



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

VOLUME THREE, PART ONE
ACTS 13 - 16

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

A small ember faintly glowed in Jerusalem. A carpenter, seeming to be a common man, collected a few faithful followers showing them what life was meant to look like. But as soon as these followers caught His brilliant vision, their joy and hope would seem crushed upon a Roman cross, because the powers and principalities would stop at nothing to snuff out His beauty and goodness. This is not how most stories begin . . .

But just when it seemed as if the shadows had grown to replace the light, a tomb is robbed of it's death and a risen Savior illuminates hope. Now these followers of Jesus are called to pick up and carry the vision and movement forward into the darkness of this world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they carry the spark of Jesus' vision outward, proclaiming this Good News of a King on a Cross to their city, their people, their enemies, and to the ends of the earth. And what began as a glowing ember in an upper room would gather into a blazing and consuming firestorm of witness across time and space, telling the tale of this carpenter, this risen Savior, the very Son of God.

These are the Acts of the Apostles.



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NAME







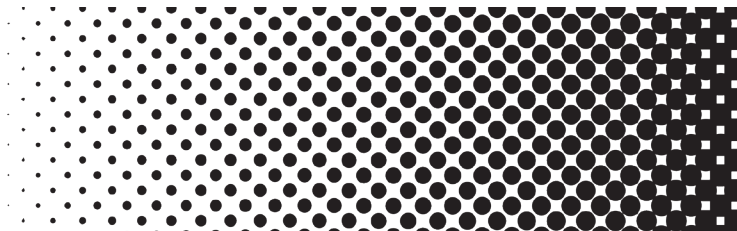


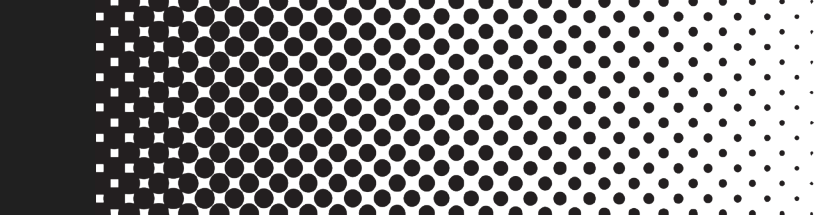
SESSION ONE

Acts 13:1-12

SESSION 1

¹Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²While 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.” ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. ⁶When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus.





⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Here we enter a new phase of God's divine plan as the gospel moves even further beyond Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria towards the ends of the earth. The church in Antioch has become the new sending hub, full of Spirit-led worship, prayer and diverse leadership. What begins as a faithful act of obedience in a local church becomes the launch of the first missionary journey with Barnabas and Saul, now Paul, set apart to boldly proclaim the Word of God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What does the church in Antioch do before sending Barnabas and Saul? What do these actions tell us about the spiritual disciplines and rhythms of the early church?
2. Who are the prophets and teachers named here? What do you observe about them from the details shared here or elsewhere? What insights do you gain about the composition of the church in Antioch?
3. Which locations are mentioned in this passage? What are some reasons the missionaries may have taken this route to proclaim the word of God?
4. In these verses we are presented with a Jewish magician and false prophet named Bar-Jesus serving a Roman proconsul in Cyprus. Which other biblical stories share elements with this one? How does Deuteronomy 18:9-13 frame the Jewish view of sorcery?

