

THE
ACTS
OF THE APOSTLES

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 on 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 Palestinian and Hellenistic 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; Is. 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 shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end 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 ends 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.

PROLOGUE

1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ²until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, ³to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

THE HOLY SPIRIT PROMISED

⁴ And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, **“which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; ⁵for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”** ⁶Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷And He said to them, **“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN

⁹ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

THE UPPER ROOM PRAYER MEETING

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son of Alphaeus* and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son of James*. ¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

MATTHIAS CHOSEN

¹⁵ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, ¹⁶“Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; ¹⁷for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.”

¹⁸ (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all those



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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.

dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

²⁰“For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

‘Let his dwelling place be desolate,
And let no one live in it’;

and,

‘Let another take his office.’

²¹“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

²³And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” ²⁶And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

2 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ²And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

THE CROWD’S RESPONSE

⁵And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. ⁶And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. ⁷Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? ⁸And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” ¹²So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?”

¹³Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.”

PETER’S SERMON

¹⁴But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusa-

lem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. ¹⁵For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

- 17 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.
- 18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.
- 19 I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.
- 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and
awesome day of the LORD.
- 21 And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD
Shall be saved.'

²²"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— ²³Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. ²⁵For David says concerning Him:

- 'I foresaw the LORD always before my face,
For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.
- 26 Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.
- 27 For You will not leave my soul in Hades,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
- 28 You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of joy in Your presence.'

²⁹"Men and brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, ³¹he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. ³²This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. ³³Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

³⁴"For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:



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.

**CONTEMPLATE**

Acts 2:42–47

READ. Read this short passage twice. Pick out a word or phrase that stands out. Consider “continued steadfastly” (v. 42), “fear came upon every soul” (v. 43), or “things in common” (v. 44).

MEDITATE. Think about this passage. How can you choose steadfastness, show respectful fear 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 LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

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

37 Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?”

38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

A VITAL CHURCH GROWS

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

**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.

A LAME MAN HEALED

3 Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*. 2 And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; 3 who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. 4 And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” 5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6 Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” 7 And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8 So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God. 10 Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

