

Equipped for Mission

A Study of Acts 13–28

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By Matthew Allen

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Introduction

The book of Acts recounts how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to the farthest corners of the earth. It records the stories of ordinary people empowered by the Holy Spirit, facing opposition, hardship, and uncertainty, yet never losing sight of their mission. Each chapter reminds us that when God calls, He also equips.

This class, *Equipped for the Mission*, traces the apostle Paul's journey through the final chapters of Acts. These last scenes illustrate how faith persists when life doesn't go as planned. From conflict and imprisonment to storms and shipwrecks, Paul learns that the Spirit of God supplies everything needed for faithful service. His courage, humility, and commitment to Christ serve as a model for every Christian striving to serve faithfully in a changing and often hostile world.

Each lesson in this study highlights how God equips His people through various means: hardship, leadership, courage, suffering, perseverance, and opportunity. The emphasis is on God's faithfulness, not Paul's greatness; the same Spirit who supported him continues to empower us. Every passage shows how God transforms obstacles into open doors, setbacks into service, and weakness into strength.

This workbook is designed for group study and discussion. Each lesson includes:

- Biblical exposition that draws out the key truths of the text.
- Reflection and discussion questions to encourage application.
- Key summary points that highlight what God is teaching.
- A memory verse and weekly challenge to carry truth into daily life.

The purpose of this study is simple: to show you that the mission of Acts continues through us. The gospel still moves forward, often through hardship, always through faith. Wherever we are, whatever our circumstances, God calls us to proclaim the kingdom of God "with all boldness and without hindrance."

The story that began in the book of Acts is still being written in our generation. The same Spirit who guided Paul through storms and

prisons now works in the church today, equipping every Christian to serve, to endure, and to lead others to Christ.

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How to Use This Book

This workbook is created to help you explore Scripture and apply what you learn. Each lesson guides you through a section of Acts, illustrating how the Spirit of God equips His followers for faith, endurance, and service. Use this material as both a study guide and a discussion resource.

1. Read the Passage Carefully

Begin each lesson by reading the assigned Scripture. Read it more than once, slowly and prayerfully. Let the text speak before turning to the commentary. Keep a notebook or margin notes to capture insights, questions, and recurring themes.

2. Study Each Section

Every lesson includes three main study points. These sections explain what happens in the passage, what it means, and how it applies. Move through each section thoughtfully. Look for what it teaches about God, the gospel, and the life of faith.

3. Reflect and Discuss

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Use the reflection questions at the end of each lesson to think personally and to guide group discussion. The questions are written to draw out practical application and spiritual growth, not just information. Take time to listen and share honestly.

4. Review the Key Truths

Each lesson concludes with a summary of key truths. These brief statements capture the main principles to remember. They are ideal for quick review or class recap.

5. Memorize and Apply

The memory verse / weekly challenge connects the lesson to daily life. Memorize the verse and take the challenge seriously. Each challenge offers a simple way to live out the week's truth: through prayer, encouragement, service, or witness.

6. Build Week by Week

The lessons follow Paul's journey from ministry to imprisonment to mission in Rome. Each week builds on the one before it. As the story unfolds, watch how God's faithfulness carries His servant through every circumstance.

7. Keep the Focus on the Mission

This workbook is not just about Paul's story: it's about ours. God still equips His people today. Use these studies to strengthen your faith, grow in confidence, and renew your commitment to the mission of Christ.

*He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ
with all boldness and without hindrance.*

Acts 28:31

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LESSON 1

Equipped for a Mission: The Church at Antioch

Acts 13:1–12

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

Acts 13:1–3

Class Overview: Acts 13:1–12 records the moment when the gospel begins to spread beyond the familiar borders of Judea and Samaria. From the lively and diverse church in Antioch, the Holy Spirit calls Barnabas and Saul to take Christ’s message to the Gentile world. This lesson explores how God equipped that congregation through worship, fasting, and prayer to become a sending church. We will see how obedience to the Spirit’s direction led to the first major missionary journey and how God’s power worked through ordinary believers to achieve extraordinary results.

