

ACTS

The Acts of the Apostles is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke and accordingly develops a correspondence of themes that originated within the third Gospel. The rationale establishing these correspondences is that the same Jesus who acted in fulfillment of Scripture to save people through His death and resurrection in Luke had ascended into heaven, where He is continuing to act as Lord to save people in increasing numbers through His apostles in the Book of Acts.

In Acts the apostles' mission as predicted by Jesus while on earth unfolded: they took up their crosses to do Jesus' work through prayer, teaching the Scriptures, performing miracles, expelling demons, challenging false teaching, acting as agents of reconciliation, spreading the gospel to the nations, trusting in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, and persevering through severe human and demonic opposition. Exemplifying all-in discipleship, Stephen and James suffered execution while Peter and Paul faced arrest and unjust imprisonment. Luke intended that Theophilus would appreciate each account as a prime example of what following Christ looked like.

Luke was the exacting historiographer recounting actual events for his recipient, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1), so that the latter may believe on the basis of trustworthy evidence (Luke 1:4).

Luke's history contains more than eyewitness-based reporting, however. Acts is theologically oriented and has evangelical purpose. Scholars therefore frequently adopt the phrase *salvation history* to classify the congruity between Luke and Acts and the history of salvation recorded in the Old Testament. As God had acted to accomplish His plan in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, so too had Jesus acted in Luke, and so too did the apostles act in Acts—the divine offer of salvation to the Gentiles being central in this respect (15:15–21).

As one detects Old Testament backgrounds in Luke's birth narrative, Jesus' temptation, and many of Jesus' parables, one also encounters reflection of the Old Testament in Peter's explanation of Pentecost (ch. 2), Stephen's speech (ch. 7), and Paul's sermon in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (ch. 13). The author presented his two volumes as continuations of biblical revelation fully intended within the providential plan of God.

Scholarship further associates Acts with the Book of Luke on the basis of shared vocabulary, literary style, and theological subject matter. The phenomenon of *we* sections, where the author of Acts moves from the third person (*he, she, they*) to the first-person plural (*we*), suggests the author was present for the events recorded in Acts 16:10–18, 20:4–21:19, and 27:1–28:30. The accumulated impression is thus that the author of Acts was a companion of Paul who, through careful investigation of eyewitness testimonies, had learned both the history of Jesus' earthly ministry and the events of Christianity's spread throughout the

Roman world, up to Paul's trial in Rome where Acts concludes. Since Luke survived as the most likely of Paul's companions present in each of the *we* sections, most contemporary scholars agree with ancient Christian tradition by attributing both the third Gospel and Acts to Luke the physician identified in Colossians 4:14.

HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

Acts moves from one strategic location to the next as it recounts the gospel's spread from Jerusalem to Rome. Along the way Luke incorporated specific historical figures for establishing the time and political context: Augustus, Quirinius, Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas, and Caiaphas in Luke; Ananias, Gallio, Felix, Festus, and Tertullus in Acts. Luke's aim was to commend real history, not myth.

The apostles' historical task was complex, as each stage of expansion brought unprecedented difficulties due to the internal diversities of each culture. One challenge was managing the demands of numerous new believers from both the Hebraic and Greek-speaking Jews (ch. 6). Another challenge was evangelism of Diaspora Jews—how to argue to educated Jews in synagogues outside Judea that Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead was the fulfillment of the messianic hope of the Old Testament (e.g., Pss 16; 22; 110; Isa 7; 9; 11; 53; 61; Zech 9:9).

Yet another challenge was evangelizing Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire who,

as intelligent as they were, were not familiar with the Old Testament and therefore required a different entry point for understanding the gospel. Compounding these challenges was the sophisticated blend of local, Hellenistic, Roman, and Diaspora Jewish cultures that mixed differently in the different cities where the apostles ministered. Each city had a different history, a different economic infrastructure, a different relationship with Rome, and a different set of patron deities (e.g., Artemis in Ephesus compared to Poseidon, Aphrodite, and Apollo in Corinth). The apostles were astute observers of these complexities, and Luke's account of their missions reveals how they ministered in ways that were culturally relevant yet theologically efficient.

In place after place, the apostles remained true to their primary teaching objectives: the authority of Scripture, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, Christ-centered salvation, and the call for repentance and faith (e.g., 3:19; 8:22, 35; 10:43; 13:38–39; 16:31; 17:30–31).

PREPARE

Acts is a journey narrative that calls for readers' participation. Episode after episode heightens the reader's understanding that faith in Christ matures through active searching of the Scriptures and through stepping out in obedience to the risen Lord's call to complete His commission. So it is that Acts 1:8 is the itinerary or blueprint for the entire volume: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth." As you read, notice how Acts displays the accomplishment of these events through the apostles' obedient faith. By the journey's end the gospel has made its way

from Judea through Samaria, Syria, Cyprus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, and ultimately Rome.

Today Acts continues to provide guidelines for workers who participate in Jesus Christ's mission. Relevant still are its messages that Jesus is the risen, exalted Lord; God gives His Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (5:32); Christian ministry is authenticated by its coherence with past canonical revelation; the Christian call is to proclaim the gospel to the farthest parts of the earth; and true Christian ministry faces the challenges of penetrating complex cultures, which often respond with intense opposition. Let the apostles' joy and determination guide your own evangelical efforts.



JOURNAL

Acts 1:4–8

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- What promise did Jesus ask His apostles to wait for? What promises are you waiting on from God?
- How would the Holy Spirit reveal His power in the lives of the apostles?
- If you belong to Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells in you (see Rom 8:9; 2 Tim 1:14; 1 John 3:24). How is the Holy Spirit helping you to faithfully follow Jesus (see Gal 5:22–26)?



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 1:21–26

READ. Read through the passage twice and notice what stands out to you. Perhaps you chose the word “resurrection” (v. 22), the phrase “know the hearts” (v. 24), or something else that is important to you.

MEDITATE. Quietly meditate on this word or phrase and ask the Holy Spirit to bring divine insight into its application in the gospel narrative. Why is it important for you to understand this snippet of Scripture?

PRAY. Use any insights as a starting point for prayer. Thank God for revealing His Word to you, and ask that He would help transform your life according to His purposes.

CONTEMPLATE. Rest in God's presence. Be encouraged that just as He has chosen disciples before you and guided them, He will do the same for you.

JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN

1 I wrote the former account, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven, after he had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³To the same apostles also, after his suffering, he presented himself alive with many convincing proofs. He was seen by them over a forty-day period and spoke about matters concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴While he was with them, he declared, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait there for what my Father promised, which you heard about from me. ⁵For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶So when they had gathered together, they began to ask him, “Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He told them, “You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.” ⁹After he had said this, while they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰As they were still staring into the sky while he was going, suddenly two men in white clothing stood near them ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven.”

A REPLACEMENT FOR JUDAS IS CHOSEN

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called the Mount of Olives (which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away). ¹³When they had entered Jerusalem, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. Peter and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James were there. ¹⁴All these continued together in prayer with one mind, together with the women, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. ¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a gathering of about 120 people) and said, ¹⁶“Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit foretold through David concerning Judas—who became the guide for those who arrested Jesus—¹⁷for he was counted as one of us and received a share in this ministry.” ¹⁸(Now this man Judas acquired a field with the reward of his unjust deed, and falling headfirst he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. ¹⁹This became known to all who lived in Jerusalem, so that in their own language they called that field *Hakeldama*, that is, “Field of Blood.”) ²⁰“For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘*Let his house become deserted, and let there be no one to live in it,*’ and ‘*Let another take his position of responsibility.*’ ²¹Thus one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time the Lord Jesus associated with us, ²²beginning from his baptism by John until the day he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness of his resurrection together with us.” ²³So they proposed two

candidates: Joseph called Barsabbas (also called Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed, “Lord, you know the hearts of all. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to assume the task of this service and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶Then they cast lots for them, and the one chosen was Matthias; so he was counted with the eleven apostles.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE DAY OF PENTECOST

2 Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like a violent wind blowing came from heaven and filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And tongues spreading out like a fire appeared to them and came to rest on each one of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem. ⁶When this sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷Completely baffled, they said, “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸And how is it that each one of us hears them in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own languages about the great deeds God has done!” ¹²All were astounded and greatly confused, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others jeered at the speakers, saying, “They are drunk on new wine!”

PETER’S ADDRESS ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST

¹⁴But Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice, and addressed them: “You men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, know this and listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵In spite of what you think, these men are not drunk, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶But this is what was spoken about through the prophet Joel:

- ¹⁷ *‘And in the last days it will be,’ God says,
‘that I will pour out my Spirit on all people,
and your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
and your young men will see visions,
and 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 *And I will perform wonders in the sky above
and miraculous signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and clouds of smoke.*
- ²⁰ *The sun will be changed to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes.*
- ²¹ *And then everyone who calls on the name
of the Lord will be saved.’*



PICTURE IT

Acts 2:14–39

PREPARE. Quiet yourself and ask God to prepare your heart and guide your imagination.

PICTURE. Imagine you’re in the crowd when Peter starts talking. He is speaking your language and recounting the words of prophets from centuries ago. Surrounding you is a busy city full of people from all over the world. Imagine the smells of a festival season and the buzz of the crowd as they hear the gospel. What is it like to follow the crowd and witness thousands of people repenting of their sins, being baptized, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit?

PRAY. Thank God for the community He has given Christians within the church. Ask Him to fill you with the passion and excitement that the early church had.

²²“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds, wonders, and miraculous signs that God performed among you through him, just as you yourselves know—²³this man, who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles. ²⁴But God raised him up, having released him from the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held in its power. ²⁵For David says about him,

*‘I saw the Lord always in front of me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken.*

²⁶ *Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced;
my body also will live in hope,*

²⁷ *because you will not leave my soul in Hades,
nor permit your Holy One to experience decay.*

²⁸ *You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of joy with your presence.’*

²⁹“Brothers, I can speak confidently to you about our forefather David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰So then, because he was a prophet and knew that God *had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne*, ³¹David by foreseeing this spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that *he was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did his body experience decay*. ³²This Jesus God raised up, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³So then, exalted to the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he has poured out what you both see and hear. ³⁴For David did not ascend into heaven, but he himself says,

*‘The Lord said to my lord,
“Sit at my right hand*

³⁵ *until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”*

³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.”



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 2:42–47

READ. Read this short passage twice. Pick out a word or phrase that stands out. Consider “devoting themselves” (v. 42), “reverential awe came over everyone” (v. 43), or “everything in common” (v. 44).

MEDITATE. Think about this passage. How can you choose devotion, show reverential awe of God’s great name, or share for the common good?

PRAY. Thank God for revealing Himself through His Word. Ask Him to grant you the wisdom to act on your understanding of these verses.

CONTEMPLATE. Spend a moment resting in God’s presence. Take comfort in the fact that He is always available to you.

THE RESPONSE TO PETER’S ADDRESS

³⁷Now when they heard this, they were acutely distressed and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “What should we do, brothers?” ³⁸Peter said to them, “Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.” ⁴⁰With many other words he testified and exhorted them saying, “Save yourselves from this perverse generation!” ⁴¹So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE EARLY BELIEVERS

⁴²They were devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed

were together and held everything in common,⁴⁵ and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need.⁴⁶ Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved.

PETER AND JOHN HEAL A LAME MAN AT THE TEMPLE

3 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time for prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon.² And a man lame from birth was being carried up, who was placed at the temple gate called "the Beautiful Gate" every day so he could beg for money from those going into the temple courts.³ When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple courts, he asked them for money.⁴ Peter looked directly at him (as did John) and said, "Look at us!"⁵ So the lame man paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them.⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, stand up and walk!"⁷ Then Peter took hold of him by the right hand and raised him up, and at once the man's feet and ankles were made strong.⁸ He jumped up, stood and began walking around, and he entered the temple courts with them, walking and leaping and praising God.⁹ All the people saw him walking and praising God,¹⁰ and they recognized him as the man who used to sit and ask for donations at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with astonishment and amazement at what had happened to him.

PETER ADDRESSES THE CROWD

¹¹ While the man was hanging on to Peter and John, all the people, completely astounded, ran together to them in the covered walkway called Solomon's Portico.¹² When Peter saw this, he declared to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us as if we had made this man walk by our own power or piety?"¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our forefathers, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate after he had decided to release him.¹⁴ But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a man who was a murderer be released to you.¹⁵ You killed the Originator of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this fact we are witnesses!¹⁶ And on the basis of faith in Jesus' name, his very name has made this man—whom you see and know—strong. The faith that is through Jesus has given him this complete health in the presence of you all.¹⁷ And now, brothers, I know you acted in ignorance, as your rulers did too.¹⁸ But the things God foretold long ago through all the prophets—that his Christ would suffer—he has fulfilled in this way.¹⁹ Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out,²⁰ so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and so that he may send the Messiah appointed for you—that is, Jesus.²¹ This one



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 3:1–10

READ. Read this passage and put yourself in the place of Peter, John, the man born lame, or the onlookers. What do you learn about the event from this point of view? Which word or phrase stands out to you in the verses?

MEDITATE. Concentrate on why this word or phrase stood out to you. Is this something you needed to hear? Meditate on the word by repeating it. Invite God to help you make a connection with it to your life.

PRAY. Once you have found a connection, turn your thoughts into a prayer. Thank God for His revelations and that His Word is living and powerful. Ask Him for guidance in implementing what you've learned from His Word.

CONTEMPLATE. Finish by resting in God.



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Acts 3:12–16

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- How is Peter different in this passage compared to the way he was in Luke 22:54–62? What allowed him to speak so boldly about faith in Jesus?
- Who are you more like—Peter speaking about Jesus' goodness or the audience feeling shock after seeing a miracle?
- What does verse 16 teach about Jesus and His power even after death? How do you see this power in your own life?