PREACHING IN SOLOMON’S PORTICO

11 Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch

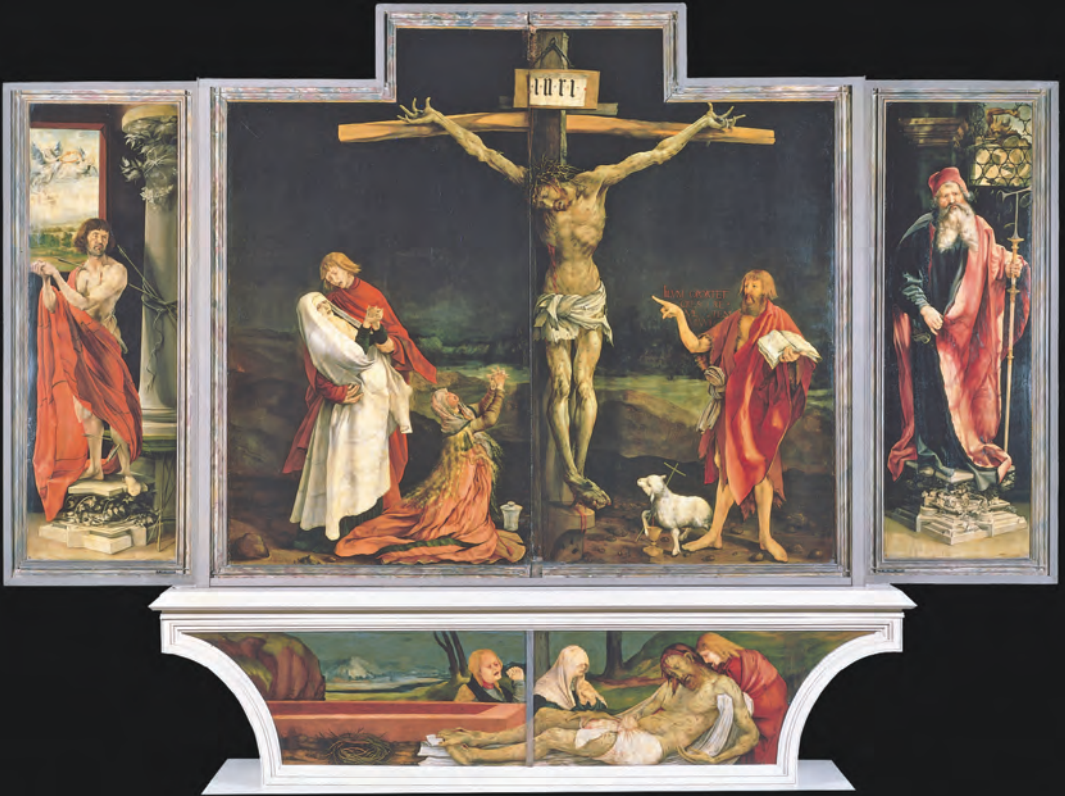


ENGAGE THROUGH ART

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.



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



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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 Acts 3:16 teach about Jesus and His power even after death? How do you see this power in your own life?



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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

which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. ¹²So when Peter saw *it*, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *Him* go. ¹⁴But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. ¹⁶And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

¹⁷"Yet now, brethren, I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did* also your rulers. ¹⁸But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. ¹⁹Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, ²⁰and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. ²²For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. ²³And it shall be *that* every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' ²⁴Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. ²⁵You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' ²⁶To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities."

PETER AND JOHN ARRESTED

4 Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, ²being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

ADDRESSING THE SANHEDRIN

⁵And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, ⁶as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. ⁷And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: ⁹If we this day

are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, ¹⁰let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. ¹¹This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ ¹²Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

THE NAME OF JESUS FORBIDDEN

¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. ¹⁵But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.”

¹⁸So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” ²¹So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. ²²For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

PRAYER FOR BOLDNESS

²³And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:

‘Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?

²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the LORD and against His Christ.’

²⁷“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

with the Holy Spirit so you, like Peter, can answer with boldness.



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Acts 4:2–26

The religious officials 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 officials (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.



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Acts 5:1–11

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.

- 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 4:34–37)?
- How did the tragic event with Ananias and Sapphira affect the church (see 5:11)?
- 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?

³¹And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

SHARING IN ALL THINGS

³²Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

³⁶And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

5 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. ²And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware *of it*, and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

⁵Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. ⁶And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

⁷Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?"

She said, "Yes, for so much."

⁹Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have 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." ¹⁰Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband. ¹¹So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

CONTINUING POWER IN THE CHURCH

¹²And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. ¹³Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. ¹⁴And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of

them. ¹⁶Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

IMPRISONED APOSTLES FREED

¹⁷Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, ¹⁸and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. ¹⁹But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰“Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.”

²¹And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

APOSTLES ON TRIAL AGAIN

²²But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, ²³saying, “Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!” ²⁴Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. ²⁵So one came and told them, saying, “Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!”

²⁶Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. ²⁷And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, ²⁸saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!”

²⁹But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are His witnesses to these things, and *so* also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

GAMALIEL’S ADVICE

³³When they heard *this*, they were furious and plotted to kill them. ³⁴Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. ³⁵And he said to them: “Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. ³⁶For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. ³⁷After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. ³⁸And now



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: “good reputation,” “full of the Holy 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.



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?

I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; ³⁹but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.”

⁴⁰And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. ⁴²And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

SEVEN CHOSEN TO SERVE

6 Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ²Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

⁵And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

⁷Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

STEPHEN ACCUSED OF BLASPHEMY

⁸And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. ¹⁰And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. ¹¹Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” ¹²And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council. ¹³They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” ¹⁵And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

STEPHEN’S ADDRESS: THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

7 Then the high priest said, “Are these things so?” ²And he said, “Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, ³and said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to

a land that I will show you.’⁴ Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.⁵ And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.⁶ But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years.⁷ ‘And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.’⁸ Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.

THE PATRIARCHS IN EGYPT

⁹ ‘And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him¹⁰ and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.¹¹ Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.¹² But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.¹³ And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to the Pharaoh.¹⁴ Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people.¹⁵ So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers.¹⁶ And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father* of Shechem.

GOD DELIVERS ISRAEL BY MOSES

¹⁷ ‘But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt¹⁸ till another king arose who did not know Joseph.¹⁹ This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.²⁰ At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months.²¹ But when he was set out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son.²² And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

²³ ‘Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.²⁴ And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian.²⁵ For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.²⁶ And the next day he appeared to *two* of them as they were fighting, and *tried* to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?’²⁷ But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you did the



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 “bondage” (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.

Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹ Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

³⁰ “And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. ³¹ When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, ³² *saying*, ‘I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and dared not look. ³³ Then the LORD said to him, “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. ³⁴ I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.”

³⁵ “This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

ISRAEL REBELS AGAINST GOD

³⁷ “This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’

³⁸ “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, ³⁹ whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; *as for* this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. ⁴² Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets:

‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and
sacrifices *during* forty years in the wilderness,
O house of Israel?’

⁴³ You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch,
And the star of your god Remphan,
Images which you made to worship;
And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’

GOD’S TRUE TABERNACLE

⁴⁴ “Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, ⁴⁵ which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But Solomon built Him a house.

⁴⁸ “However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

- ⁴⁹ 'Heaven is My throne,
And earth is My footstool.
What house will you build for Me? says the LORD,
Or what is the place of My rest?
⁵⁰ Has My hand not made all these things?'

ISRAEL RESISTS THE HOLY SPIRIT

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, ⁵³ who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*."

STEPHEN THE MARTYR

⁵⁴ When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

SAUL PERSECUTES THE CHURCH

8 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him.

³ As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

CHRIST IS PREACHED IN SAMARIA

⁴ Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. ⁵ Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. ⁶ And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ And there was great joy in that city.

THE SORCERER'S PROFESSION OF FAITH

⁹ But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰ to



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 gnashing 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?

whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.”¹¹ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.¹³ Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

THE SORCERER’S SIN

¹⁴ Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,¹⁵ who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.¹⁷ Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,¹⁹ saying, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

²⁰ But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!²¹ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.²³ For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”

²⁴ Then Simon answered and said, “Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.”

²⁵ So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

CHRIST IS PREACHED TO AN ETHIOPIAN

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert.²⁷ So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,²⁸ was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.”

³⁰ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.³² The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

³³ In His humiliation His justice was taken away,



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 “was reading Isaiah” (v. 28), “the Spirit said to Philip” (v. 29), or “What hinders 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.

And who will declare His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth.”

³⁴So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” ³⁵Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. ³⁶Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, *here is water*. What hinders me from being baptized?”

³⁷Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

³⁸So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

THE DAMASCUS ROAD: SAUL CONVERTED

9 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

³As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**”

⁵And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”

Then the Lord said, “**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**”

⁶So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Then the Lord *said* to him, “**Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.**”

⁷And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. ⁸Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

ANANIAS BAPTIZES SAUL

¹⁰Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “**Ananias.**”

And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”

¹¹So the Lord *said* to him, “**Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.** ¹²And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his hand* on him, so that he might receive his sight.”

¹³Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints



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 vessel” 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?

in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

¹⁵But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

¹⁷And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

¹⁹So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

SAUL PREACHES CHRIST

²⁰Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

²¹Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?”

²²But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

SAUL ESCAPES DEATH

²³Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ²⁴But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. ²⁵Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.

SAUL AT JERUSALEM

²⁶And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. ²⁹And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. ³⁰When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

THE CHURCH PROSPERS

³¹Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

AENEAS HEALED

³²Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all *parts of the country*, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in



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?

