, the need to care for each other and act in unity significantly increased. Early believers generously shared possessions, funds, and community – and persisted to boldly preach Jesus in all circumstances. Followers of Jesus refused to compromise their faith and operated confidently in His power. This week we will explore what authentic discipleship, the pursuit of holiness, and the empowering presence of the Spirit looks like as we reflect upon our own lives, finding areas of victory and growth.

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 4

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

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

Chapter 5

¹ Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that

Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?

⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

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

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

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

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

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

¹² The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

¹⁷ Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord

opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”

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

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

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

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

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

³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put

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

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

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

Step Two – Key Verse

Looking back over this week’s reading, pick one verse that stands out to you. Write it down below and explain why you chose it. Commit it to memory as your verse for the week.

Step Three – Questions

1. Review verses 4:32-36 and look how verse 33 is strategically embedded, linking unity of hearts, God's grace, and groundbreaking giving to the apostle's powerful testimony of Jesus. As a result, emboldened new Christ followers stepped into radical trust *and* action. By creating a community of refuge, believers' selfless giving went much deeper than good ethics or social justice – it was revolutionary generosity. Consider how the faith of these early believers might challenge you and what your current giving pattern reveals about your own beliefs, fears, and priorities. In terms of time, talent, or treasure, where has some of your most fruitful giving been? Are there sacrificial next steps the Lord is asking you to take – is there anything you're afraid that He might ask you to give?

2. Verses 5:1-11 are quite shocking, but they clearly reveal the importance of protecting the foundational purity of the emerging church. God takes holiness seriously. While Ananias and Sapphira's sin appears to be lying about money, there are deeper issues – disdain of God, recognition and status seeking, lack of trust, and hypocrisy. Reflect how understanding these underlying sins might help explain why God was so severe. Are there areas where you lean towards compromising truth or living inauthentically, even in small ways? Recall when being confronted with your sin or bad choices was helpful and share how you can grow in both accountability and receiving correction humbly.

5. In verses 5:33-40, Gamaliel, who would later be known as Paul's rabbi, was a respected leader known for wisdom and careful judgment. Steeped in Scripture and deep understanding of God's character, he recognized the Lord's sovereignty and faithfulness. Because God proved faithful to fulfill all His purposes in the past, He could be trusted with the future. (See Psalm 33:10-11 & Proverbs 21:30.) Unlike the Sanhedrin, who reacted with fear, haste, and anger, Gamaliel demonstrated patience, wisdom and discernment. He embraced a "wait and see, let God be God" approach. When unsure whether an action or teaching aligns with God, how can believers discern the truth and navigate the tension between passive acceptance and immediate rejection? Where do you personally feel inclined to intervene or "fix" something – *or* someone? How does Gamaliel's approach challenge you and what actions (or non-actions) is God stirring you to take?