Class Objectives: By the end of this class, you should be able to—

1. Describe the spiritual and cultural setting of the church at Antioch and why it became a model for mission.
2. Explain how worship, fasting, and prayer prepared the Antioch Christians to hear the Spirit’s call.
3. Understand that God’s mission is directed by the Holy Spirit, not human planning or ambition.
4. Recognize that gospel work involves both opportunity and opposition and that the Spirit provides strength to overcome.
5. Identify ways today’s church can imitate Antioch by sending, supporting, and serving in the mission of Christ.

Introduction

THE STORY OF ACTS 13 MARKS A TURNING POINT in the book of Acts and in the history of the church. Up to this point, the gospel had spread from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, mainly through the efforts of Peter and other apostles. But beginning in Acts 13, the center of God's mission shifts to a new city, Antioch, and to new messengers, Barnabas and Saul. From here, the message of Christ begins to move out to the ends of the earth.

Antioch was a remarkable congregation. It was made up of Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, leaders and servants. They had already shown a generous heart by sending aid to believers in Judea during a famine. More than that, they had a deep spiritual focus. Luke tells us they were worshiping and fasting when the Holy Spirit gave direction. Their hearts were open to God's will. They were not just maintaining what they had; they were seeking what God wanted next.

When the Spirit spoke, He didn't call the church to comfort but to commission. Two of their best men, Barnabas and Saul, were to be set apart and sent out. This was divine direction. The church obeyed immediately. They prayed, laid hands on the men, and released them for the mission. What followed changed the world.

The church's mission starts with worship. When God's people focus on Him, He gives them a vision for others. Antioch shows what it means to be a sending church. Antioch shows what it means to be a sending church: one that listens to the Spirit, values the gospel above its own convenience, and gladly gives its best for the sake of Christ. Every congregation today faces the same challenge: will we cling tightly to our comforts, or will we open our hands and let God use us to reach the world?

Historical Background

Antioch of Syria was one of the great cities of the ancient world. It ranked third in size after Rome and Alexandria. It served as a crossroads of culture, trade, and religion. Situated about 300 miles north of Jerusalem, it was a place where East met West. The city was populated

with people from all backgrounds, and its moral climate reflected the paganism of the Roman world. Yet, this unlikely location became the headquarters for gospel outreach to the Gentile nations.

The church there began when ordinary Christians, scattered by persecution in Jerusalem, started preaching the word (Acts 11:19–21). Some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, began sharing the gospel with both Greeks and Jews, and “a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” When Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to see what was happening, he rejoiced and brought Saul from Tarsus to help teach. For a year, they worked side by side, strengthening the young congregation. It was in Antioch that disciples were first called Christians, a name that highlighted their loyalty to Christ rather than any nationality or background.

By the time Acts 13 begins, the Antioch church had become strong in teaching, unified in leadership, and generous in heart. They had already sent financial aid to Judea during the famine, demonstrating compassion for others. Now they were sending people, missionaries, to spread the gospel into new territories. In this way, Antioch became the example for every future missionary church.

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A Spirit-Filled Church (13:1–2)

The church at Antioch was blessed with a strong group of teachers and prophets. Luke lists five men who led the congregation: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, and Saul. This short list says much about the kind of church Antioch had become. It was diverse. It was united. It was growing in grace. These men came from different regions, races, and backgrounds. One had been raised with Herod the tetrarch, another came from North Africa, and others were Jewish believers who had embraced Jesus as the Messiah. Yet they were serving side by side in harmony.

That unity was not by accident. It flowed from worship. Luke says, *As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said* (v. 2). This tells us something important about the life of the church. The Antioch Christians were not simply running programs or holding meetings;

they were ministering to the Lord. Their focus was upward before it was outward. They were seeking God's will through prayer, fasting, and devotion.

When the Spirit spoke, He found a congregation ready to listen. A Spirit-filled church is one that makes room for God to speak through His word, prayer, and humble, eager hearts. Antioch reminds us that the power for mission doesn't come from plans or committees; it begins in worship. Before the church can send, it must first bow before the Lord who sends.

Every time we gather in authentic worship, we prepare ourselves for mission. Worship aligns our hearts with God's purpose. It reminds us who the mission belongs to and gives us the courage to obey. The Antioch church shows us that when God's people seek Him first, the Spirit always directs them outward, to a world that still needs Jesus.