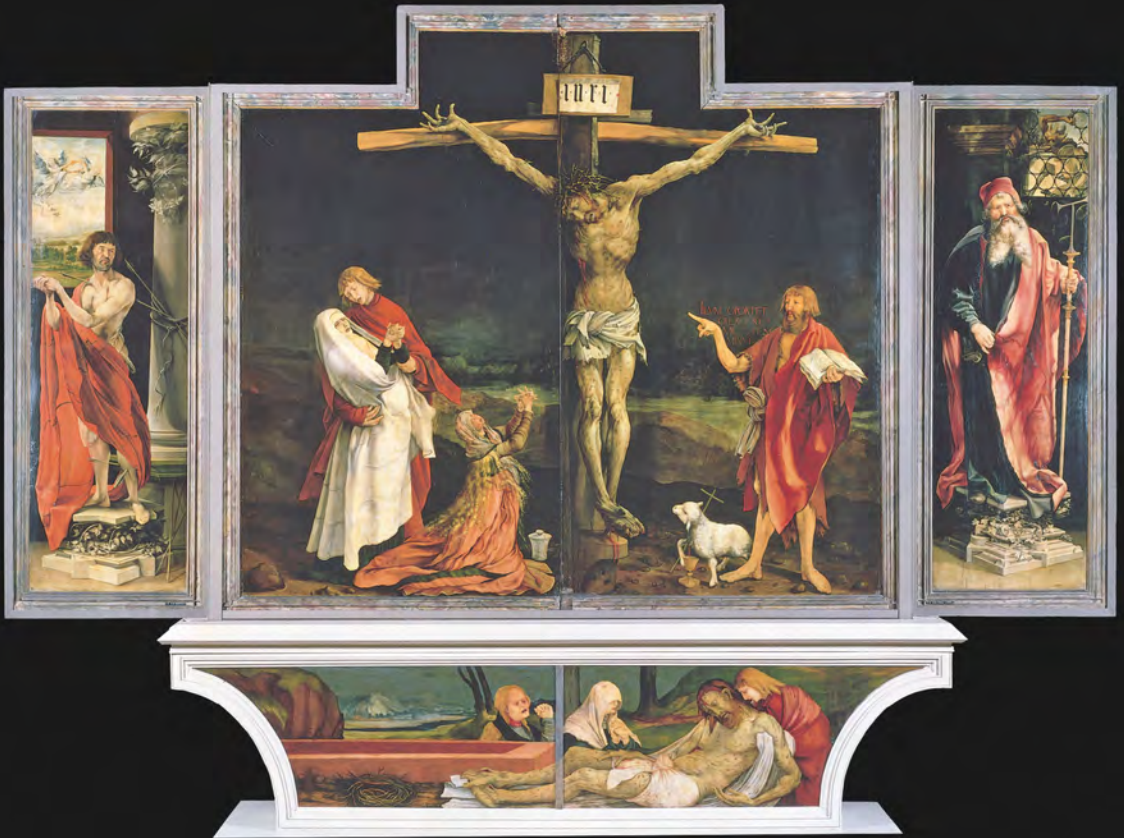


ENGAGE THROUGH ART

ISENHEIM ALTARPIECE BY MATTHIAS GRÜNEWALD

The German artist Matthias Grünewald painted this large, movable altarpiece in the Alsace region of northeastern France to convey Christ's solidarity with the sick. In the early 1500s, peasants in the area had been eating grains infected with a fungus, which caused serious skin sores and eventual death. Many were also suffering from the plague. The central panel of the altarpiece depicts Christ on the cross. In addition to the agony of the crucifixion, He's also covered in sores like those produced by the plague. Grünewald hoped to remind the sick that Jesus understood and shared in their pain.

Read Acts 3:11–16. Peter reminded the people of Jerusalem that because God raised Jesus from the dead, they could find strength and healing through faith in Him. As you meditate on these verses, know that by His wounds and in His name you are healed.



Mathias Grünewald, *Isenheim Altarpiece*, 1512–1516, Oil on Wood

heaven must receive until the time all things are restored, which God declared from times long ago through his holy prophets. ²²Moses said, *'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You must obey him in everything he tells you.'* ²³Every person who does not obey that prophet will be destroyed and thus removed from the people.' ²⁴And all the prophets, from Samuel and those who followed him, have spoken about and announced these days. ²⁵You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors, saying to Abraham, *'And in your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed.'* ²⁶God raised up his servant and sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each one of you from your iniquities."

THE ARREST AND TRIAL OF PETER AND JOHN

4 While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests and the commander of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, ²angry because they were teaching the people and announcing in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³So they seized them and put them in jail until the next day (for it was already evening). ⁴But many of those who had listened to the message believed, and the number of the men came to about 5,000.

⁵On the next day, their rulers, elders, and experts in the law came together in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others who were members of the high priest's family. ⁷After making Peter and John stand in their midst, they began to inquire, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, replied, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being examined today for a good deed done to a sick man—by what means this man was healed—¹⁰let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, this man stands before you healthy. ¹¹This Jesus is **the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, that has become the cornerstone.** ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved."

¹³When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and discovered that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴And because they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say against this. ¹⁵But when they had ordered them to go outside the council, they began to confer with one another, ¹⁶saying, "What should we do with these men? For it is plain to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable miraculous sign has come about through them, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But to keep this matter from spreading any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." ¹⁸And they called them in and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John replied, "Whether it is right before God to obey you rather than God, you decide, ²⁰for it is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard." ²¹After threatening



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Acts 4:1–12

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Why did the Jewish council question Peter and John (see v. 7)? How was Peter able to answer them so boldly (see v. 8)?
- Peter accused the religious leaders of rejecting the only One who brings salvation (see vv. 11–12). What do you risk in proclaiming Jesus as your Savior?
- When people question you about your faith, how do you answer? Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit so you, like Peter, can answer with boldness.



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Acts 4:1–26

The religious leaders in Jerusalem had arrested Peter and John, and God protected them from harm. Peter, who before the crucifixion had denied he knew Jesus, boldly preached about Jesus among high-ranking leaders (vv. 5–12). When the officials released Peter and John, the Christian community gave thanks to God. As you pray, ask God to give you opportunities to tell others about Jesus and the courage to do so. Pray for discernment and wisdom to know when and how to share your faith.



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 4:13–20

READ. Try reading these verses from various viewpoints: that of the religious leaders, Peter, John, the man who had been healed,

or an onlooker. Choose an image that stands out. Consider, for example, Peter and John standing up for what's right (vv. 19–20).

MEDITATE. Reflect on why the image you chose stood out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance in applying it to your life's circumstances.

PRAY. Pray about what you have discovered. Thank God for this connection between His Word and your life.

CONTEMPLATE. Sit in silence with God. Find strength, encouragement, and excitement in serving Him and promoting His great name.



PICTURE IT

Acts 4:32–35

PREPARE. Quiet yourself and ask God to prepare your heart and guide your imagination.

PICTURE. Acts shows the beginning of the early church. Imagine you're a part of this community of believers. What does it feel like to testify with the power of God's grace in you (v. 33)? Looking around you, do you see people's needs—whether physical, financial, or personal—being compassionately met? Feel the weight of carrying money from sales to the apostles' feet. Imagine the taste of food shared with you from your neighbors. Put yourself in the shoes of the first Christians.

PRAY. Thank God for revealing the early church through Scripture. Ask that He would fill you with the same humility, grace, and compassion that He did for the early church.



JOURNAL

Acts 5:1–11

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to

them further, they released them, for they could not find how to punish them on account of the people, because they were all praising God for what had happened.²² For the man, on whom this miraculous sign of healing had been performed, was over forty years old.

THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS PRAY FOR BOLDNESS

²³When they were released, Peter and John went to their fellow believers and reported everything the high priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard this, they raised their voices to God with one mind and said, "Master of all, you who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them,²⁵ who said by the Holy Spirit through your servant David our forefather,

*'Why do the nations rage,
and the peoples plot foolish things?*

²⁶ *The kings of the earth stood together,
and the rulers assembled together,
against the Lord and against his Christ.'*

²⁷"For indeed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed,²⁸ to do as much as your power and your plan had decided beforehand would happen.²⁹ And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage,³⁰ while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."³¹ When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously.

CONDITIONS AMONG THE EARLY BELIEVERS

³²The group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but everything was held in common.³³ With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all.³⁴ For there was no one needy among them, because those who were owners of land or houses were selling them and bringing the proceeds from the sales³⁵ and placing them at the apostles' feet. The proceeds were distributed to each, as anyone had need.³⁶ So Joseph, a Levite who was a native of Cyprus, called by the apostles Barnabas (which is translated "son of encouragement"),³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and placed it at the apostles' feet.

THE JUDGMENT ON ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

5 Now a man named Ananias, together with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property.² He kept back for himself part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge; he brought only part of it and placed it at the apostles' feet.³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and

keep back for yourself part of the proceeds from the sale of the land? ⁴Before it was sold, did it not belong to you? And when it was sold, was the money not at your disposal? How have you thought up this deed in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God!"

⁵When Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died, and great fear gripped all who heard about it. ⁶So the young men came, wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. ⁷After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, but she did not know what had happened. ⁸Peter said to her, "Tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the land?" Sapphira said, "Yes, that much." ⁹Peter then told her, "Why have you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out!" ¹⁰At once she collapsed at his feet and died. So when the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹Great fear gripped the whole church and all who heard about these things.

THE APOSTLES PERFORM MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND WONDERS

¹²Now many miraculous signs and wonders came about among the people through the hands of the apostles. By common consent they were all meeting together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high honor. ¹⁴More and more believers in the Lord were added to their number, crowds of both men and women. ¹⁵Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets, and put them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow would fall on some of them. ¹⁶A crowd of people from the towns around Jerusalem also came together, bringing the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits. They were all being healed.

FURTHER TROUBLE FOR THE APOSTLES

¹⁷Now the high priest rose up, and all those with him (that is, the religious party of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, led them out, and said, ²⁰"Go and stand in the temple courts and proclaim to the people all the words of this life." ²¹When they heard this, they entered the temple courts at daybreak and began teaching.

Now when the high priest and those who were with him arrived, they summoned the Sanhedrin—that is, the whole high council of the Israelites—and sent to the jail to have the apostles brought before them. ²²But the officers who came for them did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³"We found the jail locked securely and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside." ²⁴Now when the commander of the temple guard and the chief priests heard this report, they were greatly puzzled concerning it, wondering what this could be. ²⁵But someone came and reported to them, "Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple courts and teaching the people!" ²⁶Then the

reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- When Ananias lied to the church elders, to whom did he really lie (see v. 4)? Why would he and his wife lie about the price they paid for their land (see Acts 4:34–37)?
- How did the tragic event with Ananias and Sapphira affect the church (see v. 11)?
- Have you ever avoided telling the truth or told a lie because you were afraid of what others would think about you? What were the consequences?



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:12–16

This passage provides a snapshot of how God was working in and through the early believers. Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, documented that God was working through many miracles and healings. Notice that the surrounding community held the early believers in high regard (v. 13).

In your view, how can today's believers earn the respect and admiration of people around them? Thank God for continuing to draw many people to Himself around the world (v. 14). Pray that He would work in and through you as He did the early believers.



JOURNAL

Acts 5:27–32

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Why would the apostles continue to preach in Jesus' name even though the religious leaders told them not to (see v. 28)?
- The apostles witnessed God's miracles and told others about them. What have you witnessed of God's power that you can share with others?
- How can you apply the principle in verse 29 to how you live and make decisions?



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 6:1–7

READ. Read through this passage that is often used as a model for deacons of the church. Focus on the words listed in verse 3 that describe the qualities of those chosen to serve the church: “well-attested,” “full of the Spirit,” and “wisdom.”

MEDITATE. Meditate on these qualities. For each of the qualities listed, ask yourself these questions: What does it look like in the life of a believer? Why is it significant? How can a believer grow in it?

PRAY. Ask God to help you grow in one or more of these qualities. Praise Him for the sovereignty of His Word.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, take a moment to reflect on the specific gifts God has given you to serve others.

commander of the temple guard went with the officers and brought the apostles without the use of force (for they were afraid of being stoned by the people).

²⁷When they had brought them, they stood them before the council, and the high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood on us!” ²⁹But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than people. ³⁰The God of our forefathers raised up Jesus, whom you seized and killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him to his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses of these events, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³Now when they heard this, they became furious and wanted to execute them. ³⁴But a Pharisee whose name was Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, stood up in the council and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. ³⁵Then he said to the council, “Men of Israel, pay close attention to what you are about to do to these men. ³⁶For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and about 400 men joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and nothing came of it. ³⁷After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census, and incited people to follow him in revolt. He too was killed, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸So in this case I say to you, stay away from these men and leave them alone, because if this plan or this undertaking originates with people, it will come to nothing, ³⁹but if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them, or you may even be found fighting against God.” He convinced them, ⁴⁰and they summoned the apostles and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. ⁴¹So they left the council rejoicing because they had been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. ⁴²And every day both in the temple courts and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus was the Christ.

THE APPOINTMENT OF THE FIRST SEVEN DEACONS

6 Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So the twelve called the whole group of the disciples together and said, “It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables. ³But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵The proposal pleased the entire group, so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a Gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch. ⁶They stood these men before the apostles,

who prayed and placed their hands on them.⁷ The word of God continued to spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

STEPHEN IS ARRESTED

⁸ Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. ⁹ But some men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and the province of Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. ¹⁰ Yet they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. ¹¹ Then they secretly instigated some men to say, “We have heard this man speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.” ¹² They incited the people, the elders, and the experts in the law; then they approached Stephen, seized him, and brought him before the council. ¹³ They brought forward false witnesses who said, “This man does not stop saying things against this holy place and the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him saying that Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.” ¹⁵ All who were sitting in the council looked intently at Stephen and saw his face was like the face of an angel.

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE BEFORE THE COUNCIL

7 Then the high priest said, “Are these things true?”² So he replied, “Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our forefather Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he settled in Haran,³ and said to him, ‘*Go out from your country and from your relatives, and come to the land I will show you.*’⁴ Then he went out from the country of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After his father died, God made him move to this country where you now live. ⁵ He did not give any of it to him for an inheritance, not even a foot of ground, yet God promised *to give it to him as his possession, and to his descendants after him*, even though Abraham as yet had no child. ⁶ But God spoke as follows: ‘Your *descendants will be foreigners in a foreign country, whose citizens will enslave them and mistreat them for 400 years. 7 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,*’ said God, ‘*and after these things they will come out of there and worship me in this place.*’⁸ Then God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision, and so he became the father of Isaac and circumcised him when he was eight days old, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. ⁹ The patriarchs, because they were jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt. But God was with him,¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles, and granted him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. ¹¹ Then a famine occurred throughout Egypt and Canaan, causing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. ¹² So when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our ancestors there the first time. ¹³ On their second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers again, and Joseph’s family became known to Pharaoh. ¹⁴ So



JOURNAL

Acts 6:8–15

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God’s presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- What set Stephen apart from other people (see vv. 8, 10)? For what reasons did Stephen’s opponents lie about him and incite the people against him (see vv. 9–14)?
- How do we know God was with Stephen (see v. 10)?
- Reflect on a time when your faith was under attack. How did you respond? How do you know God was with you?



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 7:1–10

READ. As you read Stephen’s witness to Christ fulfilling the Old Testament, identify a word or an image that stands out to you. Consider, for example, God speaking to Abraham or the word “promised” (v. 5) or “enslave” (v. 6).