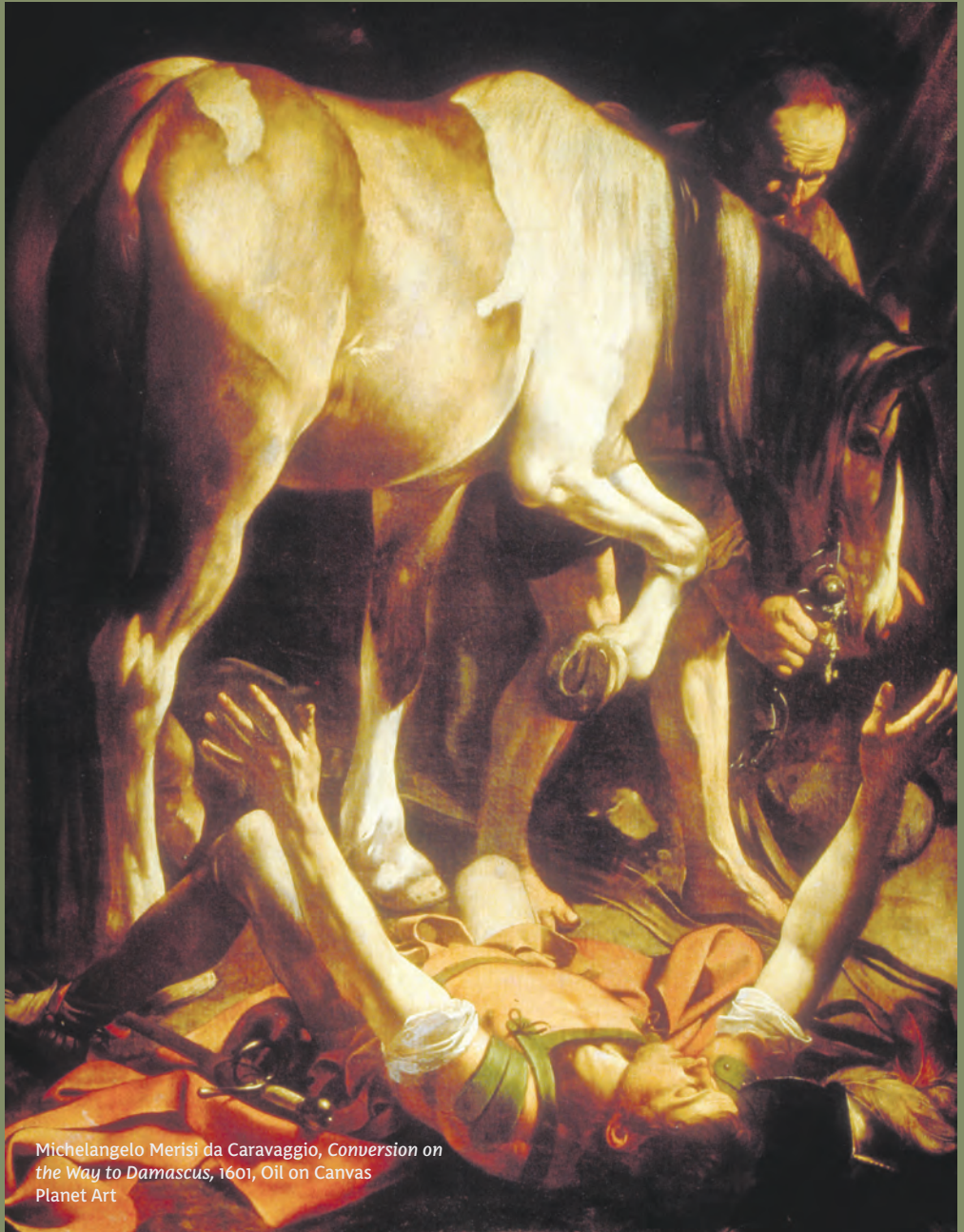


ENGAGE THROUGH ART

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

Lydda. ³³There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. ³⁴And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately. ³⁵So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

DORCAS RESTORED TO LIFE

³⁶At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. ³⁷But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper room. ³⁸And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring *him* not to delay in coming to them. ³⁹Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought *him* to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹Then he gave her *his* hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴²And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. ⁴³So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

CORNELIUS SENDS A DELEGATION

10 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, ²a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. ³About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!”

⁴And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?”

So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. ⁵Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. ⁶He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.” ⁷And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. ⁸So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

PETER'S VISION

⁹The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. ¹⁰Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance ¹¹and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. ¹²In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ¹³And a voice came to him, “**Rise, Peter; kill and eat.**”



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), “feared God” (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.

¹⁴But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.”

¹⁵And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, “**What God has cleansed you must not call common.**” ¹⁶This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

SUMMONED TO CAESAREA

¹⁷Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate. ¹⁸And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

¹⁹While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking you. ²⁰Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.”

²¹Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, “Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?”

²²And they said, “Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.”

²³Then he invited them in and lodged *them*.

On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

PETER MEETS CORNELIUS

²⁴And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*. ²⁶But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” ²⁷And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. ²⁸Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. ²⁹Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?”

³⁰So Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, ³¹and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. ³²Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ ³³So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.”

PREACHING TO CORNELIUS’ HOUSEHOLD

³⁴Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by



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.

Him. ³⁶The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—³⁷that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. ³⁹And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. ⁴⁰Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, ⁴¹not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. ⁴²And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”

THE HOLY SPIRIT FALLS ON THE GENTILES

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. ⁴⁵And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.

Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?” ⁴⁸And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

PETER DEFENDS GOD’S GRACE

11 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ²And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, ³saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!”