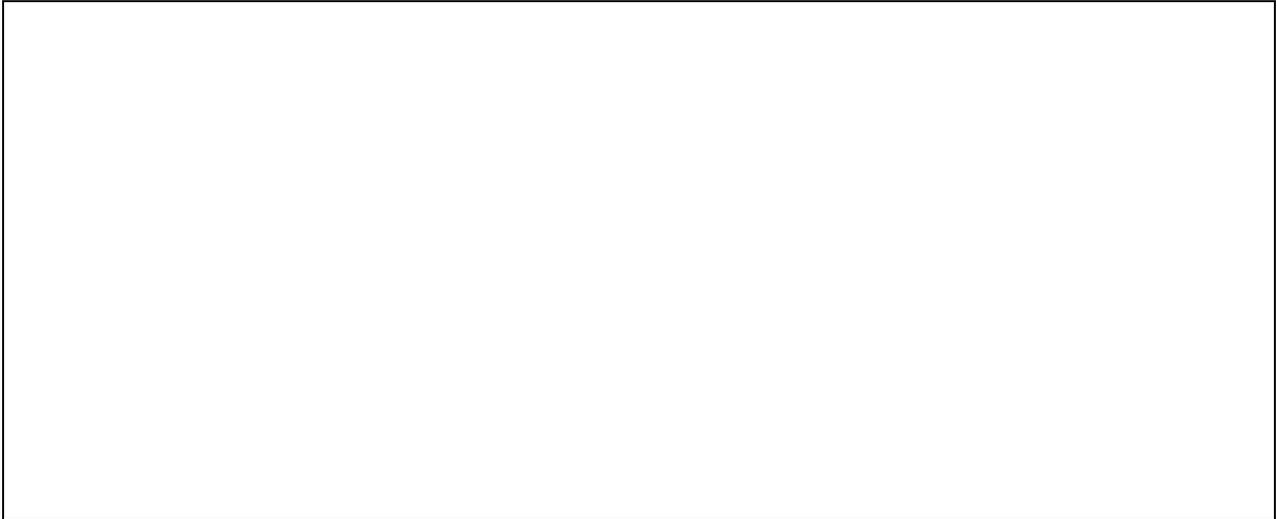
Step Four – Application & Prayer

Take what you've learned from reading and journaling to the next level – apply it to your own life. How might this week's reading impact your thinking and actions?

Take some time with the Lord. Seek Him, listen, and write a prayer based on what you've learned or anything else on your heart this week.

Step Five – Personal Enrichment

Use the bordered space to deepen your connection to what you're learning. Think inside or outside of the box and bring in a creative, personal or academic element. Perhaps it's a poem, song or drawing. Possibly it's sharing your findings learned from additional outside study. This exercise is purposefully open-ended. Use your imagination and bring something unique and relevant to this week's lesson.

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NOTES

The Church Begins

Acts ~ Expansion & Opposition *Lesson 4 – Chapter 6:1-15*

“But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them.” - Gamaliel, Acts 5:39

In the blaze of signs and wonders, fervent preaching, and explosive growth, the early church soon met fierce opposition. Yet trouble also stirred within; as believers multiplied, new needs and old divisions sparked grumbling. Even as the apostles held fast to their calling – prayer and the ministry of the Word – and refused to be pulled away, jealous opponents began secretly stirring up the people and authorities against the believers. This week we will see how the early church’s example and the greater teaching in Scripture can embolden our faith and deeds amid conflict.

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 6

¹In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

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

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

⁸Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Opposition arose,

however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

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

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

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

Step Two – Key Verse

Looking back over this week’s reading, pick one verse that stands out to you. Write it down below and explain why you chose it. Commit it to memory as your verse for the week.

Step Three – Questions

1. The church embraced both Hebrew believers rooted in Jerusalem and Hellenists—Greek-speaking Jews from distant lands—who differed in language, customs, and homeland. Think of a time you stepped into another culture, whether through travel, study, media, or friendship. What were some of the differences and similarities you noticed? List some difficulties that might arise in a multi-cultural community like we see in Acts. When the apostles acted with wisdom and humility, the whole group was pleased (v. 5). Consider what this moment teaches us about resolving conflict with grace and unity. How might you pursue that kind of peace in your own community today?