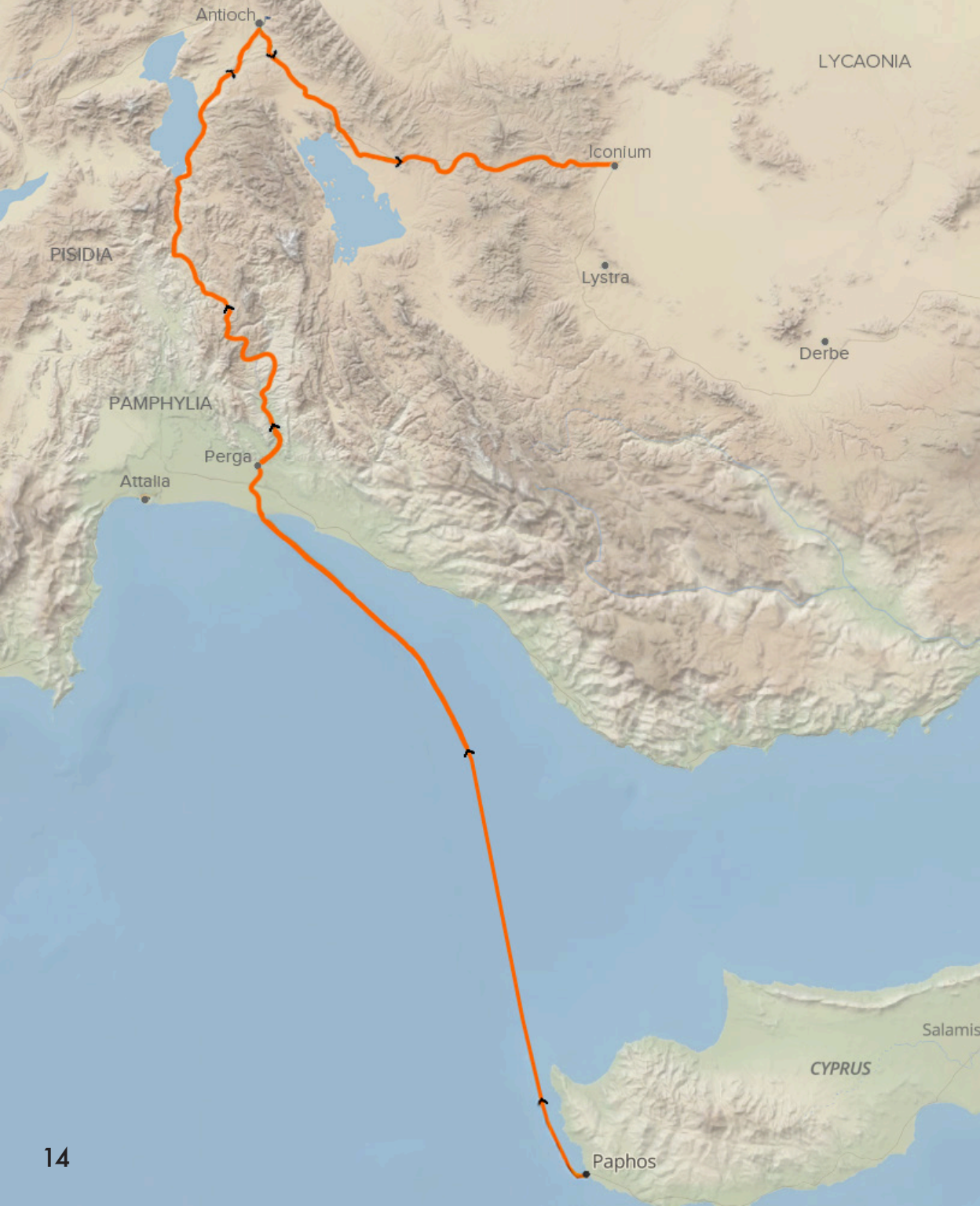
5. This is the second time we have been left without a conclusion on the spiritual state of a sorcerer in Acts. Compare this account of Elymas with that of Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8. How are these examples still relevant to us today?
6. Elymas is struck blind for a time, something we also learned about Paul in Acts 9. What similarities and differences do you observe between the two experiences? What might that teach us about God's mercy and judgment?
7. This passage shows the laying on of hands for sending, the hand of the Lord for correction and blind Elymas seeking the hands of others for leading. Which of these types of hands have you experienced in your life? How has God used that to shape your faith?
8. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks boldly as he confronts Elymas. When were you last called to speak the truth in a difficult situation? How did it go?

TENDING THE FIRE



When the word of God is faithfully proclaimed, it often stirs both a hunger for truth and spiritual opposition. Elymas tries to divert the proconsul's interest in the gospel with deceit and wickedness. Paul, once an enemy of God himself and now filled with the Holy Spirit, confronts this familiar evil. His question to Elymas cuts to the heart and still echoes today. **Are we living as children of God? Or are we resisting Him like a child of the enemy? Will we choose the straight path of the Lord? Or will we wander the crooked road of rebellion? Our choices don't only shape our lives, they can influence others who are seeking truth.**

We are also reminded to seek and obey the Holy Spirit's call in our lives. When we fall short, we must repent to receive forgiveness and be reconciled to the Father, not by our works, but by the finished work of Jesus Christ. When engaging in spiritual battle, we should be encouraged by the reality that the same Holy Spirit who empowered Paul, empowers all who place their trust in the Lord. Jesus has conquered Satan, sin and death and, in Him, we also walk in victory.