MEDITATE. Ask God to show you why this word or image stood out to you. How does Stephen’s testimony reveal God’s divine hand in human history?

PRAY. Thank God for His Word. Ask Him to give you a passion for His Son and for His Word. Ask Him to show you how He has uniquely fashioned you for His kingdom purposes.

CONTEMPLATE. Linger a moment longer in God’s presence.

Joseph sent a message and invited his father Jacob and all his relatives to come, seventy-five people in all. ¹⁵ So Jacob went down to Egypt and died there, along with our ancestors, ¹⁶ and their bones were later moved to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a certain sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

¹⁷ “But as the time drew near for God to fulfill the promise he had declared to Abraham, the people increased greatly in number in Egypt, ¹⁸ until ***another king who did not know about Joseph ruled over Egypt.*** ¹⁹ This was the one who exploited our people and was cruel to our ancestors, forcing them to abandon their infants so they would die. ²⁰ At that time Moses was born, and he was beautiful to God. For three months he was brought up in his father’s house, ²¹ and when he had been abandoned, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. ²² So Moses was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds. ²³ But when he was about forty years old, it entered his mind to visit his fellow countrymen the Israelites. ²⁴ When he saw one of them being hurt unfairly, Moses came to his defense and avenged the person who was mistreated by striking down the Egyptian. ²⁵ He thought his own people would understand that God was delivering them through him, but they did not understand. ²⁶ The next day Moses saw two men fighting, and tried to make peace between them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why are you hurting one another?’ ²⁷ But the man who was unfairly hurting his neighbor pushed Moses aside, saying, ‘***Who made you a ruler and judge over us?***’ ²⁸ ***You don’t want to kill me the way you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?*** ²⁹ When the man said this, Moses fled and became a foreigner in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

³⁰ “After forty years had passed, *an angel appeared to him in the desert of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush.* ³¹ When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and when he approached to investigate, there came the voice of the Lord, ³² ‘***I am the God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.***’ Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look more closely. ³³ ***But the Lord said to him, ‘Take the sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have certainly seen the suffering of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Now come, I will send you to Egypt.’*** ³⁵ This same Moses they had rejected, saying, ‘***Who made you a ruler and judge?***’ God sent as both ruler and deliverer through the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ This man led them out, performing wonders and miraculous signs in the land of Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. ³⁷ This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘***God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers.***’ ³⁸ This is the man who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors, and he received living oracles to give to you. ³⁹ Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him, but pushed him aside and turned back to Egypt in their hearts, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘***Make us gods who will go in front of us, for***

this Moses, who led us out of the land of Egypt –we do not know what has happened to him! ⁴¹At that time they made an idol in the form of a calf, brought a sacrifice to the idol, and began rejoicing in the works of their hands. ⁴²But God turned away from them and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: *'It was not to me that you offered slain animals and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, house of Israel? ⁴³But you took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rephan, the images you made to worship, but I will deport you beyond Babylon.'* ⁴⁴Our ancestors had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as God who spoke to Moses ordered him to make it according to the design he had seen. ⁴⁵Our ancestors received possession of it and brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our ancestors, until the time of David. ⁴⁶He found favor with God and asked that he could find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. ⁴⁷But Solomon built a house for him. ⁴⁸Yet the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands, as the prophet says,

⁴⁹ *'Heaven is my throne,
and earth is the footstool for my feet.*

*What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,
or what is my resting place?*

⁵⁰ *Did my hand not make all these things?*

⁵¹"You stubborn people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit, like your ancestors did! ⁵²Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold long ago the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become! ⁵³You received the law by decrees given by angels, but you did not obey it."

STEPHEN IS KILLED

⁵⁴When they heard these things, they became furious and ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently toward heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶"Look!" he said. "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷But they covered their ears, shouting out with a loud voice, and rushed at him with one intent. ⁵⁸When they had driven him out of the city, they began to stone him, and the witnesses laid their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹They continued to stone Stephen while he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" ⁶⁰Then he fell to his knees and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"

8 When he had said this, he died. ¹And Saul agreed completely with killing him.

SAUL BEGINS TO PERSECUTE THE CHURCH

Now on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were forced to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. ²Some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over



PICTURE IT

Acts 7:52–60

PREPARE. Quiet yourself and ask God to prepare your heart and guide your imagination.

PICTURE. Put yourself in the crowd charging Stephen with blasphemy. Hear the screaming and grinding of teeth (vv. 54, 57). Feel the weight of the stones being lifted to be thrown. Close your eyes and imagine what it smells like as these men work up a sweat to kill this man. Spend a minute hearing Stephen's final words in verse 60. What emotions do you feel at hearing a dying man ask forgiveness for his enemies?

PRAY. Finish this time by thanking God for sending Jesus so that there is no fear in death (Phil 3:20–21). Then pray that you would have the same strength, fearlessness, and unending love that Stephen showed to his enemies. End by committing to share the love given to you from God.



JOURNAL

Acts 8:1–8

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Why would Jesus' followers risk persecution and continue to preach about Jesus?
- How did persecution of the church help to spread the news of Jesus to regions beyond Jerusalem? How do you see God's hand working in the lives of His people even in the midst of their trials?
- If you had lived during the time of the early church, would you have been brave enough to preach the gospel even in the midst of persecution? Why?

him. ³But Saul was trying to destroy the church; entering one house after another, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

PHILIP PREACHES IN SAMARIA

⁴Now those who had been forced to scatter went around proclaiming the good news of the word. ⁵Philip went down to the main city of Samaria and began proclaiming the Christ to them. ⁶The crowds were paying attention with one mind to what Philip said, as they heard and saw the miraculous signs he was performing. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, were coming out of many who were possessed, and many paralyzed and lame people were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city.

⁹Now in that city was a man named Simon, who had been practicing magic and amazing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great. ¹⁰All the people, from the least to the greatest, paid close attention to him, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called 'Great.'" ¹¹And they paid close attention to him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. ¹²But when they believed Philip as he was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they began to be baptized, both men and women. ¹³Even Simon himself believed, and after he was baptized, he stayed close to Philip constantly, and when he saw the signs and great miracles that were occurring, he was amazed.

¹⁴Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵These two went down and prayed for them so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶(For the Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) ¹⁷Then Peter and John placed their hands on the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸Now Simon, when he saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, offered them money, ¹⁹saying, "Give me this power too, so that everyone I place my hands on may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could acquire God's gift with money! ²¹You have no share or part in this matter because your heart is not right before God! ²²Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that he may perhaps forgive you for the intent of your heart. ²³For I see that you are bitterly envious and in bondage to sin." ²⁴But Simon replied, "You pray to the Lord for me so that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."

²⁵So after Peter and John had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many Samaritan villages as they went.

PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

²⁶Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) ²⁷So he got up and went. There he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasury. He had come to

Jerusalem to worship,²⁸ and was returning home, sitting in his chariot, reading the prophet Isaiah.²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.”³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked him, “Do you understand what you’re reading?”³¹ The man replied, “How in the world can I, unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.³² Now the passage of scripture the man was reading was this:

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

33 *In humiliation justice was taken from him.
Who can describe his posterity?
For his life was taken away from the earth.”*

³⁴Then the eunuch said to Philip, “Please tell me, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or someone else?”³⁵ So Philip started speaking, and beginning with this scripture proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him.³⁶ Now as they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, there is water! What is to stop me from being baptized?”³⁷ So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.³⁹ Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any more, but went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ Philip, however, found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through the area, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

9 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing out threats to murder the Lord’s disciples, went to the high priest² and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, either men or women, he could bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.³ As he was going along, approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”⁵ So he said, “Who are you, Lord?” He replied, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!”⁶ But stand up and enter the city and you will be told what you must do.”⁷ (Now the men who were traveling with him stood there speechless, because they heard the voice but saw no one.)⁸ So Saul got up from the ground, but although his eyes were open, he could see nothing. Leading him by the hand, his companions brought him into Damascus.⁹ For three days he could not see, and he neither ate nor drank anything.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias,” and he replied, “Here I am, Lord.”¹¹ Then the Lord told him, “Get up and go to the street called ‘Straight,’ and at Judas’ house look for a man from Tarsus named Saul. For he is praying,¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he may see again.”¹³ But Ananias replied, “Lord, I have heard from



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 8:27–37

READ. Read these verses to see God’s love expressed toward a God-honoring eunuch from Ethiopia. What stands out to you about this event? Which word or verse seems significant? Consider “reading the prophet Isaiah” (v. 28), “the Spirit said to Philip” (v. 29), or “What is to stop me from being baptized?” (v. 36).

MEDITATE. Consider God’s purpose for this event. Why did you need to focus on this today? How might the Spirit want you to live it out? Close by finding a way to act on your newfound realization.

PRAY. Pray through the discovery you made. Thank God for helping you see the connection to your life, and ask Him to empower you to act on what He has shown you in His Word.

CONTEMPLATE. Rest in God’s presence.



JOURNAL

Acts 9:10–18

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God’s presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Who was God’s “chosen instrument” to reach the Gentiles with the gospel (v. 15)? Why was he an unlikely choice?
- Have you ever felt God calling you to do something or go somewhere but you were hesitant or afraid to obey (see vv. 13–14)? How did you respond? What happened when Ananias followed God’s instructions, even though he didn’t want to (see vv. 17–18)? Have you ever had a similar experience?

many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem,¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to imprison all who call on your name!”¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, because this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel.¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house, placed his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, his strength returned.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus,²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “This man is the Son of God.”²¹ All who heard him were amazed and were saying, “Is this not the man who in Jerusalem was ravaging those who call on this name, and who had come here to bring them as prisoners to the chief priests?”²² But Saul became more and more capable, and was causing consternation among the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

SAUL'S ESCAPE FROM DAMASCUS

²³ Now after some days had passed, the Jews plotted together to kill him,²⁴ but Saul learned of their plot against him. They were also watching the city gates day and night so that they could kill him.²⁵ But his disciples took him at night and let him down through an opening in the wall by lowering him in a basket.

SAUL RETURNS TO JERUSALEM

²⁶ When he arrived in Jerusalem, he attempted to associate with the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, because they did not believe that he was a disciple.²⁷ But Barnabas took Saul, brought him to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.²⁸ So he was staying with them, associating openly with them in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.²⁹ He was speaking and debating with the Greek-speaking Jews, but they were trying to kill him.³⁰ When the brothers found out about this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experienced peace and thus was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, the church increased in numbers.

PETER HEALS AENEAS

³² Now as Peter was traveling around from place to place, he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda.³³ He found there a man named Aeneas who had been confined to a mattress for eight years because he was paralyzed.³⁴ Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Get up and make your own bed!”



JOURNAL

Acts 9:26–30

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Who didn't believe that Saul had become a believer in Jesus, and how did they feel about him (see v. 26)? Who defended Saul and his faith (see v. 27)?
- Saul was persecuted for speaking boldly about Jesus, but the other disciples protected him. Have you ever experienced persecution for your faith? Have you protected a fellow believer? Has someone protected you?
- How can you protect and support fellow believers when they take a stand for Christ?

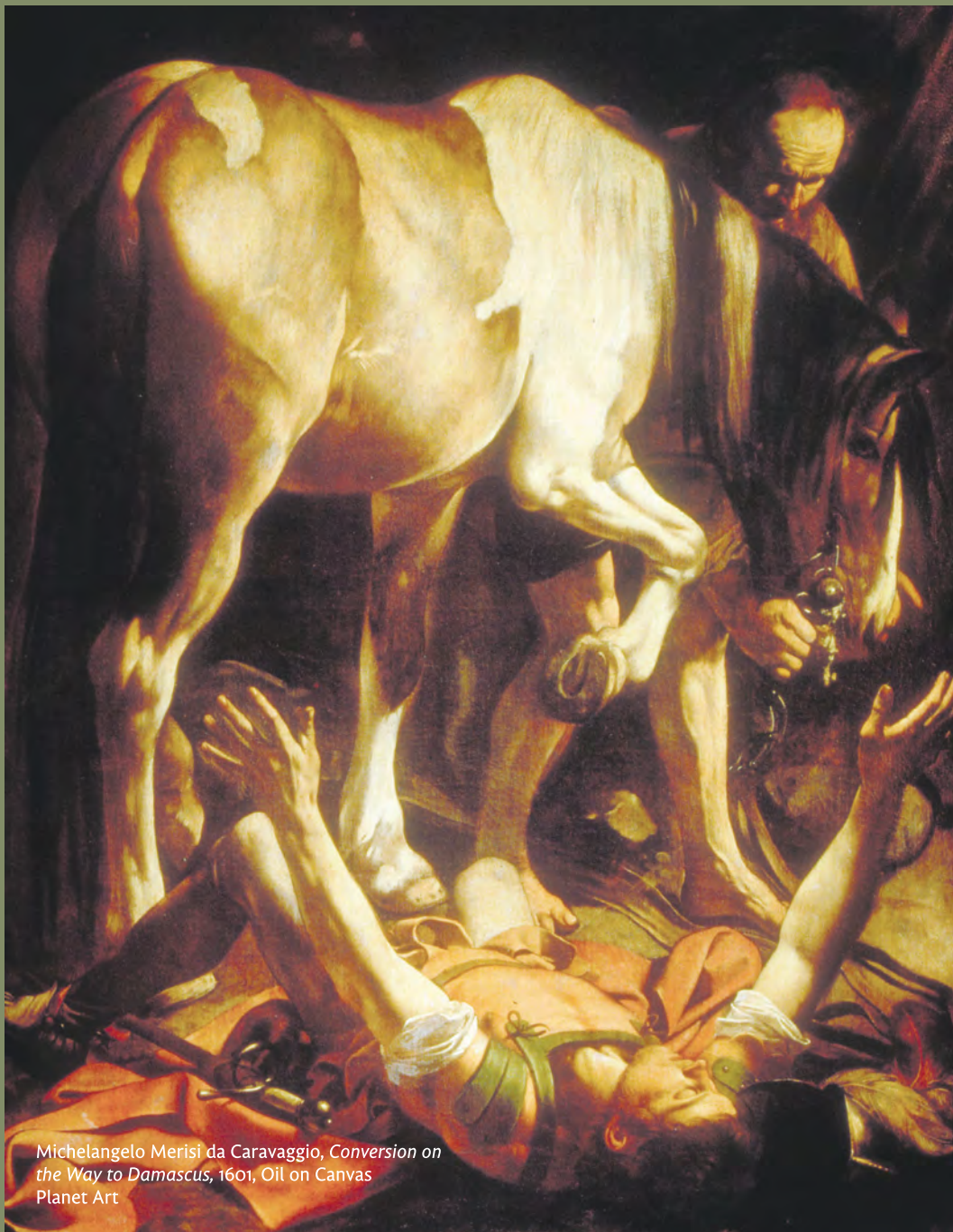


ENGAGE THROUGH ART

CONVERSION ON THE WAY TO DAMASCUS BY MICHELANGELO MERISI DA CARAVAGGIO

In this painting Caravaggio portrayed Saul at the moment he met Christ. Overwhelmed by the power of God, Saul fell to the ground, temporarily blinded and in danger from the muscular horse standing above him. Saul waves his hands, perhaps to try to feel his surroundings, perhaps in submission to the Lord's voice. What matters most is that the persecutor Saul was defeated. In this defeat he found eternal life.