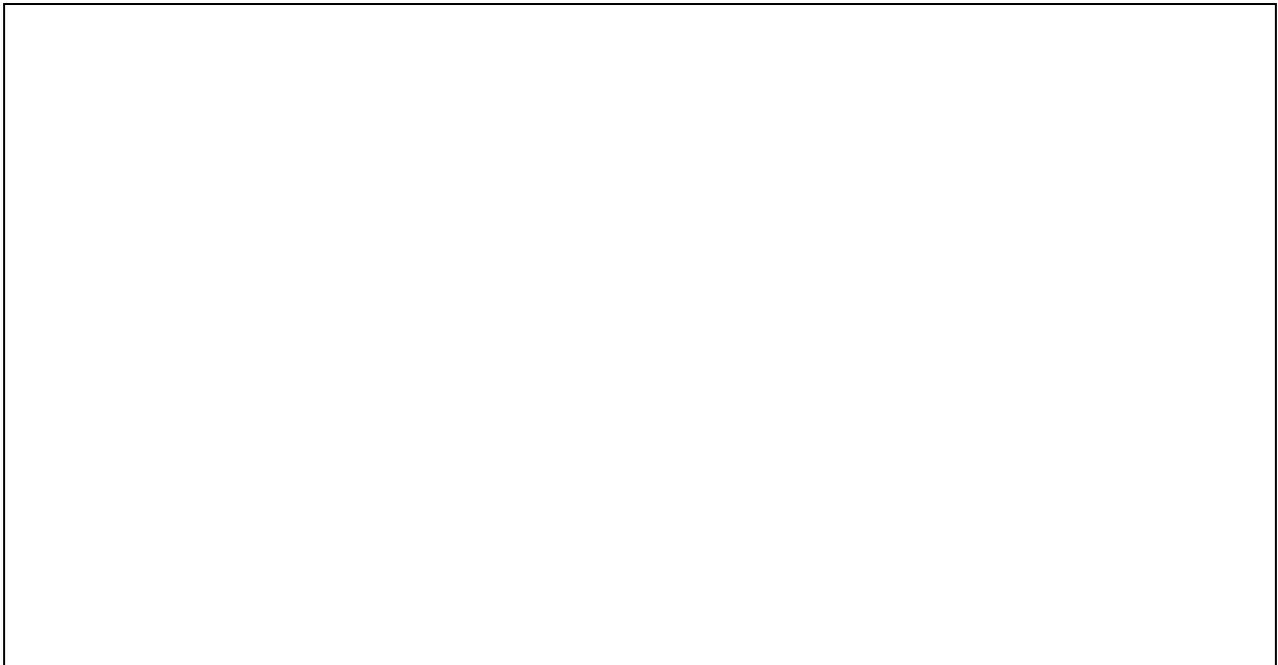
Step Four – Application & Prayer

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Take some time with the Lord. Seek Him, listen, and write a prayer based on what you've learned or anything else on your heart this week.

Step Five – Personal Enrichment

Use the bordered space to deepen your connection to what you're learning. Think inside or outside of the box and bring in a creative, personal or academic element. Perhaps it's a poem, song or drawing. Possibly it's sharing your findings learned from additional outside study. This exercise is purposefully open-ended. Use your imagination and bring something unique and relevant to this week's lesson.

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NOTES

The Church Begins

Acts ~ Stephen's Martyrdom *Lesson 5 – Chapter 7*

"To endure the cross is not tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ." ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The previous chapters in Acts recorded many bold proclamations of Christ by the apostles. Chapter seven narrows in on the man who becomes the first of many Christian martyrs. Despite this distinction, Stephen's sacrifice is not the center of the chapter, nor the message the author is ultimately conveying. Instead, Jesus' glory reigns supreme. At the pinnacle moment of his death, Stephen experiences the fulfillment of God's new covenant with mankind when he looks to heaven and sees Jesus enthroned at the right hand of God. This week we will consider how persecution is a privilege when considering Jesus' infinite glory.

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 7

¹Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²³“When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴ He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵ Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. ²⁶ The next

day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, each other?’

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

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

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

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

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

³⁹“But our ancestors refused to obey him.

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

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

⁴³ You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.

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

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

⁴⁹ “Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me?

says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? ⁵⁰ Has not my hand made all these things?’

⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and

murdered him—⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

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

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

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Step Two – Key Verse

Looking back over this week’s reading, pick one verse that stands out to you. Write it down below and explain why you chose it. Commit it to memory as your verse for the week.