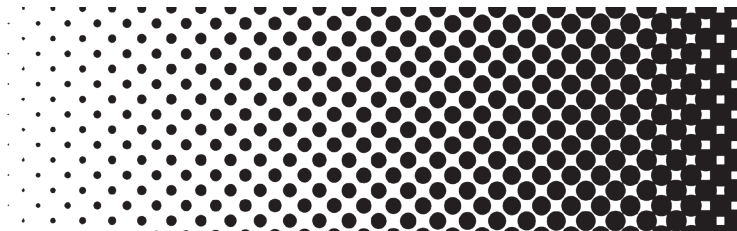


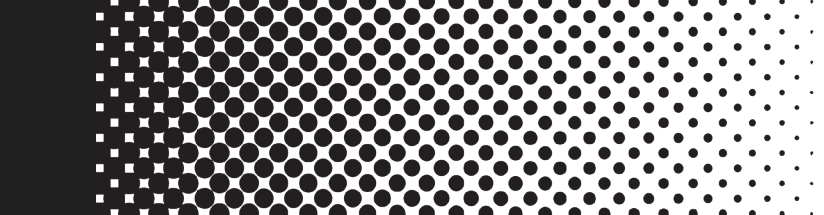
SESSION TWO

Acts 13:13-52

SESSION 2

¹³ Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, ¹⁴ but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” ¹⁶ So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. ¹⁷ The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. ¹⁸ And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹ And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. ²⁰ All this took about four hundred and fifty years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²² And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David





the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ ²³ Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴ Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’ ²⁶ “Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. ²⁷ For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. ²⁸ And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹ And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰ But God raised him from the dead, ³¹ and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.

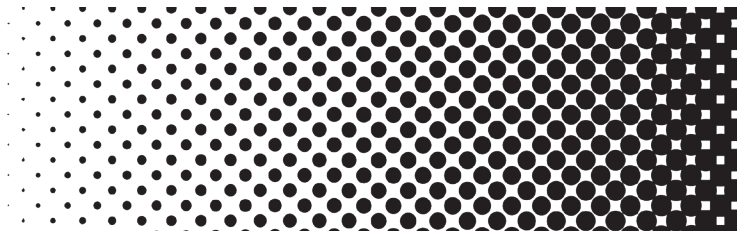


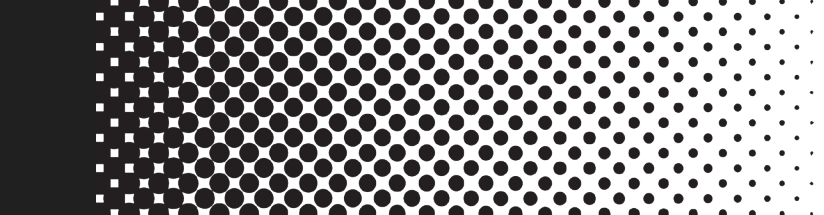
ACTS 13:13-52

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SESSION 2

³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, ³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “ ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’ ” ³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “ ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ ” ³⁵ Therefore he says also in another psalm, “ ‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’ ” ³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, ³⁷ but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. ³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹ and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰ Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: ⁴¹ “ ‘Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’ ” ⁴² As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. ⁴³ And after the meeting of the





synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Paul and Barnabas' missionary journey moves to the north, away from Cypress and through the coastal town of Perga, inland to Antioch in Pisidia. This Antioch is a distinct city from Syrian Antioch, home of the sending church for this mission journey. Pisidian Antioch was a Roman colony located in a mountainous region of modern-day Turkey. This shift in location also brings a shift in focus. Paul is speaking in the synagogue, addressing an audience rooted in Jewish tradition yet living among Gentiles. With that, a word of encouragement for the people goes out.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. On the Sabbath day, Paul and Barnabus go to the synagogue. What is the Sabbath? (Gen 2:1-3, Ex 20:8-11, Deut 5:12-15, Matt 12:9-12) Sabbath practices vary widely across traditions today. Do you observe the Sabbath? If so, how?
2. “If you have any word of encouragement, say it!” How would you summarize Paul’s message in verses 16-41? What do you think the rulers of the synagogue anticipated Paul sharing?
3. Paul’s sermon in the synagogue shares similarities with Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7. How are they different?
4. How familiar are you with the areas of Biblical history and prophecy highlighted in Paul’s address? Choose one detail, small or large, to investigate. Briefly share your findings with your small group.
5. Which attributes of God do you see emphasized in this passage? How have you personally experienced these realities of who He is in your life?