Read Acts 9:1–9. Think about Saul's conversion experience and how he went from persecuting Christians to becoming a follower of Christ. How would you describe your conversion? How is God continuing to transform you?



Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Conversion on the Way to Damascus*, 1601, Oil on Canvas
Planet Art

And immediately he got up.³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

PETER RAISES DORCAS

³⁶Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which in translation means Dorcas). She was continually doing good deeds and acts of charity.³⁷ At that time she became sick and died. When they had washed her body, they placed it in an upstairs room.³⁸ Because Lydda was near Joppa, when the disciples heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Come to us without delay.”³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them, and when he arrived they brought him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him, crying and showing him the tunics and other clothing Dorcas used to make while she was with them.⁴⁰ But Peter sent them all outside, knelt down, and prayed. Turning to the body, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her get up. Then he called the saints and widows and presented her alive.⁴² This became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.⁴³ So Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a man named Simon, a tanner.

PETER VISITS CORNELIUS

10 Now there was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort.² He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was all his household; he did many acts of charity for the people and prayed to God regularly.³ About three o’clock one afternoon he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, “Cornelius.”⁴ Staring at him and becoming greatly afraid, Cornelius replied, “What is it, Lord?” The angel said to him, “Your prayers and your acts of charity have gone up as a memorial before God.”⁵ Now send men to Joppa and summon a man named Simon, who is called Peter.⁶ This man is staying as a guest with a man named Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.”⁷ When the angel who had spoken to him departed, Cornelius called two of his personal servants and a devout soldier from among those who served him,⁸ and when he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing the meal, a trance came over him.¹¹ He saw heaven opened and an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down to earth by its four corners.¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and wild birds.¹³ Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!”¹⁴ But Peter said, “Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!”¹⁵ The voice spoke to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!”¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into heaven.

¹⁷Now while Peter was puzzling over what the vision he had seen could signify, the men sent by Cornelius had learned where



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 10:1–8

READ. Read through these verses and pick out a word or phrase that stands out to you: “devout” (vv. 2, 7), “God-fearing” (v. 2), “he sent them” (v. 8), or anything else. Repeat the word or phrase to yourself.

MEDITATE. Spend some time in silence pondering why this word or phrase stood out. Is there a change you need to make or an action you need to take in light of this truth?

PRAY. Turn your pondering into prayer. Thank God for His Word. Thank Him for continuing to instruct His people today just as He instructed Cornelius.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, spend time sitting quietly in God’s presence. Find comfort in God’s instructions for you.

Simon's house was and approached the gate.¹⁸ They called out to ask if Simon, known as Peter, was staying there as a guest.¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking seriously about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look! Three men are looking for you.²⁰ But get up, go down, and accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them."²¹ So Peter went down to the men and said, "Here I am, the person you're looking for. Why have you come?"²² They said, "Cornelius the centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear a message from you."²³ So Peter invited them in and entertained them as guests.

On the next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.²⁴ The following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting anxiously for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ So when Peter came in, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him.²⁶ But Peter helped him up, saying, "Stand up. I too am a mere mortal."²⁷ Peter continued talking with him as he went in, and he found many people gathered together.²⁸ He said to them, "You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean.²⁹ Therefore when you sent for me, I came without any objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"³⁰ Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock in the afternoon, I was praying in my house, and suddenly a man in shining clothing stood before me³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your acts of charity have been remembered before God.³² Therefore send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter. This man is staying as a guest in the house of Simon the tanner, by the sea.'³³ Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come. So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us."

³⁴ Then Peter started speaking: "I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people,³⁵ but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him.³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)—³⁷you know what happened throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John announced:³⁸ with respect to Jesus from Nazareth, that God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him.³⁹ We are witnesses of all the things he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised him up on the third day and caused him to be seen,⁴¹ not by all the people, but by us, the witnesses God had already chosen, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to warn them that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ About him all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Acts 10:34–43

At this point in the story of the early church, most people who believed in Jesus had Jewish backgrounds. In this passage, God led Peter to a broader vision of reaching Gentiles outside the Jewish faith. When Peter met the Roman centurion Cornelius, a God-fearing man who was interested in learning more about Jesus, Peter was able to introduce him to the gospel of Jesus. Peter realized that he needed to step out of his Jewish comfort zone in order for the gospel to advance into all nations. He assured Cornelius that God did not show favoritism and that all people could be forgiven and accepted by God (vv. 34–35, 43). Thank God for making His forgiveness accessible to all.

THE GENTILES RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the message. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were greatly astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷“No one can withhold the water for these people to be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” ⁴⁸So he gave orders to have them baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for several days.

PETER DEFENDS HIS ACTIONS TO THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

11 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers took issue with him, ³saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and shared a meal with them.” ⁴But Peter began and explained it to them point by point, saying, ⁵“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came to me. ⁶As I stared I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles, and wild birds. ⁷I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!’ ⁸But I said, ‘Certainly not, Lord, for nothing defiled or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth!’ ⁹But the voice replied a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!’ ¹⁰This happened three times, and then everything was pulled up to heaven again. ¹¹At that very moment, three men sent to me from Caesarea approached the house where we were staying. ¹²The Spirit told me to accompany them without hesitation. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³He informed us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, ¹⁴who will speak a message to you by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ ¹⁵Then as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did on us at the beginning. ¹⁶And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷Therefore if God gave them the same gift as he also gave us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?” ¹⁸When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles.”



JOURNAL

Acts 11:12–21

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God’s presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- As Jewish believers talked with Peter, what did they struggle to believe (see vv. 12–17)? Explain why they eventually “praised God” (v. 18).
- When the Gentiles from Cyprus and Cyrene heard the good news of Jesus Christ, how did they respond (see v. 20)?
- Have you ever held a belief or judgment that opposed God? How did you come to understand the truth?

ACTIVITY IN THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

¹⁹Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews. ²⁰But there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene among them who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks too, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. ²¹The hand

of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²²A report about them came to the attention of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, ²⁴because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a significant number of people were brought to the Lord. ²⁵Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught a significant number of people. Now it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

FAMINE RELIEF FOR JUDEA

²⁷At that time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸One of them, named Agabus, got up and predicted by the Spirit that a severe famine was about to come over the whole inhabited world. (This took place during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹So the disciples, each in accordance with his financial ability, decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰They did so, sending their financial aid to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

JAMES IS KILLED AND PETER IMPRISONED

12 About that time King Herod laid hands on some from the church to harm them. ²He had James, the brother of John, executed with a sword. ³When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter too. (This took place during the feast of Unleavened Bread.) ⁴When he had seized him, he put him in prison, handing him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him. Herod planned to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. ⁵So Peter was kept in prison, but those in the church were earnestly praying to God for him. ⁶On that very night before Herod was going to bring him out for trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. ⁷Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the prison cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly!" And the chains fell off Peter's wrists. ⁸The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." Peter did so. Then the angel said to him, "Put on your cloak and follow me." ⁹Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening through the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰After they had passed the first and second guards, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went outside and walked down one narrow street, when at once the angel left him. ¹¹When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from everything the Jewish people were expecting to happen."

¹²When Peter realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many people had gathered together and were praying. ¹³When he knocked at the door of



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 11:25–30

READ. Barnabas came alongside Saul to encourage him and partner with him in ministry. Read through this account and locate a phrase that personally affects you. Consider "departed for" (v. 25), "met with" (v. 26), or "predicted by the Spirit" (v. 28).

MEDITATE. As you repeat the words to yourself, meditate on why you chose them. Is this something you have wanted to experience? Did you need to hear this to find direction in an area of your life?

PRAY. Take these thoughts and turn them into prayers. Thank God for revealing His Word to you, and ask that the Holy Spirit nudge you into action. Ask the Lord to show you someone whom you can mentor or encourage.

CONTEMPLATE. Conclude by sitting in God's presence. Find comfort in the power of the Holy Spirit and the care of specific people through the church.



PICTURE IT

Acts 12:5–10

PREPARE. Quiet yourself and ask God to prepare your heart and guide your imagination.

PICTURE. Picture yourself in prison beside Peter. What does the cell look like? Is it cold? Notice how crowded Peter's cell is because of all the guards there to watch him (v. 6). Try to imagine the brilliant light as the angel appears in the cell. Watch the heavy chains fall off as Peter is lifted off the floor, and picture the joy he feels as he follows the angel out of the cell and into freedom.

PRAY. Thank God for answering prayers (v. 5). Ask that He would remind you to pray for others who may be suffering. Finish by praying for specific people in your life who need the help of the Holy Spirit.



JOURNAL

Acts 12:18–24

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- After Herod made a speech, what did the people do (see v. 22)? Why did God strike Herod with a sickness that ended in his death (see v. 23)?
- How can you avoid making the same mistake Herod made? How should you respond when people honor you?



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 13:1–5

READ. Read this short passage and pick out a word or phrase that someone new to the Christian faith might not understand. How would you explain it to him or her? Consider “serving the Lord” (v. 2) or “placed their hands on them” (v. 3).

MEDITATE. Focus on each person's action in this series of events. Which one might God want you to imitate? How?

PRAY. Use this connection between Scripture and life as a starting point to prayer. Thank God for revealing this truth to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you to be a good steward of the gift of the Holy Spirit that He has placed inside you.

the outer gate, a slave girl named Rhoda answered.¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she did not open the gate, but ran back in and told them that Peter was standing at the gate.¹⁵ But they said to her, “You've lost your mind!” But she kept insisting that it was Peter, and they kept saying, “It is his angel!”¹⁶ Now Peter continued knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were greatly astonished.¹⁷ He motioned to them with his hand to be quiet and then related how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. He said, “Tell James and the brothers these things,” and then he left and went to another place.

¹⁸ At daybreak there was great consternation among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.¹⁹ When Herod had searched for him and did not find him, he questioned the guards and commanded that they be led away to execution. Then Herod went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

²⁰ Now Herod was having an angry quarrel with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they joined together and presented themselves before him. And after convincing Blastus, the king's personal assistant, to help them, they asked for peace, because their country's food supply was provided by the king's country.²¹ On a day determined in advance, Herod put on his royal robes, sat down on the judgment seat, and made a speech to them.²² But the crowd began to shout, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!”²³ Immediately an angel of the Lord struck Herod down because he did not give the glory to God, and he was eaten by worms and died.²⁴ But the word of God kept on increasing and multiplying.

²⁵ So Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem when they had completed their mission, bringing along with them John Mark.

THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH COMMISSIONS BARNABAS AND SAUL

13 Now there were these prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen (a close friend of Herod the tetrarch from childhood) and Saul.² While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”³ Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off.

PAUL AND BARNABAS PREACH IN CYPRUS

⁴ So Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.⁵ When they arrived in Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. (Now they also had John as their assistant.)⁶ When they had crossed over the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus,⁷ who was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. The proconsul summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God.⁸ But the magician Elymas (for that is the way his name is translated) opposed them, trying to turn the proconsul away from the faith.⁹ But Saul (also known as Paul), filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at him

¹⁰and said, “You who are full of all deceit and all wrongdoing, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness—will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹Now look, the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind, unable to see the sun for a time!” Immediately mistiness and darkness came over him, and he went around seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹²Then when the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, because he was greatly astounded at the teaching about the Lord.

PAUL AND BARNABAS AT PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

¹³Then Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴Moving on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading from the law and the prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent them a message, saying, “Brothers, if you have any message of exhortation for the people, speak it.” ¹⁶So Paul stood up, gestured with his hand and said, “Men of Israel, and you Gentiles who fear God, listen: ¹⁷The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and made the people great during their stay as foreigners in the country of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. ¹⁸For a period of about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹After he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave his people their land as an inheritance. ²⁰All this took about 450 years. After this he gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. ²¹Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man from the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. ²²After removing him, God raised up David their king. He testified about him: *‘I have found David* the son of Jesse *to be a man after my heart*, who will accomplish everything I want him to do.’ ²³From the descendants of this man God brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, just as he promised. ²⁴Before Jesus arrived, John had proclaimed a baptism for repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵But while John was completing his mission, he said repeatedly, ‘What do you think I am? I am not he. But look, one is coming after me. I am not worthy to untie the sandals on his feet!’ ²⁶Brothers, descendants of Abraham’s family, and those Gentiles among you who fear God, the message of this salvation has been sent to us. ²⁷For the people who live in Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize him, and they fulfilled the sayings of the prophets that are read every Sabbath by condemning him. ²⁸Though they found no basis for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹When they had accomplished everything that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and placed him in a tomb. ³⁰But God raised him from the dead, ³¹and for many days he appeared to those who had accompanied him from Galilee to Jerusalem. These are now his witnesses to the people. ³²And we proclaim to you the good news about the promise to our ancestors, ³³that this promise God has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second psalm, *‘You are my Son; today I have fathered you.’* ³⁴But regarding the fact

CONTEMPLATE. Finish this meditation by resting in God’s presence. Reflect on the fact that He has called you to proclaim His gospel to the farthest parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 13:26–33

READ. Read through this gospel account for details you previously knew and for details that seem new to you. Choose a word, a phrase or an image that stands out to you. Cite any phrases that seem unclear, and read the context until you find hints for their meaning.

MEDITATE. Spend time thinking about why a certain phrase or image stood out to you. Is this an image you have considered previously? In what part of your life might God want you to obey, implement, or imitate this phrase?

PRAY. Take your realizations and turn them into prayer. Thank God for revealing this to you and ask for clarity for how He would have you apply this knowledge.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, be silent and take comfort in God’s presence.



JOURNAL

Acts 13:38–41

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Why would Paul's message about receiving forgiveness through Jesus be so difficult for the Jews to understand and accept (see v. 39)? What work of God did the Jews not believe (see v. 41)?
- How did Paul try to warn his listeners (see vv. 40–41)?
- Do you sometimes struggle to see or believe the work God is doing around you? How can you accept His work in others and yourself more fully?



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 13:46–52

READ. Focus on "courageously" (v. 46). Then read the rest of the passage and locate choices and actions associated with this holy boldness. Pick a word or phrase that relates to it for meditation.