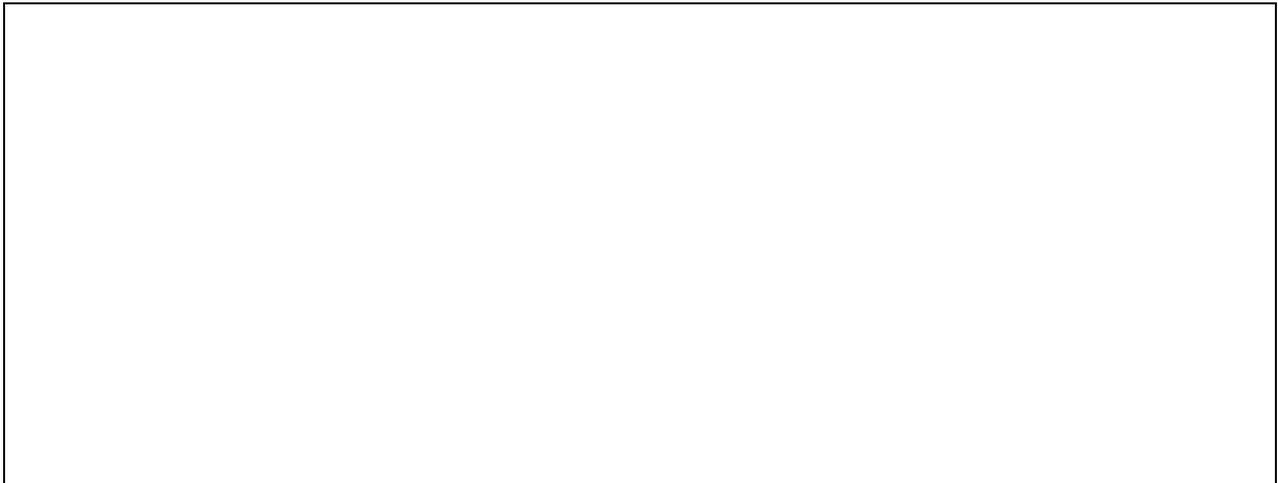
Step Three – Questions

1. The length of Stephen’s speech makes it difficult for the reader to identify his point. Start by looking at the many promises God gave Abraham in verses 5-8. Despite being promised much, Abraham never saw their fulfillment in his lifetime. In this passage, Stephen is reminding his hearers of God’s covenant to the Israelites, encouraging them to be faithful. Are there promises from God’s Word (e.g., Isaiah 41:10 & Hebrews 13:5) or any given to you personally that have yet to be actualized? How does waiting for the fulfillment of these cultivate hope and trust in your life?

Take some time with the Lord. Seek Him, listen, and write a prayer based on what you've learned or anything else on your heart this week.

Step Five – Personal Enrichment

Use the bordered space to deepen your connection to what you're learning. Think inside or outside of the box and bring in a creative, personal or academic element. Perhaps it's a poem, song or drawing. Possibly it's sharing your findings learned from additional outside study. This exercise is purposefully open-ended. Use your imagination and bring something unique and relevant to this week's lesson.

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NOTES

The Church Begins

Acts ~ The Gospel Spreads *Lesson 6 – Chapter 8*

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” ~ Mark 16:15

Immediately following the martyrdom of Stephen in Chapter 7, there arose a fierce persecution led by a young zealot named Saul. Yet what was intended to destroy the early church served as the very catalyst to propel it forward. As believers were scattered beyond the walls of Jerusalem, they didn't flee in silence; they went everywhere, turning a moment of great sorrow into a season of extraordinary joy. This week we will see how the Holy Spirit orchestrates divine appointments during chaos and find that even when we are scattered by life's storms, the promises of God remain steadfast, transforming our trials into a mission field and our obedience into rejoicing.

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 8

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

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

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.”¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his

sorcery. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

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

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

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

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

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

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had

gone to Jerusalem to worship,²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

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

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

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

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

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

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

Step Two – Key Verse

Looking back over this week’s reading, pick one verse that stands out to you. Write it down below and explain why you chose it. Commit it to memory as your verse for the week.

3. In Acts 8:9-24, the story pivots to a man named Simon who had been deceiving people with his false “signs and wonders” for some time. Look at some clues given in the text that tell us he is not aligned with the Holy Spirit in his actions. What do Simon’s behaviors reveal about his understanding of salvation and God’s nature, and how does this contrast with true, saving faith? Simon wanted to buy God’s power and prestige, not follow Jesus as Lord. In verse 22, what two actions does Peter say are the appropriate responses to misaligned thoughts and actions? Have you ever had Simon-like moments, bargaining with Jesus for what He could do for you (comfort, blessings, personal success) versus simply seeking Him for who He is? If the Holy Spirit is bringing anything to mind, be quick to respond like Peter suggests. Our God is quick to forgive.