6. The people begged for Paul and Barnabas to return to the synagogue and only a week later the Jews were filled with jealousy, contradicting and reviling Paul. Why do you think the Jews turned so quickly? What other Biblical examples of fickle crowds come to mind?
7. The passage shifts from addressing primarily Jews to a broader Gentile audience. What tensions do you think this would have created in Antioch? Which similar tensions do you recognize, if any, within Christian communities today?
8. How do Paul and Barnabas respond to this opposition to the gospel? How do you respond to opposition? When have you had to “shake the dust” from your feet? Consider Mark 6:11 and John 15:18 27.
9. The disciples are described as being “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” despite rejection. How might joy look different when rooted in gospel hope rather than circumstances?

TENDING THE FIRE



Paul stands in a synagogue and boldly recounts God's faithfulness throughout history. He reminds the people that God chose their ancestors, led them through the wilderness, gave them judges and kings, raised up David and ultimately, brought them a Savior, Jesus. Some received Paul's message with joy and belief. Others rejected it and in doing so, rejected the eternal life God offers by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This passage can ignite a deeper trust in the God who chooses, leads, gives, raises and saves. Sharing the message of salvation requires courage and compassion, recognizing that some will reject it but others will believe. **Pray earnestly for those carrying the gospel to distant mission fields and for all of those counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name. Ask the Lord to strengthen them with joy and fill them with the Holy Spirit, just as He did in Pisidian Antioch. And then ask Him to do the same in you. How is Jesus calling you to move toward Him today?**

Don't wait. Step forward.



Iconium

Lystra

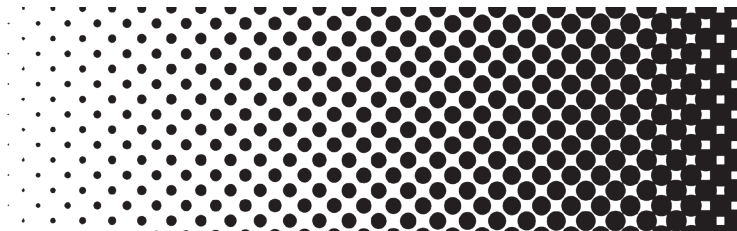


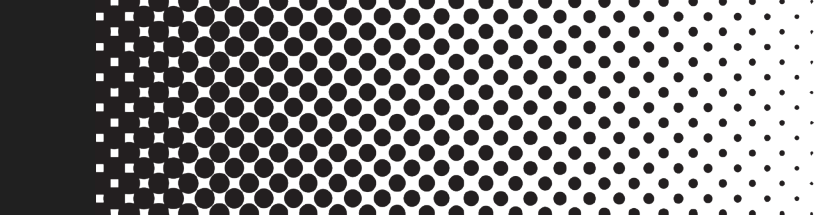
SESSION THREE

Acts 14:1-18

SESSION 3

¹Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. ²But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, ⁶they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷and there they continued to preach the gospel. ⁸Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. ⁹He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, ¹⁰said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. ¹¹And when the crowds saw what Paul had done,





they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ¹⁵ “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” ¹⁸ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

INTRODUCTION

After being driven out of Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas travel to Iconium, a city in Galatia with both Jewish and Gentile populations. They begin, again, by preaching in the synagogue, taking advantage of common ground with their Jewish audience.

The message brings both belief and opposition. As opposition grows, they are forced to flee. They encounter a new challenge in Lystra, a Gentile city without a synagogue, immersed in pagan worship. While the mission remains the same, the approach changes as the power of the gospel crosses into new cultural and religious boundaries.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In the last chapter, we read about one unbelieving Jew, Elymas, attempting to turn one Gentile, the proconsul, away from the faith. Here we learn of unbelieving Jews poisoning the minds of Gentiles in Iconium. What might these details tell us about the nature of spiritual warfare? How do you prepare yourself for resistance to the gospel as you share the good news?
2. Facing opposition in Iconium from the start, we see that Paul and Barnabus remained (v3), then fled (v5). How might they have discerned when to stay and when to go with ever-present opposition to their mission? How do you stay sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading as you make decisions?
3. Compare the miracle Paul performs in this passage with the miracle Peter performs in Acts 3:1-10. What similarities or differences do you notice? How do the people respond in both cases?
4. Like the lame man who now walks (v10), we face the same choice to either continue in old ways or walk in faith. How can we resist the pull of generational patterns (v16) that don't align with God's truth? What daily practices help you walk in God's way?