⁴But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying: ⁵“I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. ⁶When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ⁷And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘**Rise, Peter; kill and eat.**’ ⁸But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.’ ⁹But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘**What God has cleansed you must not call common.**’ ¹⁰Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹²Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴who will tell you words by which you and all your

household will be saved.¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.¹⁶ Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’¹⁷ If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”

¹⁸When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.”

BARNABAS AND SAUL AT ANTIOCH

¹⁹Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.²⁰ But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

²²Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.²³ When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.²⁴ For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

²⁵Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.²⁶ And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

RELIEF TO JUDEA

²⁷And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.²⁸ Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.²⁹ Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.³⁰ This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

HEROD'S VIOLENCE TO THE CHURCH

12 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.² Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.³ And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread.⁴ So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

PETER FREED FROM PRISON

⁵Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.⁶ And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping,



JOURNAL

Acts 11:17–21

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 “glorified God” (v. 18).
- When the Gentiles from Cyprus and Cyrene heard the good news of Jesus Christ, how did they respond (see v. 21)?
- Have you ever held a belief or judgment that opposed God? How did you come to understand the truth?



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), “assembled with” (v. 26), or “showed 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?

bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. ⁷Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off *his* hands. ⁸Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." ⁹So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

¹¹And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people."

¹²So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. ¹³And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. ¹⁵But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel."

¹⁶Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

¹⁸Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. ¹⁹But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death.

And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.

HEROD'S VIOLENT DEATH

²⁰Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's *country*.

²¹So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. ²²And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" ²³Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.

²⁴But the word of God grew and multiplied.

BARNABAS AND SAUL APPOINTED

²⁵And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

13 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.

PREACHING IN CYPRUS

⁴So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant.

⁶Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? ¹¹And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.”

And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA

¹³Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. ¹⁵And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”

¹⁶Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: ¹⁷The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. ¹⁸Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. ¹⁹And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment.

²⁰“After that He gave *them* judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. ²¹And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²²And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after My *own* heart, who will do all



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 “ministered to the Lord” (v. 2) or “laid 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.

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 ends 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?

My will.' ²³From this man's seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus— ²⁴after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not *He*. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.'

²⁶"Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. ²⁷For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*. ²⁸And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. ²⁹Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb. ³⁰But God raised Him from the dead. ³¹He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. ³²And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. ³³God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:

'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.'

³⁴And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus:

'I will give you the sure mercies of David.'

³⁵Therefore He also says in another *Psalms*:

'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.'

³⁶"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; ³⁷but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. ³⁸Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; ³⁹and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:

⁴¹ 'Behold, you despisers,
Marvel and perish!
For I work a work in your days,
A work which you will by no means believe,
Though one were to declare it to you.'

BLESSING AND CONFLICT AT ANTIOCH

⁴²So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. ⁴³Now when the congregation had broken up,

many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. ⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For so the Lord has commanded us:

'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,
That you should be for salvation to
the ends of the earth.'

⁴⁸Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

⁴⁹And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. ⁵⁰But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. ⁵²And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

AT ICONIUM

14 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. ²But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. ³Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

⁴But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. ⁵And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, ⁶they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. ⁷And they were preaching the gospel there.

IDOLATRY AT LYSTRA

⁸And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. ⁹This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, ¹⁰said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked. ¹¹Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" ¹²And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought



CONTEMPLATE

Acts 13:46–52

READ. Focus on "grew bold" (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.



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 observing him” (v. 9), “Turn from these useless things” (v. 15), or “He did not leave Himself without 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 Derbe, 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

oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

¹⁴But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out ¹⁵and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, ¹⁶who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” ¹⁸And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

STONING, ESCAPE TO DERBE

¹⁹Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead. ²⁰However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

STRENGTHENING THE CONVERTS

²¹And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²²strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” ²³So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. ²⁴And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. ²⁵Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. ²⁶From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

²⁷Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

CONFLICT OVER CIRCUMCISION

15 And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ²Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

³So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. ⁴And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. ⁵But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is

necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.”

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

⁶Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. ⁷And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up *and* said to them: “Men *and* brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, ⁹and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”

¹²Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. ¹³And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, “Men *and* brethren, listen to me: ¹⁴Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

- ¹⁶ ‘After this I will return
And will rebuild the tabernacle of
David, which has fallen down;
I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will set it up;
¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
Says the LORD who does all these things.’

¹⁸“Known to God from eternity are all His works. ¹⁹Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. ²¹For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

THE JERUSALEM DECREE

²²Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

²³They wrote this *letter* by them:

The apostles, the elders, and the brethren,

To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch,
Syria, and Cilicia:

Greetings.