4. Keeping in mind that the Gospel of Luke and Acts share the same author, note the parallels between the story of Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40 and the account of Jesus on the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35. In both stories, the travelers were looking at the right Scriptures but couldn't interpret their meaning until someone walked alongside them. Who is 'on the road' in your life right now – either a 'perplexed traveler' who needs the Scriptures explained or someone who could help *you* see Jesus more clearly? Read Proverbs 11:14. What next steps can you take in this discipleship journey?

5. In Acts 8:39, the Spirit of the Lord supernaturally removes Phillip from the Ethiopian eunuch and immediately places him in Azotus to continue his ministry. Phillip didn’t get to disciple the eunuch, see the fruit of his labor, or even say goodbye. The Lord simply, and abruptly, redirected Phillip to the next assignment. Because his mission was complete, God had more work for him elsewhere. Have you ever been redirected from a project, job, life assignment, or

ministry just as it was becoming successful? Consider how you responded – did you stay too long, accept that your role there was done, or want to control the outcome? It’s a journey moving from our head to our heart – but God’s timing is perfect, and His plans are trustworthy, even when they are unknown or challenging (Isaiah 55:8-9, Proverbs 19:21). Spend a moment reflecting: Does He have your full heart, are you willing to obey, and what might keep you from being willing?

Step Four – Application & Prayer

Take what you’ve learned from reading and journaling to the next level – apply it to your own life. How might this week’s reading impact your thinking and actions?

Take some time with the Lord. Seek Him, listen, and write a prayer based on what you’ve learned or anything else on your heart this week.

Step Five – Personal Enrichment

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The Church Begins

Acts ~ Conversion of Saul *Lesson 7 – Chapter 9:1-31*

*Consider this... The Apostle Paul entered heaven to the cheers of those he martyred.
That's how the gospel works. ~ Unknown*

From the very start of His ministry, Jesus and His followers faced opposition. Even His brutal crucifixion could not extinguish the movement—rather, the Holy Spirit ignited an explosive spread of the gospel. Saul, who witnessed Stephen's steadfast faith as the church's first martyr, emerged as its fiercest persecutor, storming house to house to imprison believers and crush the Way. This week we encounter an extraordinary moment: Jesus Himself intervenes, dramatically redirecting Saul's life, the trajectory of the church, and ultimately the course of history. As we reflect on this turning point, we will consider our own life-altering encounters with Christ and our place in God's unfolding story of salvation.

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 9

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

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

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

¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named

Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

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

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

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

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

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

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

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join

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

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

Step Two – Key Verse

Looking back over this week's reading, pick one verse that stands out to you. Write it down below and explain why you chose it. Commit it to memory as your verse for the week.