5. The people of Lystra misidentify the source of the miracle. Are there things about your faith that are misunderstood by those around you? Have you ever addressed a misunderstanding that led people away from Christ? How did it go?
6. How does Paul and Barnabas' response to being mistaken for gods contrast with Herod's in Acts 12:21–23? What does this reveal about their hearts?
7. Paul and Barnabas implore the crowd to turn from vain things to a living God (v15). The word 'vain' is also used in Exodus 20:7. What does God mean by 'vain' in these contexts? Are there culturally accepted 'vain' things we tend to justify today?
8. Paul says that God has not left Himself without witness. How does this idea connect with the mission laid out in Acts 1:8 and Paul's teaching in Romans 1:19–20? What might this say about our role in continuing that witness today?

TENDING THE FIRE



"I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols." (Isaiah 42:8) Paul and Barnabas understood just how corrupted the praise they received in Lystra truly was. Their deep grief, displayed in the tearing of their garments, reminds us that even sincere admiration, when misdirected, dishonors God. Has so much changed since then? Today, it's not uncommon to see the elevation of personal achievement, but this passage invites us to reflect every honor to the Lord with humility. Even as believers, we can slip into self glorification, forgetting that we are not the source of good. Creation bears witness to God's goodness and we are called to join that testimony, not as recipients of glory, but as reflectors of His glory.

When praised, do we humbly point to the Giver of every good gift? Do our words and lives lift up Jesus or elevate ourselves? Let us be a people who, like Paul and Barnabas, live with clarity and conviction, faithfully pointing others to the living God. As we carry the gospel into every place, pray we would always reflect His glory with humility, joy and unwavering purpose.



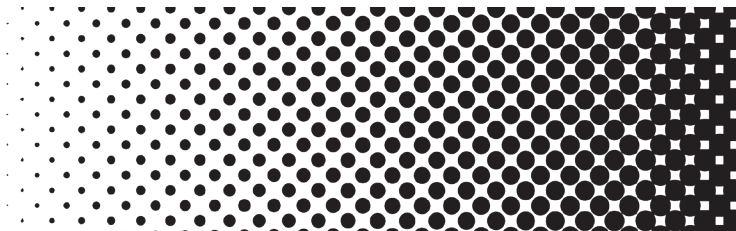


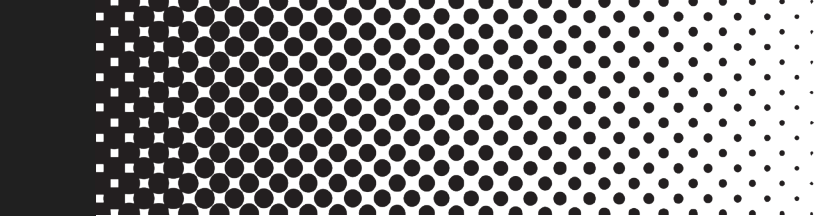
SESSION FOUR

Acts 14:19-28

SESSION 4

¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. ²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. ²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.





²⁴ Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.
²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. ²⁷ And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they remained no little time with the disciples.

INTRODUCTION

The one who oversaw the stoning of Stephen is now the recipient of such a fate. It seems crazy, but after being dragged out of the city and presumed dead, he goes back . . . TWICE!

Imagine watching this scene play out. How would you feel about proclaiming the name of Jesus after seeing what happens to Paul?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Consider the plot in Acts 14:4-5. How motivated would one have to be to travel over twenty miles to carry out such a plot?
2. Have you ever observed a violent event in-person? How did it effect you? Did it affect your thinking or behavior? Explain.
3. Thinking theologically and biblically, what do you think is at the root of mob violence?
4. The Jews are pursuing Paul. Read Acts 7:58-59; 8:1-3; 9:1-2 and compare to this situation. Describe the irony.
5. Can you think back in your life and describe something that reversed in your life like what has happened to Paul considering the previous question? Explain.

6. Who do the Jews join with in their attack on Paul?
Now Read John 19:12-16. How should this prepare us for the type of resistance we may encounter?

7. In Acts 14:2, what are the three things that Paul and Barnabas did on their return trip? Of these three which do you feel you need the most and why?

8. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These are letters by Paul about the role of elder. Why do you think Paul and Barnabas appointed them in each town? Why might it be important today?

9. Read Philippians 2:5-10. Describe the movement of Christ Jesus. How should Jesus' movement influence our own?

TENDING THE FIRE



Paul becomes a victim of his own previous zeal. Paul (then Saul) had asked for letters that would allow him to travel around and arrest Christians. Now we see other Jews traveling what could be a day or more to kill Paul. Not only that but they are joining together with pagans to get it done! We should remember the words “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets” (Luke 6:22-23). It is so ironic. How far did Jesus travel to save His creation? From His seat in the heavens down to earth, down to servitude, down to a slave’s death that would put Him in the ground.