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?



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 "exhorted and strengthened the brethren" (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

²⁴ Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "*You must be circumcised and keep the law*"—to whom we gave no *such* commandment—²⁵ it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹ that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

Farewell.

CONTINUING MINISTRY IN SYRIA

³⁰ So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. ³² Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. ³³ And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.

³⁴ However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. ³⁵ Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

DIVISION OVER JOHN MARK

³⁶ Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing." ³⁷ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

TIMOTHY JOINS PAUL AND SILAS

16 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the* son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father *was* Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. ⁴ And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

THE MACEDONIAN CALL

⁶Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. ⁷After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. ⁸So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

LYDIA BAPTIZED AT PHILIPPI

¹¹Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. ¹³And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*. ¹⁴Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

PAUL AND SILAS IMPRISONED

¹⁶Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. ¹⁷This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." ¹⁸And this she did for many days.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. ¹⁹But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.

²⁰And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; ²¹and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." ²²Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. ²³And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER SAVED

²⁵But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the

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 16:23–34

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.

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?

doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. ²⁷And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. ²⁸But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

²⁹Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³²Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. ³⁴Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

PAUL REFUSES TO DEPART SECRETLY

³⁵And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."

³⁶So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

³⁷But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

³⁸And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. ³⁹Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city. ⁴⁰So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

PREACHING CHRIST AT THESSALONICA

17 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ²Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and demonstrating that the Christ



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.



had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”⁴ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

ASSAULT ON JASON’S HOUSE

⁵ But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. ⁷ Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” ⁸ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. ⁹ So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

MINISTERING AT BEREIA

¹⁰ Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. ¹⁴ Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

THE PHILOSOPHERS AT ATHENS

¹⁶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. ¹⁷ Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babblers want to say?”

Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak? ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.” ²¹ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

ADDRESSING THE AREOPAGUS

²² Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very re-

ligious; ²³for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: ²⁴God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' ²⁹Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. ³⁰Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

³²And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this *matter*." ³³So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

MINISTERING AT CORINTH

18 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. ²And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. ³So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. ⁴And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

⁵When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ*. ⁶But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." ⁷And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

⁹Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "**Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent;** ¹⁰for I am



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 and have our being" (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), "attack" (v. 10), or whatever surfaces for your 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.

with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”¹¹ And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹² When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, ¹³ saying, “This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.”

¹⁴ And when Paul was about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. ¹⁵ But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look *to it* yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such *matters*.” ¹⁶ And he drove them from the judgment seat. ¹⁷ Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

PAUL RETURNS TO ANTIOCH

¹⁸ So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila *were* with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. ¹⁹ And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, ²¹ but took leave of them, saying, “I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.” And he sailed from Ephesus.

²² And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. ²³ After he had spent some time *there*, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

MINISTRY OF APOLLOS

²⁴ Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷ And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; ²⁸ for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

PAUL AT EPHESUS

19 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples ² he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”

³ And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.”



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 (see v. 28 with 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?

⁴Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”

⁵When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. ⁷Now the men were about twelve in all.

⁸And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. ⁹But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. ¹⁰And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

MIRACLES GLORIFY CHRIST

¹¹Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. ¹³Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” ¹⁴Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so.

¹⁵And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?”

¹⁶Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. ¹⁸And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. ¹⁹Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. ²⁰So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

THE RIOT AT EPHESUS

²¹When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” ²²So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.

²³And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. ²⁴For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. ²⁵He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. ²⁶Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. ²⁷So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into



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Acts 19:5–12

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?

disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.”

²⁸Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, “Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!” ²⁹So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s travel companions. ³⁰And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. ³¹Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. ³²Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. ³³And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. ³⁴But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, “Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!”

³⁵And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: “Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Zeus? ³⁶Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. ³⁷For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. ³⁸Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. ³⁹But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. ⁴⁰For we are in danger of being called in question for today’s uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering.” ⁴¹And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.



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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.

JOURNEYS IN GREECE

20 After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to *himself*, embraced *them*, and departed to go to Macedonia. ²Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece ³and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. ⁵These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas. ⁶But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

MINISTERING AT TROAS

⁷Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. ⁸There were many lamps in the upper room where they

were gathered together. ⁹And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. ¹⁰But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing *him* said, “Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.” ¹¹Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. ¹²And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.