MEDITATE. What is easy and what is difficult in your life right now? Paul and Barnabas were bold and devout, but strife was stirred up against them. Ask God for His wisdom and strength to navigate both the easy and the difficult circumstances in your life. Ponder the word or phrase you chose. What changes might God be guiding you to make?

PRAY. Thank God for the freedom and joy Jesus gives. Take any thoughts, doubts, convictions, or questions before the Lord. Thank Him for His Word and ask Him to continue to reveal more to you throughout the day.

CONTEMPLATE. Close by simply being in God's presence. God loves you so much that He came to you.

that he has raised Jesus from the dead, never again to be in a state of decay, God has spoken in this way: *'I will give you the holy and trustworthy promises made to David.'*³⁵ Therefore he also says in another psalm, *'You will not permit your Holy One to experience decay.'*³⁶ For David, after he had served God's purpose in his own generation, died, was buried with his ancestors, and experienced decay,³⁷ but the one whom God raised up did not experience decay.³⁸ Therefore let it be known to you, brothers, that through this one forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,³⁹ and by this one everyone who believes is justified from everything from which the law of Moses could not justify you.⁴⁰ Watch out, then, that what is spoken about by the prophets does not happen to you:

⁴¹ *'Look, you scoffers; be amazed and perish! For I am doing a work in your days, a work you would never believe, even if someone tells you.'*

⁴² As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people were urging them to speak about these things on the next Sabbath.⁴³ When the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who were speaking with them and were persuading them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city assembled together to hear the word of the Lord.⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and they began to contradict what Paul was saying by reviling him.⁴⁶ Both Paul and Barnabas replied courageously, "It was necessary to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles."⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us: *'I have appointed you to be a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'*⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they began to rejoice and praise the word of the Lord, and all who had been appointed for eternal life believed.⁴⁹ So the word of the Lord was spreading through the entire region.⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high social standing and the prominent men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and threw them out of their region.⁵¹ So after they shook the dust off their feet in protest against them, they went to Iconium.⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

PAUL AND BARNABAS AT ICONIUM

14 The same thing happened in Iconium when Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a large group of both Jews and Greeks believed.² But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.³ So they stayed there for a considerable time, speaking out courageously for the Lord, who testified to the message of his grace, granting miraculous signs and wonders to be performed through their hands.⁴ But the population of the city was divided; some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.⁵ When both the

Gentiles and the Jews (together with their rulers) made an attempt to mistreat them and stone them, ⁶Paul and Barnabas learned about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding region. ⁷There they continued to proclaim the good news.

PAUL AND BARNABAS AT LYSTRA

⁸In Lystra sat a man who could not use his feet, lame from birth, who had never walked. ⁹This man was listening to Paul as he was speaking. When Paul stared intently at him and saw he had faith to be healed, ¹⁰he said with a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And the man leaped up and began walking. ¹¹So when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” ¹²They began to call Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³The priest of the temple of Zeus, located just outside the city, brought bulls and garlands to the city gates; he and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifices to them. ¹⁴But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard about it, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting, ¹⁵“Men, why are you doing these things? We too are men, with human natures just like you! We are proclaiming the good news to you, so that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them. ¹⁶In past generations he allowed all the nations to go their own ways, ¹⁷yet he did not leave himself without a witness by doing good, by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying you with food and your hearts with joy.” ¹⁸Even by saying these things, they scarcely persuaded the crowds not to offer sacrifice to them.

¹⁹But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and after winning the crowds over, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, presuming him to be dead. ²⁰But after the disciples had surrounded him, he got up and went back into the city. On the next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

PAUL AND BARNABAS RETURN TO ANTIOCH IN SYRIA

²¹After they had proclaimed the good news in that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch. ²²They strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, “We must enter the kingdom of God through many persecutions.” ²³When they had appointed elders for them in the various churches, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the protection of the Lord in whom they had believed. ²⁴Then they passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia, ²⁵and when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. ²⁶From there they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷When they arrived and gathered the church together, they reported all the things God had done with them, and that he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles. ²⁸So they spent considerable time with the disciples.



JOURNAL

Acts 14:1–7

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God’s presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Who became believers after Paul and Barnabas spoke in the synagogue (see v. 1)? What made the apostles’ teaching credible (see v. 3)?
- Who turned the Gentiles against the apostles, and why (see v. 2)? Why did Paul and Barnabas continue preaching even though they faced strong persecution?
- How can you continue to persevere in your faith despite persecution, trouble, and opposition?



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 14:8–18

READ. Sometimes the best intentions still create confusion. Read an example of how this happened in Lystra. Choose a phrase that impacts you personally. Consider “Paul stared intently at him” (v. 9), “turn from these worthless things” (v. 15), or “he did not leave himself without a witness” (v. 17).

MEDITATE. Ponder what made confusion grow after the man was healed. What could have started it? How do you resonate with the people of Lystra? Meditate on the phrase you chose while reading the passage. Listen to God as He speaks through His Word.

PRAY. Take any revelations or questions and turn them into prayer. Ask God what He wants to teach you. Thank Him for revealing His truth to you, and ask Him to clarify how this truth should impact your daily life.

CONTEMPLATE. Close by resting in God and trusting His power at work in you.



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Acts 14:19–28

As the gospel advanced into both Jewish and Gentile regions, the apostle Paul and Barnabas faced many threatening situations. In Lystra, for example, the people stoned Paul and he nearly died (vv. 19–20). God continued to give successes to the church despite many obstacles. In this account in Acts, Paul and Barnabas revisited several towns where they had established small groups of believers. They encouraged the believers to stand strong in the faith and reminded them that they might face persecution (v. 22).

How might the words of Paul and Barnabas help you face your hardships bravely? Trials are part of every life. Pray that God would help you face them bravely. Thank God for promising to be with us through everything (Matt 28:20; Heb 13:5).



JOURNAL

Acts 15:5–11

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- What issue were the elders and apostles trying to resolve (see v. 5)? What has God given to everyone—whether Jew or Gentile—who believes in salvation through the grace of Jesus (see vv. 8–9, 11)?
- According to Peter, how are people saved (see v. 11)? Why was this difficult for some religious Jews to accept?
- How can you free yourself from religious rules and accept the grace of God for salvation?

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

15 Now some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”² When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement.³ So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they were relating at length the conversion of the Gentiles and bringing great joy to all the brothers.⁴ When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all the things God had done with them.⁵ But some from the religious party of the Pharisees who had believed stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles and to order them to observe the law of Moses.”

⁶ Both the apostles and the elders met together to deliberate about this matter.⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that some time ago God chose me to preach to the Gentiles so they would hear the message of the gospel and believe.⁸ And God, who knows the heart, has testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,⁹ and he made no distinction between them and us, cleansing their hearts by faith.¹⁰ So now why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are.”

¹² The whole group kept quiet and listened to Barnabas and Paul while they explained all the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.¹³ After they stopped speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me.¹⁴ Simeon has explained how God first concerned himself to select from among the Gentiles a people for his name.¹⁵ The words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written,

- ¹⁶ *‘After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the fallen tent of David;
I will rebuild its ruins and restore it,
so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord,
namely, all the Gentiles I have called to be my own,’ says the
Lord, who makes these things*¹⁸ known from long ago.

¹⁹ “Therefore I conclude that we should not cause extra difficulty for those among the Gentiles who are turning to God,²⁰ but that we should write them a letter telling them to abstain from things defiled by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood.²¹ For Moses has had those who proclaim him in every town from ancient times, because he is read aloud in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to send men chosen from among them, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.²³ They sent this letter with them:

From the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings! ²⁴ Since we have heard that some have gone out from among us with no orders from us and have confused you, upsetting your minds by what they said, ²⁵ we have unanimously decided to choose men to send to you along with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas who will tell you these things themselves in person. ²⁸ For it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us not to place any greater burden on you than these necessary rules: ²⁹ that you abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from doing these things, you will do well. Farewell.

³⁰ So when they were dismissed, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the entire group together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ When they read it aloud, the people rejoiced at its encouragement. ³² Both Judas and Silas, who were prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with a long speech. ³³ After they had spent some time there, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. ³⁴ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and proclaiming (along with many others) the word of the Lord.

PAUL AND BARNABAS PART COMPANY

³⁶ After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s return and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they are doing.” ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to bring John called Mark along with them too, ³⁸ but Paul insisted that they should not take along this one who had left them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. ³⁹ They had a sharp disagreement, so that they parted company. Barnabas took along Mark and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and set out, commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers and sisters. ⁴¹ He passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

TIMOTHY JOINS PAUL AND SILAS

16 He also came to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple named Timothy was there, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but whose father was a Greek. ² The brothers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was Greek. ⁴ As they went through the towns, they passed on the decrees that had been decided on by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the Gentile believers to obey. ⁵ So the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number every day.



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 15:30–35

READ. Think about the power of a letter as you read these verses. Choose a word, a phrase, or an image that stands out to you. Perhaps you’ll choose the word “rejoiced” (v. 31), the phrase “encouraged and strengthened the brothers” (v. 32), or a mental image of the people reading the letter. Ruminant on your choice a moment. Review the verses and repeat them to yourself.

MEDITATE. Ask God why this word, phrase, or image stood out to you. What about it opens up the text and this event to you in a fresh way?

PRAY. Take your meditations to God in prayer. Thank Him for revealing Himself through His Word. Ask Him to highlight someone to whom you could send an encouraging letter. Invite Him to continue to communicate with you as you encourage others around you.

CONTEMPLATE. Enjoy a still moment in God’s presence.



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Acts 15:36–41

Paul and Barnabas had worked well together through many difficult circumstances. Still, Acts 15 documents a disagreement between them. At issue in the conflict was whether John Mark should be allowed to travel with them. Paul didn’t want to take John Mark because he had fallen short in the past. Barnabas was eager to give John Mark a second chance. When they couldn’t resolve the conflict, they decided to work separately.

As you consider the disputes and disagreements in your relationships, what can you do to resolve them without anger and bitterness? Pray about the conflicts in your life, asking God to help

you be a peacemaker. Ask for humility and gentleness so that you don't inflame conflicts. Pray for unity in your family, workplace, and church.



JOURNAL

Acts 16:6–10

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Why do you think the Holy Spirit wouldn't allow Paul and Silas to preach the gospel in Asia and Bithynia (see vv. 6–7)?
- Where did Paul and Silas end up preaching (see v. 10)? How did God show them where to go and share the gospel (see v. 9)?
- Have you ever questioned God when He told you no? How do you respond to God when He closes a door that you think He should open?



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 16:22–34

READ. Paul and Silas were traveling companions who took the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they went. In doing so they suffered persecutions. Look for a passage within these verses that speaks to you. Consider Paul and Silas praying and singing in prison or the salvation of the jailer and his family.

MEDITATE. Why did this stand out to you? What might the Holy Spirit be leading you to glean from meditating on this passage?

PRAY. Turn your reactions into prayer. Ask God to help you make sense of what you have learned. Determine to follow what the Holy Spirit urges you to do.

PAUL'S VISION OF THE MACEDONIAN MAN

⁶They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this, ⁸so they passed through Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" ¹⁰After Paul saw the vision, we attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

ARRIVAL AT PHILIPPI

¹¹We put out to sea from Troas and sailed a straight course to Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of that district of Macedonia, a Roman colony. We stayed in this city for some days. ¹³On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the side of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down and began to speak to the women who had assembled there. ¹⁴A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, a God-fearing woman, listened to us. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. ¹⁵After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, "If you consider me to be a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house." And she persuaded us.

PAUL AND SILAS ARE THROWN INTO PRISON

¹⁶Now as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit that enabled her to foretell the future by supernatural means. She brought her owners a great profit by fortune-telling. ¹⁷She followed behind Paul and us and kept crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸She continued to do this for many days. But Paul became greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out of her at once. ¹⁹But when her owners saw their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. ²⁰When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion. They are Jews ²¹and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us to accept or practice, since we are Romans."

²²The crowd joined the attack against them, and the magistrates tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³After they had beaten them severely, they threw them into prison and commanded the jailer to guard them securely. ²⁴Receiving such orders, he threw them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the rest of the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly a great earthquake occurred, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. Immediately all the doors

flew open, and the bonds of all the prisoners came loose. ²⁷When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, because he assumed the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul called out loudly, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” ²⁹Calling for lights, the jailer rushed in and fell down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them outside and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³²Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, along with all those who were in his house. ³³At that hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and all his family were baptized right away. ³⁴The jailer brought them into his house and set food before them, and he rejoiced greatly that he had come to believe in God, together with his entire household. ³⁵At daybreak the magistrates sent their police officers, saying, “Release those men.” ³⁶The jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent orders to release you. So come out now and go in peace.” ³⁷But Paul said to the police officers, “They had us beaten in public without a proper trial—even though we are Roman citizens—and they threw us in prison. And now they want to send us away secretly? Absolutely not! They themselves must come and escort us out!” ³⁸The police officers reported these words to the magistrates. They were frightened when they heard Paul and Silas were Roman citizens ³⁹and came and apologized to them. After they brought them out, they asked them repeatedly to leave the city. ⁴⁰When they came out of the prison, they entered Lydia’s house, and when they saw the brothers, they encouraged them and then departed.

PAUL AND SILAS AT THESSALONICA

17 After they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²Paul went to the Jews in the synagogue, as he customarily did, and on three Sabbath days he addressed them from the scriptures, ³explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and to rise from the dead, saying, “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.” ⁴Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large group of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women. ⁵But the Jews became jealous, and gathering together some worthless men from the rabble in the marketplace, they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. They attacked Jason’s house, trying to find Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly. ⁶When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials, screaming, “These people who have stirred up trouble throughout the world have come here too, ⁷and Jason has welcomed them as guests! They are all acting against Caesar’s decrees, saying there is another king named Jesus!” ⁸They caused confusion among the crowd and the city officials who heard these things. ⁹After the city officials had received bail from Jason and the others, they released them.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, be silent in God’s presence and know that the same God who released Paul and Silas from prison is with you always.



JOURNAL

Acts 17:1–4

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God’s presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- How did the people respond to Paul’s message about Jesus as the Messiah (see vv. 2–4)?
- Not everyone received Paul’s message. How do you feel when people reject your message?
- Think about Paul’s method of discussing Jesus, particularly his use of Scriptures and reasoning. How might you use the same method to tell people about Jesus?