A Spirit-Directed Mission

(13:2–3)

When the Holy Spirit spoke, His message was simple but life-changing: *Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.* (v. 2). God had a specific task in mind, and He chose these two men to carry it out. They didn't volunteer themselves. They didn't launch a personal mission. They were called by the Spirit, recognized by the church, and sent with prayer.

This is how all true missions begin. It doesn't start with human plans but with God's initiative. The church did not decide to send missionaries because it wanted to expand. They acted in obedience to what the Spirit revealed. After fasting and praying, they laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and released them to the work. That gesture showed both their blessing and their partnership. The church at Antioch was not losing two of its best leaders; it was sending them as an extension of its own faith and work.

Notice the pattern here: worship → listening → obedience. God still uses this pattern today. When His people worship sincerely, He guides them toward His mission. When they listen humbly, He provides clarity.

When they obey, He multiplies the work. The Antioch church shows us that being “Spirit-led” is not about emotion or impulse: it’s about submission. It’s the willingness to go where God sends and to release what He asks for.

Every congregation faces the same calling. Sometimes God calls us to move into new territory personally. Other times, He calls us to send and support those who go. Either way, obedience requires faith. To be a Spirit-led church is to hold everything, our resources, our time, our people, open before God and say, “Use us for Your purpose.” That’s when the true mission begins.

A Spirit-Empowered Message (Acts 13:4–12)

After being sent out by the church, Barnabas and Saul set sail for Cyprus. This island was familiar territory for Barnabas; it was his home. This was the natural place to begin. But what matters most is not geography; it is obedience. Luke says plainly, *so being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.* (v. 4). The mission that began in worship now moves forward in power.

As they preached throughout the island, they faced both opportunity and opposition. In Paphos, they met two men who represent the clash of truth and deceit: Sergius Paulus, a Roman official open to hearing God’s word, and Elymas, a magician who tried to turn him away from the faith. Here we learn that gospel work is never without resistance. Wherever truth advances, Satan pushes back. But God equips His servants for such moments.

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, confronted Elymas directly: *You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery... will you ever stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord?* (v. 10) The man who once persecuted the church now stood firm for Christ. His boldness did not come from natural strength; it came from the Spirit. God struck Elymas blind for a time, showing that the power of darkness cannot stand against the light of Christ. When Sergius Paulus saw what happened, he believed, amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

Here we see a spiritual reality. The gospel always advances through conflict. Faith grows when believers trust God's word and stand firm in truth. A Spirit-empowered message does not rely on clever speech or a forceful personality. It depends on the Spirit's power working through people willing to speak up for Jesus.

When we face opposition or doubt, we can remember that the same Spirit who filled Paul lives in us. God still opens doors, still silences the enemy, and still changes hearts through His Word. Our task is to stay faithful, speak truth, and let God do what only He can do.

Lesson Summary and Reflection

Key truths from Syrian Antioch:

- Mission begins in worship.
- The Spirit, not human planning, directs the work.
- God's power overcomes opposition.
- Sending is an act of faith, not loss.
- Every member participates in the mission.

The story of Antioch reminds us of what God can do through ordinary Christians who are willing to listen and obey. Their strength was not in size, wealth, or position; it was in their surrender to the Spirit. As they worshiped, the Lord gave direction. As they prayed, He gave power. As they sent their best, He expanded His mission.

Every church today is called to live out the same pattern. The gospel advances when God's people focus upward in worship and outward in mission. Antioch teaches us that sending is not losing; it's multiplying. Their obedience opened a new chapter in God's plan to reach the world, and the same Spirit is still at work through His church today.

When we see our local congregation as a base for mission, everything changes. Worship becomes preparation. Giving becomes a partnership. Prayer becomes participation. And every brother or sister, whether staying or going, becomes part of God's story to make Christ known.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Acts 13:2

Weekly Challenge: Spend time in prayer this week, asking God where He might be calling you to serve or send.

For Reflection

1. What qualities made the church at Antioch ready for God's call?

2. How does worship prepare us to hear and obey the Spirit?

3. What does this story teach us about letting go of comfort and security for the sake of the mission?

4. In what ways might God be calling you or your congregation to "send" today?

5. How can you personally live more like a Spirit-filled, Spirit-sent disciple this week?