FROM TROAS TO MILETUS

¹³Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. ¹⁴And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. ¹⁵We sailed from there, and the next *day* came opposite Chios. The following *day* we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next *day* we came to Miletus. ¹⁶For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.

THE EPHESIAN ELDERS EXHORTED

¹⁷From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. ¹⁸And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹servicing the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, ²¹testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. ²²And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. ²⁴But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

²⁵“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. ²⁶Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. ²⁷For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

³²“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you



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.

an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. ³⁵I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, **'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'**"

³⁶And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, ³⁸sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

WARNINGS ON THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

21 Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following *day* to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ²And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. ⁴And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. ⁵When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till *we were* out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. ⁶When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

⁷And when we had finished *our* voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. ⁸On the next *day* we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was *one* of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. ¹⁰And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

¹²Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

¹⁴So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

PAUL URGED TO MAKE PEACE

¹⁵And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

¹⁷And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. ¹⁸On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done



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.

among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; ²¹but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs. ²²What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. ²³Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. ²⁴Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave *their* heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but *that* you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. ²⁵But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.”

ARRESTED IN THE TEMPLE

²⁶Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

²⁷Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” ²⁹(For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

³⁰And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. ³¹Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³²He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another.

So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. ³⁵When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. ³⁶For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, “Away with him!”

ADDRESSING THE JERUSALEM MOB

³⁷Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I speak to you?”

He replied, “Can you speak Greek? ³⁸Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?”



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Acts 21:32–40

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 v. 21, 28–29)? Who stopped the people from beating Paul and then arrested him (see vv. 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?

³⁹But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”

⁴⁰So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying,

22 “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.” ²And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent.

Then he said: ³“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. ⁴I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, ⁵as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶“Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. ⁷And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ ⁸So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’

⁹“And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. ¹⁰So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’ ¹¹And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

¹²“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwell there, ¹³came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him. ¹⁴Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. ¹⁵For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’

¹⁷“Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance ¹⁸and saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.’ ¹⁹So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. ²⁰And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’ ²¹Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’”

PAUL’S ROMAN CITIZENSHIP

²²And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the



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 (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 Him (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 who He is. Then ask God to use you among people who haven’t yet learned about Him.

earth, for he is not fit to live!" ²³Then, as they cried out and tore off *their* clothes and threw dust into the air, ²⁴the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. ²⁵And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

²⁶When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."

²⁷Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?"

He said, "Yes."

²⁸The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship."

And Paul said, "But I was born *a citizen*."

²⁹Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

THE SANHEDRIN DIVIDED

³⁰The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

23 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." ²And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

⁴And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

⁵Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

⁶But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"

⁷And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. ⁸For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. ⁹Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."

¹⁰Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks.



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.



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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?

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL

¹¹But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”

¹²And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. ¹³Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. ¹⁴They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, “We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.”

¹⁶So when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, “Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him.” ¹⁸So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, “Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you.”

¹⁹Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?”

²⁰And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. ²¹But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you.”

²²So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, “Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me.”

SENT TO FELIX

²³And he called for two centurions, saying, “Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; ²⁴and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor.” ²⁵He wrote a letter in the following manner:

²⁶ Claudius Lysias,

To the most excellent governor Felix:

Greetings.

²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. ²⁸And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. ²⁹I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. ³⁰And when it was told me that the Jews lay in



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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.

wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him.

Farewell.

³¹Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by night to Antipatris. ³²The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. ³³When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. ³⁴And when the governor had read *it*, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was* from Cilicia, ³⁵he said, “I will hear you when your accusers also have come.” And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.

ACCUSED OF SEDITION

24 Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator *named* Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.

²And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: “Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, ³we accept *it* always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. ⁴Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. ⁵For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. ⁷But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him* out of our hands, ⁸commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.” ⁹And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

THE DEFENSE BEFORE FELIX

¹⁰Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: “Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, ¹¹because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹²And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. ¹⁴But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. ¹⁵I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust. ¹⁶This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

¹⁷“Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, ¹⁸in the midst of which some Jews from



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 hope in God” (v. 15) or “I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men” (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.

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?

Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. ¹⁹They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. ²⁰Or else let those who are *here* themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, ²¹unless *it is* for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.'

FELIX PROCRASTINATES

²²But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the Way*, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case." ²³So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.

²⁴And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. ²⁵Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." ²⁶Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.

²⁷But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

PAUL APPEALS TO CAESAR

25 Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. ²Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, ³asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while *they* lay in ambush along the road to kill him. ⁴But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly. ⁵"Therefore," he said, "let those who have authority among you go down with *me* and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him."