PAUL AND SILAS AT BEREA

¹⁰The brothers sent Paul and Silas off to Berea at once, during the night. When they arrived, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹These Jews were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so. ¹²Therefore many of them believed, along with quite a few prominent Greek women and men. ¹³But when the Jews from Thessalonica heard that Paul had also proclaimed the word of God in Berea, they came there too, inciting and disturbing the crowds. ¹⁴Then the brothers sent Paul away to the coast at once, but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. ¹⁵Those who accompanied Paul escorted him as far as Athens, and after receiving an order for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

PAUL AT ATHENS

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was greatly upset because he saw the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he was addressing the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue, and in the marketplace every day those who happened to be there. ¹⁸Also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him, and some were asking, “What does this foolish babbler want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods.” (They said this because he was proclaiming the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) ¹⁹So they took Paul and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are proclaiming?” ²⁰For you are bringing some surprising things to our ears, so we want to know what they mean.” ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there used to spend their time in nothing else than telling or listening to something new.)

²²So Paul stood before the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in all respects. ²³For as I went around and observed closely your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: ‘To an unknown god.’ Therefore what you worship without knowing it, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, who



ENGAGE THROUGH ART

ECSTASY OF SAINT TERESA BY GIAN LORENZO BERNINI

Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) sculpted this masterpiece of Saint Teresa dressed in ruffled folds of heavy fabric and a beautiful angel dressed in a delicate covering. The angel holds a golden arrow with an iron tip, which is aimed at Teresa’s heart as she becomes consumed by the love of God. The gilded rays behind the figures resemble the sun’s beams. The rays, combined with the clouds on which Teresa sits, unite our world with the spiritual.

Read Acts 16:25–34. After being abruptly awakened, the Philippian jailer moved from despair and trembling to faith and joy. God revealed the prison of his soul, awakened his spirit, and set him free. As you meditate on this story, ask God to fill you with the joy of salvation.



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 17:24–34

READ. Read these verses and look for expressions of God's love. Note any phrases that catch your attention. Which of these are familiar from previous readings? Which are new?

MEDITATE. Meditate on each deliberate action God used to express His love. For example, “made the world and everything in it” (v. 24), “he is not far from each one of us” (v. 27), and “in him we live and move about and exist” (v. 28). What actions minister to you? What part of your life needs this reminder?

PRAY. Take your thoughts and turn them into prayer. Thank God for creating everything and for His infinite love for us.

CONTEMPLATE. Rest in the presence of the Creator and take comfort in His plans for you.



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 18:7–17

READ. Read these verses and seek to understand the attack on Paul. What motivated it? How did Paul manage it? Read the passage again and decide which words and phrases stand out to you. Consider “Do not be afraid, but speak” (v. 9), “assault” (v. 10), or whatever surfaces for you personally.

MEDITATE. Acts testifies to the Holy Spirit guiding believers away from dangers and also toward specific people and places to grow the kingdom. Reflect on any word or phrase that stood out to you. Why did you need to discover this?

PRAY. Allow your thoughts to become prayers. Thank God for His Word and ask Him to continue to bring you clarity.

CONTEMPLATE. Sit a quiet moment in God's presence.

is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands,²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives life and breath and everything to everyone.²⁶ From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth, determining their set times and the fixed limits of the places where they would live,²⁷ so that they would search for God and perhaps grope around for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.²⁸ For in him we live and move about and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’²⁹ So since we are God's offspring, we should not think the deity is like gold or silver or stone, an image made by human skill and imagination.³⁰ Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, he now commands all people everywhere to repent,³¹ because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he designated, having provided proof to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

³² Now when they heard about the resurrection from the dead, some began to scoff, but others said, “We will hear you again about this.”³³ So Paul left the Areopagus.³⁴ But some people joined him and believed. Among them were Dionysius, who was a member of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

PAUL AT CORINTH

18 After this Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.² There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to depart from Rome. Paul approached them,³ and because he worked at the same trade, he stayed with them and worked with them (for they were tentmakers by trade).⁴ He addressed both Jews and Greeks in the synagogue every Sabbath, attempting to persuade them.

⁵ Now when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul became wholly absorbed with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.⁶ When they opposed him and reviled him, he protested by shaking out his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am guiltless! From now on I will go to the Gentiles!”⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went to the house of a person named Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.⁸ Crispus, the president of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with his entire household, and many of the Corinthians who heard about it believed and were baptized.⁹ The Lord said to Paul by a vision in the night, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent,¹⁰ because I am with you, and no one will assault you to harm you, because I have many people in this city.”¹¹ So he stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

PAUL BEFORE THE PROCONSUL GALLIO

¹² Now while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews attacked Paul together and brought him before the judgment seat,¹³ saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God in a way

contrary to the law!"¹⁴ But just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of some crime or serious piece of villainy, I would have been justified in accepting the complaint of you Jews,¹⁵ but since it concerns points of disagreement about words and names and your own law, settle it yourselves. I will not be a judge of these things!"¹⁶ Then he had them forced away from the judgment seat.¹⁷ So they all seized Sosthenes, the president of the synagogue, and began to beat him in front of the judgment seat. Yet none of these things were of any concern to Gallio.

PAUL RETURNS TO ANTIOCH IN SYRIA

¹⁸ Paul, after staying many more days in Corinth, said farewell to the brothers and sailed away to Syria accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because he had made a vow.¹⁹ When they reached Ephesus, Paul left Priscilla and Aquila behind there, but he himself went into the synagogue and addressed the Jews.²⁰ When they asked him to stay longer, he would not consent,²¹ but said farewell to them and added, "I will come back to you again if God wills." Then he set sail from Ephesus,²² and when he arrived at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church at Jerusalem and then went down to Antioch.²³ After he spent some time there, Paul left and went through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

APOLLOS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, arrived in Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker, well-versed in the scriptures.²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and with great enthusiasm he spoke and taught accurately the facts about Jesus, although he knew only the baptism of John.²⁶ He began to speak out fearlessly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately.²⁷ When Apollos wanted to cross over to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he assisted greatly those who had believed by grace,²⁸ for he refuted the Jews vigorously in public debate, demonstrating from the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AT EPHESUS

19 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul went through the inland regions and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples there² and said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."³ So Paul said, "Into what then were you baptized?" "Into John's baptism," they replied.⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus."⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus,⁶ and when Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy.⁷ (Now there were about twelve men in all.)



JOURNAL

Acts 18:24–28

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- After Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos speak, why did they pull him aside (see vv. 25–26)?
- What did Paul and Apollos have in common when they spoke to Jews about Jesus being the Christ (cp. v. 28 with Acts 17:2)?
- Who has guided you in your faith the way Aquila and Priscilla guided Apollos? How did that person help you? How can you do the same for someone else?



JOURNAL

Acts 19:8–12

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Even though Paul boldly reasoned with the people about the kingdom of God for three months, how did some people in the synagogue respond to his message (see vv. 8–9)? What did Paul do next?
- Describe the miracles God gave Paul the power to perform (see vv. 11–12).
- Why do some people resist the gospel despite hearing persuasive arguments and witnessing miracles?

PAUL CONTINUES TO MINISTER AT EPHESUS

⁸So Paul entered the synagogue and spoke out fearlessly for three months, addressing and convincing them about the kingdom of God. ⁹But when some were stubborn and refused to believe, reviling the Way before the congregation, he left them and took the disciples with him, addressing them every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰This went on for two years, so that all who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.

THE SEVEN SONS OF SCEVA

¹¹God was performing extraordinary miracles by Paul's hands, ¹²so that when even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his body were brought to the sick, their diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. ¹³But some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were possessed by evil spirits, saying, "I sternly warn you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴(Now seven sons of a man named Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were doing this.) ¹⁵But the evil spirit replied to them, "I know about Jesus and I am acquainted with Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶Then the man who was possessed by the evil spirit jumped on them and beat them all into submission. He prevailed against them so that they fled from that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷This became known to all who lived in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks; fear came over them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised. ¹⁸Many of those who had believed came forward, confessing and making their deeds known. ¹⁹Large numbers of those who had practiced magic collected their books and burned them up in the presence of everyone. When the value of the books was added up, it was found to total 50,000 silver coins. ²⁰In this way the word of the Lord continued to grow in power and to prevail.

A RIOT IN EPHESUS

²¹Now after all these things had taken place, Paul resolved to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. He said, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." ²²So after sending two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, he himself stayed on for a while in the province of Asia.

²³At that time a great disturbance took place concerning the Way. ²⁴For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought a great deal of business to the craftsmen. ²⁵He gathered these together, along with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity comes from this business. ²⁶And you see and hear that this Paul has persuaded and turned away a large crowd, not only in Ephesus but in practically all of the province of Asia, by saying that gods made by hands are not gods at all. ²⁷There is danger not only that this business of ours will come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be regarded as nothing, and she whom all the province of Asia and the world worship will suffer the loss of her greatness."

²⁸When they heard this they became enraged and began to shout, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹The city was filled

with the uproar, and the crowd rushed to the theater together, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, the Macedonians who were Paul's traveling companions.³⁰ But when Paul wanted to enter the public assembly, the disciples would not let him.³¹ Even some of the provincial authorities who were his friends sent a message to him, urging him not to venture into the theater.³² So then some were shouting one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had met together.³³ Some of the crowd concluded it was about Alexander because the Jews had pushed him to the front. Alexander, gesturing with his hand, was wanting to make a defense before the public assembly.³⁴ But when they recognized that he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" for about two hours.³⁵ After the city secretary quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, what person is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the keeper of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image that fell from heaven?"³⁶ So because these facts are indisputable, you must keep quiet and not do anything reckless.³⁷ For you have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess.³⁸ If then Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against someone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another there.³⁹ But if you want anything in addition, it will have to be settled in a legal assembly.⁴⁰ For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause we can give to explain this disorderly gathering."⁴¹ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

PAUL TRAVELS THROUGH MACEDONIA AND GREECE

20 After the disturbance had ended, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left to go to Macedonia.² After he had gone through those regions and spoken many words of encouragement to the believers there, he came to Greece,³ where he stayed for three months. Because the Jews had made a plot against him as he was intending to sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.⁴ Paul was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, and Timothy, as well as Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.⁵ These had gone on ahead and were waiting for us in Troas.⁶ We sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and within five days we came to the others in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.⁷ On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul began to speak to the people, and because he intended to leave the next day, he extended his message until midnight.⁸ (Now there were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting.)⁹ A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, was sinking into a deep sleep while Paul continued to speak for a long time. Fast asleep, he fell down from the third story and was picked up dead.¹⁰ But Paul went down, threw himself on the young man, put his arms around him, and said, "Do not be



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Acts 20:7-12

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- What happened to Eutychus as Paul was preaching (see v. 9)?
- Describe the miracle God performed through Paul. After the miracle, what did Paul do (see v. 11)?
- This event demonstrates Paul's willingness for God to work through him in unexpected ways and at unexpected times. Are you willing and ready for God to work through you to help transform other people's lives? Pay attention to opportunities to compassionately help people in need or to tell people about the gift of God's grace through Jesus.

distressed, for he is still alive!”¹¹ Then Paul went back upstairs, and after he had broken bread and eaten, he talked with them a long time, until dawn. Then he left.¹² They took the boy home alive and were greatly comforted.

THE VOYAGE TO MILETUS

¹³We went on ahead to the ship and put out to sea for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for he had arranged it this way. He himself was intending to go there by land.¹⁴ When he met us in Assos, we took him aboard and went to Mitylene.¹⁵ We set sail from there, and on the following day we arrived off Chios. The next day we approached Samos, and the day after that we arrived at Miletus.¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so as not to spend time in the province of Asia, for he was hurrying to arrive in Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.¹⁷ From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, telling the elders of the church to come to him.

¹⁸When they arrived, he said to them, “You yourselves know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I set foot in the province of Asia,¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, and with the trials that happened to me because of the plots of the Jews.²⁰ You know that I did not hold back from proclaiming to you anything that would be helpful, and from teaching you publicly and from house to house,²¹ testifying to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.²² And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem without knowing what will happen to me there,²³ except that the Holy Spirit warns me in town after town that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me.²⁴ But I do not consider my life worth anything to myself, so that I may finish my task and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace.

²⁵“And now I know that none of you among whom I went around proclaiming the kingdom will see me again.²⁶ Therefore I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of you all.²⁷ For I did not hold back from announcing to you the whole purpose of God.²⁸ Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.²⁹ I know that after I am gone fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.³⁰ Even from among your own group men will arise, teaching perversions of the truth to draw the disciples away after them.³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears.³² And now I entrust you to God and to the message of his grace. This message is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.³³ I have desired no one’s silver or gold or clothing.³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine provided for my needs and the needs of those who were with me.³⁵ By all these things, I have shown you that by working in this way we must help the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 20:22–35

READ. Read through Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders. Read it a second time and notice which portions stand out to you. You may choose Paul’s faith through persecution (vv. 23–24), the warning of the evil to come (vv. 28–29), or anything else that stands out to you.

MEDITATE. Ponder why this stood out. Could it be that you needed this encouragement or motivation or example? Perhaps you need to hear this advice from God’s Spirit. Consider how the words you chose might connect to the circumstances you’re currently experiencing in your life.

PRAY. Pray through your newfound understanding of Paul’s farewell. Thank God for using Paul. Ask Him to use you to accomplish His purposes.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, be silent and encouraged that God is with you.

³⁶When he had said these things, he knelt down with them all and prayed. ³⁷They all began to weep loudly, and hugged Paul and kissed him, ³⁸especially saddened by what he had said, that they were not going to see him again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

21 After we tore ourselves away from them, we put out to sea, and sailing a straight course, we came to Cos, on the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ²We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went aboard, and put out to sea. ³After we sighted Cyprus and left it behind on our port side, we sailed on to Syria and put in at Tyre, because the ship was to unload its cargo there. ⁴After we located the disciples, we stayed there seven days. They repeatedly told Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. ⁵When our time was over, we left and went on our way. All of them, with their wives and children, accompanied us outside of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, ⁶we said farewell to one another. Then we went aboard the ship, and they returned to their own homes. ⁷We continued the voyage from Tyre and arrived at Ptolemais, and when we had greeted the brothers, we stayed with them for one day. ⁸On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹(He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.)

¹⁰While we remained there for a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹He came to us, took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it, and said, "The Holy Spirit says this: 'This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will tie up the man whose belt this is, and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" ¹²When we heard this, both we and the local people begged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be tied up, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴Because he could not be persuaded, we said no more except, "The Lord's will be done."

¹⁵After these days we got ready and started up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶Some of the disciples from Caesarea came along with us too, and brought us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple from the earliest times, with whom we were to stay. ¹⁷When we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us gladly. ¹⁸The next day Paul went in with us to see James, and all the elders were there. ¹⁹When Paul had greeted them, he began to explain in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all ardent observers of the law. ²¹They have been informed about you—that you teach all the Jews now living among the Gentiles to abandon Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²²What then should we do? They will no doubt hear that you have come. ²³So do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow; ²⁴take them and purify yourself



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Acts 21:10–15

When Paul was about to go to Jerusalem, his friends in Caesarea implored him not to. This was because a prophet named Agabus told Paul that people in Jerusalem would arrest him and turn him over to the Gentiles (v. 11). In a display of Spirit-filled courage, Paul said he was willing to die for the sake of Jesus (v. 13).