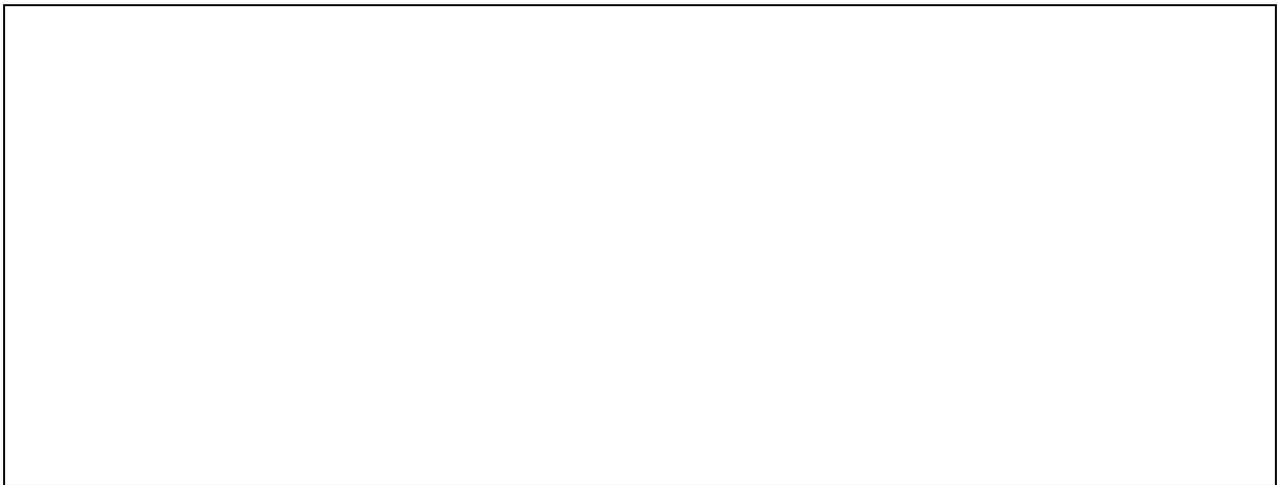
Step Three – Questions

1. Saul burned with zeal in persecuting the church. Read Acts 26:9-11 where Saul confesses his fierce conviction in opposing Jesus. He was convinced, forceful, obsessed. Yet in Acts 9, Jesus Himself intervenes. He appears, speaks, and transforms everything. Look back at all Jesus does and declares, then mark His actions and commands in verses 6, 11, 12, 15, 17. Jesus is the true Author and Hero of Saul's story. If you are a follower of Jesus, reflect on how encountering Him has reshaped the very trajectory of your life. How has your purpose in life changed as you've gotten to know Him? Today, ask Him: Where might I be clinging to my old way of living and instead need to surrender?

Take some time with the Lord. Seek Him, listen, and write a prayer based on what you've learned or anything else on your heart this week.

Step Five – Personal Enrichment

Use the bordered space to deepen your connection to what you're learning. Think inside or outside of the box and bring in a creative, personal or academic element. Perhaps it's a poem, song or drawing. Possibly it's sharing your findings learned from additional outside study. This exercise is purposefully open-ended. Use your imagination and bring something unique and relevant to this week's lesson.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write or draw their personal enrichment response.

NOTES

The Church Begins

Acts ~ Peter's Ministry *Lesson 8 – Chapter 9:32-Chapter 11*

This very moment I may, if I desire, become the friend of God. ~ Augustine

Following Paul's radical change, Luke highlights another dramatic transformation in the Apostle Peter. In these chapters, Peter travels outside the gates of Jerusalem to greater regions, performing miracles and sharing the Gospel – and the church grows. Obedient to the Spirit's promptings, he undergoes a profound shift of deeply rooted traditions, beliefs, and perceptions. Peter crosses centuries of cultural boundaries that change the trajectory of Christianity forever. Outsiders become insiders and the church grows beyond the walls of social, ethnic, and geographical borders, spreading beyond the Jewish community. The Gospel becomes available to *all people*. This week we will examine a pivotal turning point that launched an unstoppable movement. As we see how the Holy Spirit empowered believers to overcome barriers to know and love Him, we'll also find that He's inviting us to do the same today.

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 9

³² As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

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

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

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Chapter 10

¹ At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³ One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!”

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

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

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

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

¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have

never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

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

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

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

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

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

²² The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” ²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

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

²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

³⁰ Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining

clothes stood before me³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

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

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

Then Peter said,⁴⁷ “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They

have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Chapter 11

¹The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

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

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

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

¹¹“Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹²The 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. ¹³He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

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

¹⁸ When they heard this, they had no further

objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

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

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

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

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

Step Two – Key Verse

Looking back over this week’s reading, pick one verse that stands out to you. Write it down below and explain why you chose it. Commit it to memory as your verse for the week.

Step Three – Questions

1. Compare how the miracles with Peter in 9:32-43 unmistakably echo Jesus' miracles in Mark 2:1-2 & 5:35-43. Because Peter spent intimate time with Jesus and saw Him do miraculous works firsthand, he was able to confidently continue doing what Jesus did, empowered by the Spirit – drawing many people to the Savior (Acts 4:13). Proximity to Jesus changes us – time with Him makes us more like Him. Share how Jesus has done something powerful in your life (or someone else's you've witnessed), whether restoration, healing, or resurrection-like new life, that you have personally received or watched. What impact did it have on those around you? How do you intentionally abide in Jesus and what specific areas in your life do you want to look and act more like Him?