⁶And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought. ⁷When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, ⁸while he answered for himself, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all."

⁹But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?"

¹⁰So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. ¹¹For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!”

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

¹³ And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. ¹⁴ When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying: “There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, ¹⁵ about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed *me*, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. ¹⁶ To them I answered, ‘It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.’ ¹⁷ Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. ¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, ¹⁹ but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. ²⁰ And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. ²¹ But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.”

²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.”

“Tomorrow,” he said, “you shall hear him.”

²³ So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus’ command Paul was brought in. ²⁴ And Festus said: “King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. ²⁵ But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. ²⁶ I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. ²⁷ For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.”

PAUL’S EARLY LIFE

26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.”

So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: ² “I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, ³ especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

⁴ “My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all



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.



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 of the promise made by God” (v. 6) or “exceedingly 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.

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

the Jews know. ⁵They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. ⁶And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. ⁷To this *promise* our twelve tribes, earnestly serving *God* night and day, hope to attain. For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. ⁸Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

⁹“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. ¹¹And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.

PAUL RECOUNTS HIS CONVERSION

¹²“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, ¹³at mid-day, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*’ ¹⁵So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. ¹⁷I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ¹⁸to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’

PAUL’S POST-CONVERSION LIFE

¹⁹“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. ²¹For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill *me*. ²²Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— ²³that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles.”

AGRIPPA PARRIES PAUL’S CHALLENGE

²⁴Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!”

²⁵But he said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. ²⁶For the king, before

whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.”

²⁸Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

²⁹And Paul said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.”

³⁰When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; ³¹and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, “This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.”

³²Then Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

THE VOYAGE TO ROME BEGINS

27 And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to *one* named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. ²So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. ³And the next *day* we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave *him* liberty to go to his friends and receive care. ⁴When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under *the shelter* of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. ⁵And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, *a city* of Lycia. ⁶There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.

⁷When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under *the shelter* of Crete off Salmone. ⁸Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.

PAUL’S WARNING IGNORED

⁹Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, ¹⁰saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.” ¹¹Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. ¹²And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, *and winter there.*

IN THE TEMPEST

¹³When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. ¹⁴But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. ¹⁵So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let *her* drive. ¹⁶And running under

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 27:8–18

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.

the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. ¹⁷When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven. ¹⁸And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next *day* they lightened the ship. ¹⁹On the third *day* we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. ²⁰Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.

²¹But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. ²²And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, ²⁴saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' ²⁵Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. ²⁶However, we must run aground on a certain island."

²⁷Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. ²⁸And they took soundings and found *it* to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found *it* to be fifteen fathoms. ²⁹Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. ³⁰And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, ³¹Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." ³²Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.

³³And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. ³⁴Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." ³⁵And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat. ³⁶Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. ³⁷And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. ³⁸So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

SHIPWRECKED ON MALTA

³⁹When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible. ⁴⁰And they let go the anchors and left *them* in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. ⁴¹But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable,

but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.

⁴²And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. ⁴³But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump *overboard* first and get to land, ⁴⁴and the rest, some on boards and some on *parts* of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

PAUL'S MINISTRY ON MALTA

28 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. ²And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. ³But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid *them* on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. ⁴So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live." ⁵But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

⁷In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. ⁸And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. ¹⁰They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

ARRIVAL AT ROME

¹¹After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. ¹²And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. ¹³From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, ¹⁴where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. ¹⁵And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

¹⁶Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

PAUL'S MINISTRY AT ROME

¹⁷And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet



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 "unusual kindness" (v. 2) or "honored us in many ways" (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.

I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, ¹⁸who, when they had examined me, wanted to let *me* go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. ¹⁹But when the Jews spoke against *it*, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. ²⁰For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see *you* and speak with *you*, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.”

²¹Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. ²²But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”

²³So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. ²⁴And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. ²⁵So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, ²⁶saying,



JOURNAL

Acts 28:28–31

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. 28–29)?
- Even at the end of his life Paul was preaching and teaching “with all confidence” (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?

‘Go to this people and say:

“Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;
And seeing you will see, and not perceive;

²⁷ For the hearts of this people have grown dull.

Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with *their* eyes
and hear with *their* ears,

Lest they should understand with
their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”

²⁸ “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!”
²⁹ And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

³⁰ Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, ³¹preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.