Reflect on Paul's courage. What gave him such strong conviction? How had God developed him into a man of bold faith? Notice that Paul did not seek suffering, but he was committed to doing the right thing even if suffering had to occur. His commitment to the Lord came above all other interests. Ask God to develop your character, courage, and heart for Him. Ask God to use you in any way He wishes.

along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself live in conformity with the law. ²⁵But regarding the Gentiles who have believed, we have written a letter, having decided that they should avoid meat that has been sacrificed to idols and blood and what has been strangled and sexual immorality.” ²⁶Then Paul took the men the next day, and after he had purified himself along with them, he went to the temple and gave notice of the completion of the days of purification, when the sacrifice would be offered for each of them. ²⁷When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from the province of Asia who had seen him in the temple area stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸shouting, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this sanctuary! Furthermore he has brought Greeks into the inner courts of the temple and made this holy place ritually unclean!” ²⁹(For they had seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him previously, and they assumed Paul had brought him into the inner temple courts.) ³⁰The whole city was stirred up, and the people rushed together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple courts, and immediately the doors were shut. ³¹While they were trying to kill him, a report was sent up to the commanding officer of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. ³²He immediately took soldiers and centurions and ran down to the crowd. When they saw the commanding officer and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³Then the commanding officer came up and arrested him and ordered him to be tied up with two chains; he then asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴But some in the crowd shouted one thing, and others something else, and when the commanding officer was unable to find out the truth because of the disturbance, he ordered Paul to be brought into the barracks. ³⁵When he came to the steps, Paul had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob, ³⁶for a crowd of people followed them, screaming, “Away with him!” ³⁷As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commanding officer, “May I say something to you?” The officer replied, “Do you know Greek? ³⁸Then you’re not that Egyptian who started a rebellion and led the 4,000 men of the ‘Assassins’ into the wilderness some time ago?” ³⁹Paul answered, “I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city. Please allow me to speak to the people.” ⁴⁰When the commanding officer had given him permission, Paul stood on the steps and gestured to the people with his hand. When they had become silent, he addressed them in Aramaic,



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Acts 21:21–40

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God’s presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Why were the people trying to kill Paul (see Acts 21, 28–29)? Who stopped the people from beating Paul and then arrested him (see Acts 21:31–33)?
- Why would Paul want to address the same people who were beating him (see v. 39)?
- How easy would it be for you to love the people trying to kill you? How do Paul’s actions line up with what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:44?

PAUL’S DEFENSE

22 “Brothers and fathers, listen to my defense that I now make to you.” ²(When they heard that he was addressing them in Aramaic, they became even quieter.) Then Paul said, ³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated with strictness under Gamaliel according to the law of our ancestors, and was zealous for God just as all of you are

today. ⁴I persecuted this Way even to the point of death, tying up both men and women and putting them in prison, ⁵as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I was on my way to make arrests there and bring the prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. ⁶As I was en route and near Damascus, about noon a very bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. ⁷Then I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' ⁸I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' ⁹Those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰So I asked, 'What should I do, Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told about everything that you have been designated to do.' ¹¹Since I could not see because of the brilliance of that light, I came to Damascus led by the hand of those who were with me. ¹²A man named Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who live there, ¹³came to me and stood beside me and said to me, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight!' And at that very moment I looked up and saw him. ¹⁴Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has already chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear a command from his mouth, ¹⁵because you will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.' ¹⁷When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸and saw the Lord saying to me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' ¹⁹I replied, 'Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat those in the various synagogues who believed in you. ²⁰And when the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing nearby, approving, and guarding the cloaks of those who were killing him.' ²¹Then he said to me, 'Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

THE ROMAN COMMANDER QUESTIONS PAUL

²²The crowd was listening to him until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Away with this man from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live!" ²³While they were screaming and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust in the air, ²⁴the commanding officer ordered Paul to be brought back into the barracks. He told them to interrogate Paul by beating him with a lash so that he could find out the reason the crowd was shouting at Paul in this way. ²⁵When they had stretched him out for the lash, Paul said to the centurion standing nearby, "Is it legal for you to lash a man who is a Roman citizen without a proper trial?" ²⁶When the centurion heard this, he went to the commanding officer and reported it, saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen." ²⁷So the commanding officer came and asked Paul, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" He replied, "Yes." ²⁸The commanding officer answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." "But I



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Acts 22:12–16

As Agabus had foretold (Acts 21:10–11), the people in Jerusalem revolted against Paul and turned him over to the Roman authorities (Acts 21:30–33). As he was being led to prison, Paul was granted a moment to defend himself. Standing before both the Roman authorities and the Jewish mob who wanted to kill him, he spoke at length about how he had come to faith in Jesus. During his discourse, Paul recounted how a devout Jew named Ananias had helped him come to faith in Jesus and regain his sight.

What do you notice about Paul's calling, as described by Ananias? First God called Paul to know His will (v. 14). Then God sent Paul to be a witness to the nations about all he had seen and heard (v. 15). As you pray, ask God to give you a deeper understanding of His will. Then ask God to use you among people who haven't yet learned about Him.



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 22:22–29

READ. Read this passage about Paul being bound though he was innocent. Choose a word or phrase that stands out to you in the verses. Consider details such as feelings or how God protected Paul.

MEDITATE. Meditate on what it would have been like to be in Paul's situation. What action or words of his would you have found most helpful? What else would you have wanted to say or do? Is there an area of your life that needs to mirror Paul more?

PRAY. Turn your thoughts and feelings into prayer. Ask God to help you behave more like Him, and thank Him for all He has done for you already.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, rest peacefully in God's presence. Know that just as He protected and guided Paul, He will protect and guide you.

was even born a citizen,” Paul replied. ²⁹Then those who were about to interrogate him stayed away from him, and the commanding officer was frightened when he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had had him tied up.

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

³⁰The next day, because the commanding officer wanted to know the true reason Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and the whole council to assemble. He then brought Paul down and had him stand before them.

23 Paul looked directly at the council and said, “Brothers, I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God to this day.” ²At that the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit there judging me according to the law, and in violation of the law you order me to be struck?” ⁴Those standing near him said, “Do you dare insult God’s high priest?” ⁵Paul replied, “I did not realize, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, *‘You must not speak evil about a ruler of your people.’*”

⁶Then when Paul noticed that part of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, he shouted out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead!” ⁷When he said this, an argument began between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸(For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) ⁹There was a great commotion, and some experts in the law from the party of the Pharisees stood up and protested strongly, “We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” ¹⁰When the argument became so great the commanding officer feared that they would tear Paul to pieces, he ordered the detachment to go down, take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Have courage, for just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

THE PLOT TO KILL PAUL

¹²When morning came, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul. ¹³There were more than forty of them who formed this conspiracy. ¹⁴They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have bound ourselves with a solemn oath not to partake of anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵So now you and the council request the commanding officer to bring him down to you, as if you were going to determine his case by conducting a more thorough inquiry. We are ready to kill him before he comes near this place.”

¹⁶But when the son of Paul’s sister heard about the ambush, he came and entered the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commanding officer, for he has something to report to him.”



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Acts 23:8–11

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God’s presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- In what ways were the beliefs of the Sadducees and the Pharisees different?
- How was Paul rescued from the conflict between the two groups (see vv. 9–10)? How did God encourage Paul (see v. 11)?
- How can you trust God to protect you during times of trouble? How does He encourage you after you endure trouble or suffering?

¹⁸So the centurion took him and brought him to the commanding officer and said, “The prisoner Paul called me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.” ¹⁹The commanding officer took him by the hand, withdrew privately, and asked, “What is it that you want to report to me?” ²⁰He replied, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as if they were going to inquire more thoroughly about him. ²¹So do not let them persuade you to do this, because more than forty of them are lying in ambush for him. They have bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink anything until they have killed him, and now they are ready, waiting for you to agree to their request.” ²²Then the commanding officer sent the young man away, directing him, “Tell no one that you have reported these things to me.” ²³Then he summoned two of the centurions and said, “Make ready 200 soldiers to go to Caesarea along with 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen by nine o’clock tonight, ²⁴and provide mounts for Paul to ride so that he may be brought safely to Felix the governor.” ²⁵He wrote a letter that went like this:

²⁶Claudius Lysias to His Excellency Governor Felix, greetings. ²⁷This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, when I came up with the detachment and rescued him, because I had learned that he was a Roman citizen. ²⁸Since I wanted to know what charge they were accusing him of, I brought him down to their council. ²⁹I found he was accused with reference to controversial questions about their law, but no charge against him deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰When I was informed there would be a plot against this man, I sent him to you at once, also ordering his accusers to state their charges against him before you.

³¹So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him to Antipatris during the night. ³²The next day they let the horsemen go on with him, and they returned to the barracks. ³³When the horsemen came to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. ³⁴When the governor had read the letter, he asked what province he was from. When he learned that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said, “I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive too.” Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.

THE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST PAUL

24 After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought formal charges against Paul to the governor. ²When Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, “We have experienced a lengthy time of peace through your rule, and reforms are being made in this nation through your foresight. ³Most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this everywhere and in every way with all gratitude. ⁴But so that I



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Acts 23:23–35

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God’s presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- How did God use government officials to rescue and protect Paul (see vv. 23–24)? What reason did the commander give for rescuing Paul (see v. 27)?
- The commander determined Paul had done nothing wrong and didn’t deserve punishment (see vv. 28–29). Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation, where you were falsely accused and then exonerated? What emotions did you experience?
- Take a few moments to thank God for protecting and rescuing you, even when you don’t realize it.



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 24:10–21

READ. Read through Paul's defense a few times. Choose one of Paul's statements that you find most moving. Repeat it a couple of times. You could choose "I have a hope in God" (v. 15) or "I do my best to always have a clear conscience toward God and toward people" (v. 16).

MEDITATE. Consider the statement you chose. Why is it significant to you? What does it mean to each area of your life? Is there an attitude or habit you need to change to align with this statement?

PRAY. Take your meditative thoughts and turn them into prayers. Thank God for revealing to you how to apply His Word. Ask that the Holy Spirit nudge you to obey God in particular ways.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, be still in God's presence. Find joy in the resurrection and peace in God's love for you. Take these feelings into the rest of your day.



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 24:22–27

READ. Read through the account of Felix and Paul to understand Felix's character. What is your emotional response to Felix's behavior? What did they discuss that you find interesting? You might choose "righteousness" or "self-control" (v. 25).

MEDITATE. Meditate on why this part of their discussion stood out to you. Does the word or phrase describe your character? Your actions? When do you find yourself acting in similar ways? Ask God to show you the action or truth from this passage that He most wants you to incorporate into your speaking and doing.

may not delay you any further, I beg you to hear us briefly with your customary graciousness. ⁵For we have found this man to be a troublemaker, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶He even tried to desecrate the temple, so we arrested him. ⁸When you examine him yourself, you will be able to learn from him about all these things we are accusing him of doing." ⁹The Jews also joined in the verbal attack, claiming that these things were true.

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE FELIX

¹⁰When the governor gestured for him to speak, Paul replied, "Because I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years, I confidently make my defense. ¹¹As you can verify for yourself, not more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹²They did not find me arguing with anyone or stirring up a crowd in the temple courts or in the synagogues or throughout the city, ¹³nor can they prove to you the things they are accusing me of doing. ¹⁴But I confess this to you, that I worship the God of our ancestors according to the Way (which they call a sect), believing everything that is according to the law and that is written in the prophets. ¹⁵I have a hope in God (a hope that these men themselves accept too) that there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. ¹⁶This is the reason I do my best to always have a clear conscience toward God and toward people. ¹⁷After several years I came to bring to my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings, ¹⁸which I was doing when they found me in the temple, ritually purified, without a crowd or a disturbance. ¹⁹But there are some Jews from the province of Asia who should be here before you and bring charges, if they have anything against me. ²⁰Or these men here should tell what crime they found me guilty of when I stood before the council, ²¹other than this one thing I shouted out while I stood before them: 'I am on trial before you today concerning the resurrection of the dead.'"

²²Then Felix, who understood the facts concerning the Way more accurately, adjourned their hearing, saying, "When Lysias the commanding officer comes down, I will decide your case." ²³He ordered the centurion to guard Paul, but to let him have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from meeting his needs.

PAUL SPEAKS REPEATEDLY TO FELIX

²⁴Some days later, when Felix arrived with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵While Paul was discussing righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for now, and when I have an opportunity, I will send for you." ²⁶At the same time he was also hoping that Paul would give him money, and for this reason he sent for Paul as often as possible and talked with him. ²⁷After two years had passed, Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, and because he wanted to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

PAUL APPEALS TO CAESAR

25 Now three days after Festus arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ²So the chief priests and the most prominent men of the Jews brought formal charges against Paul to him. ³Requesting him to do them a favor against Paul, they urged Festus to summon him to Jerusalem, planning an ambush to kill him along the way. ⁴Then Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and he himself intended to go there shortly. ⁵“So,” he said, “let your leaders go down there with me, and if this man has done anything wrong, they may bring charges against him.”

⁶After Festus had stayed not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he sat on the judgment seat and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷When he arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges that they were not able to prove. ⁸Paul said in his defense, “I have committed no offense against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.” ⁹But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, asked Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and be tried before me there on these charges?” ¹⁰Paul replied, “I am standing before Caesar’s judgment seat, where I should be tried. I have done nothing wrong to the Jews, as you also know very well. ¹¹If then I am in the wrong and have done anything that deserves death, I am not trying to escape dying, but if not one of their charges against me is true, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!” ¹²Then, after conferring with his council, Festus replied, “You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go!”

FESTUS ASKS KING AGRIPPA FOR ADVICE

¹³After several days had passed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. ¹⁴While they were staying there many days, Festus explained Paul’s case to the king to get his opinion, saying, “There is a man left here as a prisoner by Felix. ¹⁵When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me about him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. ¹⁶I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to hand over anyone before the accused had met his accusers face-to-face and had been given an opportunity to make a defense against the accusation. ¹⁷So after they came back here with me, I did not postpone the case, but the next day I sat on the judgment seat and ordered the man to be brought. ¹⁸When his accusers stood up, they did not charge him with any of the evil deeds I had suspected. ¹⁹Rather they had several points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a man named Jesus who was dead, whom Paul claimed to be alive. ²⁰Because I was at a loss how I could investigate these matters, I asked if he were willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried there on these charges. ²¹But when Paul appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of His Majesty the Emperor, I ordered him to be kept under guard until I could send him to Caesar.” ²²Agrippa said to Festus, “I would also like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” he replied, “you will hear him.”