2. In Acts 9:36-43, God uses Peter to raise a woman from the dead, attesting to Jesus' power over death and validating the apostles' ministry. The passage also highlights how God sees the quiet, understated, and faithful. Tabitha was a compassionate woman whose ordinary service touched lives deeply. Sewing garments for widows and the poor became her "ministry platform" where she reflected Christ's love in practical, everyday ways. This mattered to God, and He honored her enough to raise her from death, turning her story into a testimony that led many to believe in Him. As we see throughout the Bible, God sees the hidden and faithful, and uses them for eternal impact. Share when you have felt unseen. What talents and giftings are you using – are they used in places seen or unseen? How can knowing that God notices and *treasures* these acts (even when no one else does) free you from seeking validation or applause and empower you to keep serving with joy?

3. In 10:9-16 Peter has a vision that is both shocking and offensive. Three times God emphasized His point, challenging Peter's lifelong beliefs and traditions. God was breaking down religious behaviors and cultural barriers, setting the stage for a pivotal, historic moment in the life of the new church – God is again revealing His heart for *all* people (Psalm 67:1-2). Look at Peter's transformation in verses 28, 34-35. Consider where might you hold any biases towards a particular individual or group (age, ethnic, socio-economic, gender, etc.)? Are you willing to let God challenge your assumptions and comfort zones to reach someone outside your normal circle? Be bold and ask God how He can use you to build bridges and demonstrate His love to someone who needs Him. It's a prayer He loves to answer.

4. In Acts 11:20-25 Barnabas recognized that the growing work in Antioch required the specific gifts of Saul. Spending 7-10 “silent years” on the sidelines in Tarsus after being rejected in Jerusalem, the Jewish-trained Saul underwent serious refinement. Now alongside Barnabas, Saul would be engaged in the first multiethnic, vibrant, growing church – with more humility and skills to reach the Greeks. How has God used seemingly silent seasons for preparation in your life? Barnabas sought out Saul, even though it meant bringing in someone who would eventually surpass him in stature. It can be easy to feel envious of the gifts, talents and achievements of others. Modeling Barnabas' humble leadership, do you find it easy to celebrate others or is it sometimes a struggle? Who is someone you could encourage and help elevate today?

5. Because believers in the early Antioch church stood apart so distinctly from their surrounding culture, they were mockingly called Christians by unbelieving Greeks (11:26). The term Christian (Christianos) means *belonging to (as in slave ownership) or follower of the Anointed One*. In verses 11:20-30 look for notable traits and actions of this multiethnic church body. Compare today's modern Christians to the example we see in Antioch, and consider where the local church excels and where it could represent Jesus more completely. In your circles, how might unbelieving coworkers, neighbors, friends or family see you living 'set apart' – would they see you as religious, a nice person, or someone reflecting the heart and character of Jesus? On a sliding scale from 'fear of mockery' to 'courage to stand out for Jesus,' discuss where you land and what next steps you can take to move up the scale to help make Jesus known.

Step Four – Application & Prayer

Take what you've learned from reading and journaling to the next level – apply it to your own life. How might this week's reading impact your thinking and actions?

Take some time with the Lord. Seek Him, listen, and write a prayer based on what you've learned or anything else on your heart this week.

Step Five – Personal Enrichment

Use the bordered space to deepen your connection to what you're learning. Think inside or outside of the box and bring in a creative, personal or academic element. Perhaps it's a poem, song or drawing. Possibly it's sharing your findings learned from additional outside study. This exercise is purposefully open-ended. Use your imagination and bring something unique and relevant to this week's lesson.

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NOTES

The Church Begins

Acts ~ Persecution & Deliverance *Lesson 9 – Chapter 12*

The strongest principle of growth lies in human choice. ~ Mary Ann Evans

After encountering the Holy Spirit at work in both Jews and Gentiles and learning God’s true heart for all peoples in all nations, Peter in Chapter 12 now finds himself back in prison. King Agrippa I is facing growing political and religious unrest as thousands of Jews gather from all ends of the Roman Empire for the Festival of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem, and tensions are high. Yet miracles continue – and so does the church. This week we will reflect on God’s faithfulness amidst ongoing persecution and learn how to pray, trust, and witness for His glory.

Step One – Observation

Read through the entire chapter. Using a pen and highlighter, engage with the text. Underline key words and highlight key phrases. Look for repeated words or patterns. Journal your questions, observations and insights in the space on the right.

Chapter 12

¹It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ²He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. ³When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. ⁴After 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. ⁵So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

⁶The 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. ⁷Suddenly 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.

⁸Then 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. ⁹Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he

was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

²¹ On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²² They shouted,

“This is the voice of a god, not of a man.”

²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

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

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

Step Two – Key Verse

Looking back over this week’s reading, pick one verse that stands out to you. Write it down below and explain why you chose it. Commit it to memory as your verse for the week.

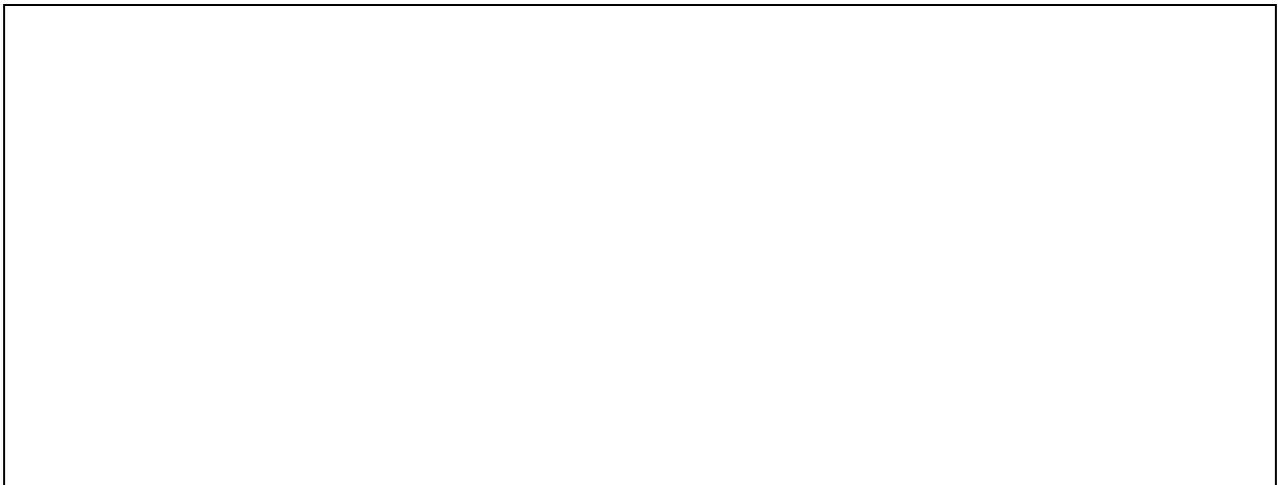
Step Three – Questions

1. In verse 5 we find the early church “*earnestly* praying to God” in response to Peter’s imprisonment and pending execution. Persistent, fervent prayer is a consistent through-line in the book of Acts, and here we see the collective church praying throughout the night, desperately, without ceasing – and the results were miraculous. The same Greek word is used to describe Elijah in James 5:17 and Jesus at Gethsemane in Luke 22:44, implying concentrated, intense effort, similar to a muscle being stretched to its limit. Reflect on your perspective of prayer – does it tend to be your first line of defense or your last resort? Where have you seen God move through fervent prayer? Consider an ‘impossible’ situation in your (or someone else’s) life and share how God might be calling you to be stretched in your prayer life, partnering with Him to see Him work in mighty ways.

Take some time with the Lord. Seek Him, listen, and write a prayer based on what you've learned or anything else on your heart this week.

Step Five – Personal Enrichment

Use the bordered space to deepen your connection to what you're learning. Think inside or outside of the box and bring in a creative, personal or academic element. Perhaps it's a poem, song or drawing. Possibly it's sharing your findings learned from additional outside study. This exercise is purposefully open-ended. Use your imagination and bring something unique and relevant to this week's lesson.

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NOTES