PRAY. Take your thoughts, fears, and emotions to God. Pray that the Holy Spirit would help you make sense of what you’re feeling and thinking. Thank God for His Word.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, sit quietly in God’s presence. Feel comforted. Finish your time by deciding to act on your realizations from this passage.



JOURNAL

Acts 25:8–12

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God’s presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- How did Paul respond to the charges against him (see v. 8)?
- Why did Festus ask Paul if he would willingly stand trial in Jerusalem (see v. 9)? Why did Paul refuse?
- Why was Paul willing to accept death as a punishment (see v. 11)? Did he deserve death? Why or why not?
- What would you willingly endure because of your faith?



PICTURE IT

Acts 25:18–27

PREPARE. Quiet yourself and ask God to prepare your heart and guide your imagination.

PICTURE. Imagine you are in the crowd listening to the accusations against Paul. Can you see the confusion on Agrippa’s face as he listens to seemingly irrelevant accusations? Can you hear the shouts of the crowd as they fight to have Paul killed? Feel the dust at your feet stir as many people walk past, shouting to end Paul’s life. Smell the mix of prominent men and poor townspeople gathered together. Most importantly,

feel the confusion of Festus as he finds no reason that Paul should be imprisoned.

PRAY. Thank God for protecting Paul throughout his life, and find comfort in knowing He does the same for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you share God's truth even in the midst of persecution.

PAUL BEFORE KING AGRIPPA AND BERNICE

²³So the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience hall, along with the senior military officers and the prominent men of the city. When Festus gave the order, Paul was brought in. ²⁴Then Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you who are present here with us, you see this man about whom the entire Jewish populace petitioned me both in Jerusalem and here, shouting loudly that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵But I found that he had done nothing that deserved death, and when he appealed to His Majesty the Emperor, I decided to send him. ²⁶But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after this preliminary hearing I may have something to write. ²⁷For it seems unreasonable to me to send a prisoner without clearly indicating the charges against him."

PAUL OFFERS HIS DEFENSE

26 So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul held out his hand and began his defense:

²"Regarding all the things I have been accused of by the Jews, King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate that I am about to make my defense before you today, ³because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversial issues of the Jews. Therefore I ask you to listen to me patiently. ⁴Now all the Jews know the way I lived from my youth, spending my life from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. ⁵They know, because they have known me from time past, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. ⁶And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, ⁷a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly serve God night and day. Concerning this hope the Jews are accusing me, Your Majesty! ⁸Why do you people think it is unbelievable that God raises the dead? ⁹Of course, I myself was convinced that it was necessary to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus the Nazarene. ¹⁰And that is what I did in Jerusalem: Not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons by the authority I received from the chief priests, but I also cast my vote against them when they were sentenced to death. ¹¹I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to force them to blaspheme. Because I was so furiously enraged at them, I went to persecute them even in foreign cities.

¹²"While doing this very thing, as I was going to Damascus with authority and complete power from the chief priests, ¹³about noon along the road, Your Majesty, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining everywhere around me and those traveling with me. ¹⁴When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? You are hurting yourself by kicking against the goads.' ¹⁵So I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But get up and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this reason, to designate you in advance as a servant and witness to the things you have seen and to the things in which I will appear



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 26:4-14

READ. Read through this passage about Paul sharing how he met and accepted Jesus. As you read through a second time, choose a word or phrase that stands out to you. You could choose "hope in the promise made by God" (v. 6) or "furiously enraged" (v. 11).

MEDITATE. Repeat this word or phrase to yourself and meditate upon it. Why do you think it caught your attention? Do you need encouragement in an area of your life? Is there a change you need to make?

PRAY. Use your newfound thoughts to talk with God about how to apply this verse in your context. Thank God for revealing His Word to you. Ask that the Holy Spirit would empower you.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, sit still in God's presence. Find encouragement in Paul's testimony, and know that God can forgive you and draw you to Himself.

to you.¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.⁷

¹⁹“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,²⁰ but I declared to those in Damascus first, and then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds consistent with repentance.²¹ For this reason the Jews, after they seized me while I was in the temple courts, were trying to kill me.²² I have experienced help from God to this day, and so I stand testifying to both small and great, saying nothing except what the prophets and Moses said was going to happen:²³ that the Christ was to suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, to proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

²⁴As Paul was saying these things in his defense, Festus exclaimed loudly, “You have lost your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane!”²⁵ But Paul replied, “I have not lost my mind, most excellent Festus, but am speaking true and rational words.²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and I am speaking freely to him, because I cannot believe that any of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner.²⁷ Do you believe the prophets, King Agrippa? I know that you believe.”²⁸ Agrippa said to Paul, “In such a short time are you persuading me to become a Christian?”²⁹ Paul replied, “I pray to God that whether in a short or a long time not only you but also all those who are listening to me today could become such as I am, except for these chains.”

³⁰So the king got up, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them,³¹ and as they were leaving they said to one another, “This man is not doing anything deserving death or imprisonment.”³² Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

PAUL AND COMPANY SAIL FOR ROME

27 When it was decided we would sail to Italy, they handed over Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius.² We went on board a ship from Adramyttium that was about to sail to various ports along the coast of the province of Asia and put out to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.³ The next day we put in at Sidon, and Julius, treating Paul kindly, allowed him to go to his friends so they could provide him with what he needed.⁴ From there we put out to sea and sailed under the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us.⁵ After we had sailed across the open sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we put in at Myra in Lycia.⁶ There the centurion found a ship from Alexandria sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it.⁷ We sailed slowly for many days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus. Because the wind prevented us from going any farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone.⁸ With difficulty we sailed along the coast of Crete and came to a place called Fair Havens that was near the town of Lasea.



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Acts 26:17–29

Standing before King Agrippa in Rome, Paul spoke about how he met Jesus and came to faith. In his discourse, Paul told the king that his message over the years had always been aligned with what the Old Testament prophets had said about the coming Messiah—that Jesus would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and that He would speak truth to Jews and Gentiles (v. 23).

Imagine if you had been King Agrippa listening to Paul talk about Jesus. How would you have responded? As you pray, focus on Paul’s simple, truthful message about Jesus. Ask God to enable you to speak frankly about Jesus among your friends and coworkers who don’t yet know Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide those conversations and give you discernment and wisdom.



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 27:8–20

READ. Read this passage once from the perspective of the ship's crew and once from Paul's perspective. Then choose a word or phrase that stands out to you.

MEDITATE. As you consider the word you chose, what comes to mind? Is there an area of your life that needs God's transforming power today? Is there an attitude you need to change? Did you need encouragement to behave in a particular way today?

PRAY. Take your meditative thoughts and turn them into prayers. Thank God for giving you His Word. Ask that He would lead you to live out the faithful actions He is convicting you to do.

CONTEMPLATE. After praying, be silent in God's presence. Rest knowing that God's guidance is good, His words are good, and His love is real.



JOURNAL

Acts 27:21–26

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- Why did Paul reprimand the crew (see v. 21)? How did God reassure Paul, and how did Paul reassure the crew (see vv. 22–25)?
- If you had been one of the crew members, would you have believed Paul's words?
- Reflect on a time in your life when everything seemed to be going wrong. How did God reassure you that He would take care of you? Thank God for His faithfulness to you.

CAUGHT IN A VIOLENT STORM

⁹Since considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous because the fast was already over, Paul advised them, ¹⁰“Men, I can see the voyage is going to end in disaster and great loss not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” ¹¹But the centurion was more convinced by the captain and the ship's owner than by what Paul said. ¹²Because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there. They hoped that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there. ¹³When a gentle south wind sprang up, they thought they could carry out their purpose, so they weighed anchor and sailed close along the coast of Crete. ¹⁴Not long after this, a hurricane-force wind called the northeaster blew down from the island. ¹⁵When the ship was caught in it and could not head into the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶As we ran under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were able with difficulty to get the ship's boat under control. ¹⁷After the crew had hoisted it aboard, they used supports to undergird the ship. Fearing they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor, thus letting themselves be driven along. ¹⁸The next day, because we were violently battered by the storm, they began throwing the cargo overboard, ¹⁹and on the third day they threw the ship's gear overboard with their own hands. ²⁰When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and a violent storm continued to batter us, we finally abandoned all hope of being saved.

²¹Since many of them had no desire to eat, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not put out to sea from Crete, thus avoiding this damage and loss. ²²And now I advise you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only the ship will be lost. ²³For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve came to me ²⁴and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul! You must stand before Caesar, and God has graciously granted you the safety of all who are sailing with you.’ ²⁵Therefore keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be just as I have been told. ²⁶But we must run aground on some island.”

²⁷When the fourteenth night had come, while we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected they were approaching some land. ²⁸They took soundings and found the water was twenty fathoms deep; when they had sailed a little farther they took soundings again and found it was fifteen fathoms deep. ²⁹Because they were afraid that we would run aground on the rocky coast, they threw out four anchors from the stern and wished for day to appear. ³⁰Then when the sailors tried to escape from the ship and were lowering the ship's boat into the sea, pretending that they were going to put out anchors from the bow, ³¹Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” ³²Then the soldiers cut the ropes of the ship's boat and let it drift away.

³³As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have been in suspense and have gone without food; you have eaten nothing.

³⁴Therefore I urge you to take some food, for this is important for your survival. For not one of you will lose a hair from his head.”
³⁵After he said this, Paul took bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all, broke it, and began to eat. ³⁶So all of them were encouraged and took food themselves. ³⁷(We were in all 276 persons on the ship.) ³⁸When they had eaten enough to be satisfied, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea.

PAUL IS SHIPWRECKED

³⁹When day came, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. ⁴⁰So they slipped the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the linkage that bound the steering oars together. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and steered toward the beach. ⁴¹But they encountered a patch of crosscurrents and ran the ship aground; the bow stuck fast and could not be moved, but the stern was being broken up by the force of the waves. ⁴²Now the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners so that none of them would escape by swimming away. ⁴³But the centurion, wanting to save Paul’s life, prevented them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land, ⁴⁴and the rest were to follow, some on planks and some on pieces of the ship. And in this way all were brought safely to land.

PAUL ON MALTA

28 After we had safely reached shore, we learned that the island was called Malta. ²The local inhabitants showed us extraordinary kindness, for they built a fire and welcomed us all because it had started to rain and was cold. ³When Paul had gathered a bundle of brushwood and was putting it on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. ⁴When the local people saw the creature hanging from Paul’s hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer! Although he has escaped from the sea, Justice herself has not allowed him to live!” ⁵However, Paul shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶But they were expecting that he was going to swell up or suddenly drop dead. So after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

⁷Now in the region around that place were fields belonging to the chief official of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us hospitably as guests for three days. ⁸The father of Publius lay sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and after praying, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹After this had happened, many of the people on the island who were sick also came and were healed. ¹⁰They also bestowed many honors, and when we were preparing to sail, they gave us all the supplies we needed.

PAUL FINALLY REACHES ROME

¹¹After three months we put out to sea in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered at the island and had the “Heavenly Twins” as its figurehead. ¹²We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 28:1–10

READ. Read through this passage to find the impression the natives had about Paul and how it changed over time. Then read to find how the natives helped Paul and how Paul helped them. Pick out a word or phrase that stands out to you. Consider “extraordinary kindness” (v. 2) or “bestowed many honors” (v. 10).

MEDITATE. As you repeat your phrase to yourself, contemplate why it is significant. Is there a part of your life that needs to change? Is there an attitude or value that needs to conform to be more like Jesus? Is there an action you need to start or stop?

PRAY. Turn your meditative thoughts into prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you and empower you to act.

CONTEMPLATE. Be still in God’s presence. Be comforted that He takes care of all His people, including you.



PICTURE IT

Acts 28:17–24

PREPARE. Quiet yourself and ask God to prepare your heart and guide your imagination.

PICTURE. Picture yourself as one of the people in the crowd who have been listening to Paul witness about Christ from morning until evening. His voice becomes hoarse while his enthusiasm grows as he speaks of Jesus. Focus on the beauty of Paul's words. As you listen, what do you feel? What do some in the crowd find hard to believe about Paul's testimony? What has convinced others?

PRAY. Ask God to give you the passion Paul had for speaking about Christ. Pray that the Holy Spirit will nudge you when you have an opportunity to share your faith. Most of all, thank God for all the believers who came before you so you could have everlasting life in Christ.



JOURNAL

Acts 28:25–31

PREPARE YOUR HEART.

Open yourself to God's presence. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal Himself through His Word. Then read the passage.

REFLECT AND WRITE.

- What did Paul say the Jews still disagreed about and discussed at great length (see vv. 25–28)?
- Even at the end of his life Paul was preaching and teaching “with compete boldness” (v. 31). Do you feel confident when you talk about Jesus? Why or why not?
- Who in your life needs to hear about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (see v. 31)? How can you start this conversation?

days.¹³ From there we cast off and arrived at Rhegium, and after one day a south wind sprang up and on the second day we came to Puteoli.¹⁴ There we found some brothers and were invited to stay with them seven days. And in this way we came to Rome.¹⁵ The brothers from there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. When he saw them, Paul thanked God and took courage.¹⁶ When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

PAUL ADDRESSES THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ROME

¹⁷ After three days Paul called the local Jewish leaders together. When they had assembled, he said to them, “Brothers, although I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, from Jerusalem I was handed over as a prisoner to the Romans.¹⁸ When they had heard my case, they wanted to release me, because there was no basis for a death sentence against me.¹⁹ But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar—not that I had some charge to bring against my own people.²⁰ So for this reason I have asked to see you and speak with you, for I am bound with this chain because of the hope of Israel.”²¹ They replied, “We have received no letters from Judea about you, nor have any of the brothers come from there and reported or said anything bad about you.²² But we would like to hear from you what you think, for regarding this sect we know that people everywhere speak against it.”

²³ They set a day to meet with him, and they came to him where he was staying in even greater numbers. From morning until evening he explained things to them, testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets.²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others refused to believe.²⁵ So they began to leave, unable to agree among themselves, after Paul made one last statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah²⁶ when he said,

*‘Go to this people and say,
“You will keep on hearing, but will never understand,
and you will keep on looking, but will never perceive.*

²⁷ *For the heart of this people has become dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have closed their eyes,
so that they would not see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.’”*

²⁸ “Therefore be advised that this salvation from God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen!”¹¹

³⁰ Paul lived there two whole years in his own rented quarters and welcomed all who came to him,³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete boldness and without restriction.