Are you worried about someone hating you for your faith? Confess it to a brother or sister in the LORD and ask them to pray for your soul to be strengthened, encourage you in your faith, and remind you of what Jesus has accomplished for us through his life, death, and resurrection.



Antioch

Seleucia

SYRIA

PHOENICIA

Sidon

Damascus

Tyre

Acco

Caesarea

Shechem

Joppa

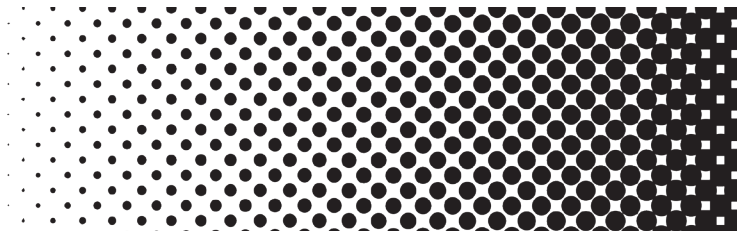
Jerusalem

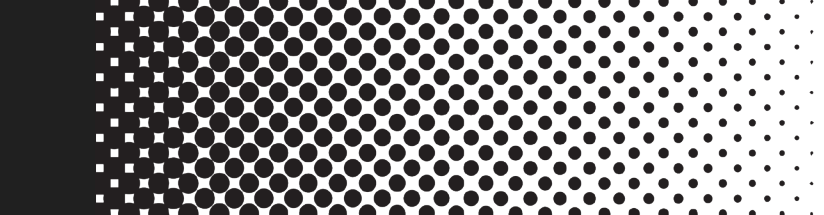


SESSION FIVE
Acts 15:1-35


SESSION 5

¹But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ²And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. ³So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. ⁴When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. ⁵But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” ⁶The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ⁷And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.





¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” ¹² And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ “ ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸ known from of old.’ ¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

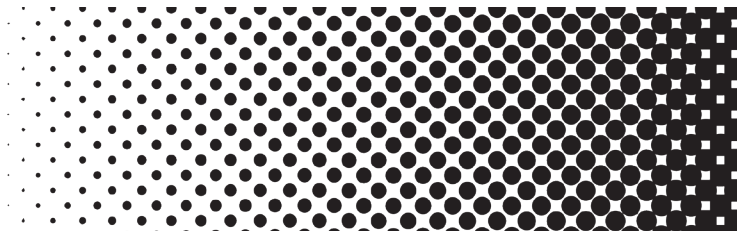


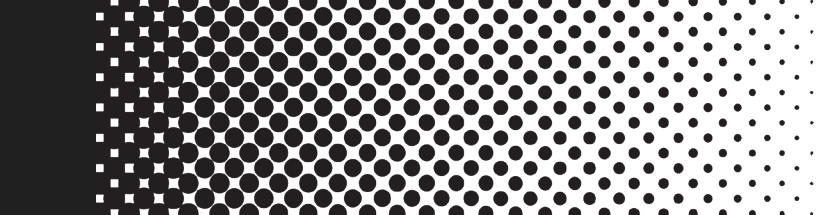
ACTS 15:1-35

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SESSION 5

²¹For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” ²²Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, ²³with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, ²⁵it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.





²⁷We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” ³⁰So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. ³²And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. ³³And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. ³⁵But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

INTRODUCTION

This event is sometimes referred to as the “Jerusalem Council.” We have seen the church growing and extending its borders beyond the bounds of the Israelite people which raises significant questions. Do the boundaries set for the people of Israel apply to those who had not been called to be God’s early people? How should Gentiles live differently than those all around them?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are all the things that circumcision indicates for an Israelite? Why is this such a big deal (for both sides)?
2. Read Matthew 5:17-18 and Luke 24:44-45. What is meant by “fulfilled” and “accomplished” in these verses? Who fulfilled and accomplished? What are the implications for the Law and how might it speak to what is happening at the Jerusalem Council?
3. What is Peter referring to in Acts 15:7-9? What does Peter appeal to as his primary argument? Why was Peter essential to this discussion?
4. Acts 15:13-18 is a quote from Amos 9:11-12. Read the context in Amos. How is James using this text for his argument? What was changed in the text?
5. Even though they decide that circumcision is unnecessary, what are the rules that the leadership say the Gentile converts should still follow? Why these rules? What might these rules have in common?

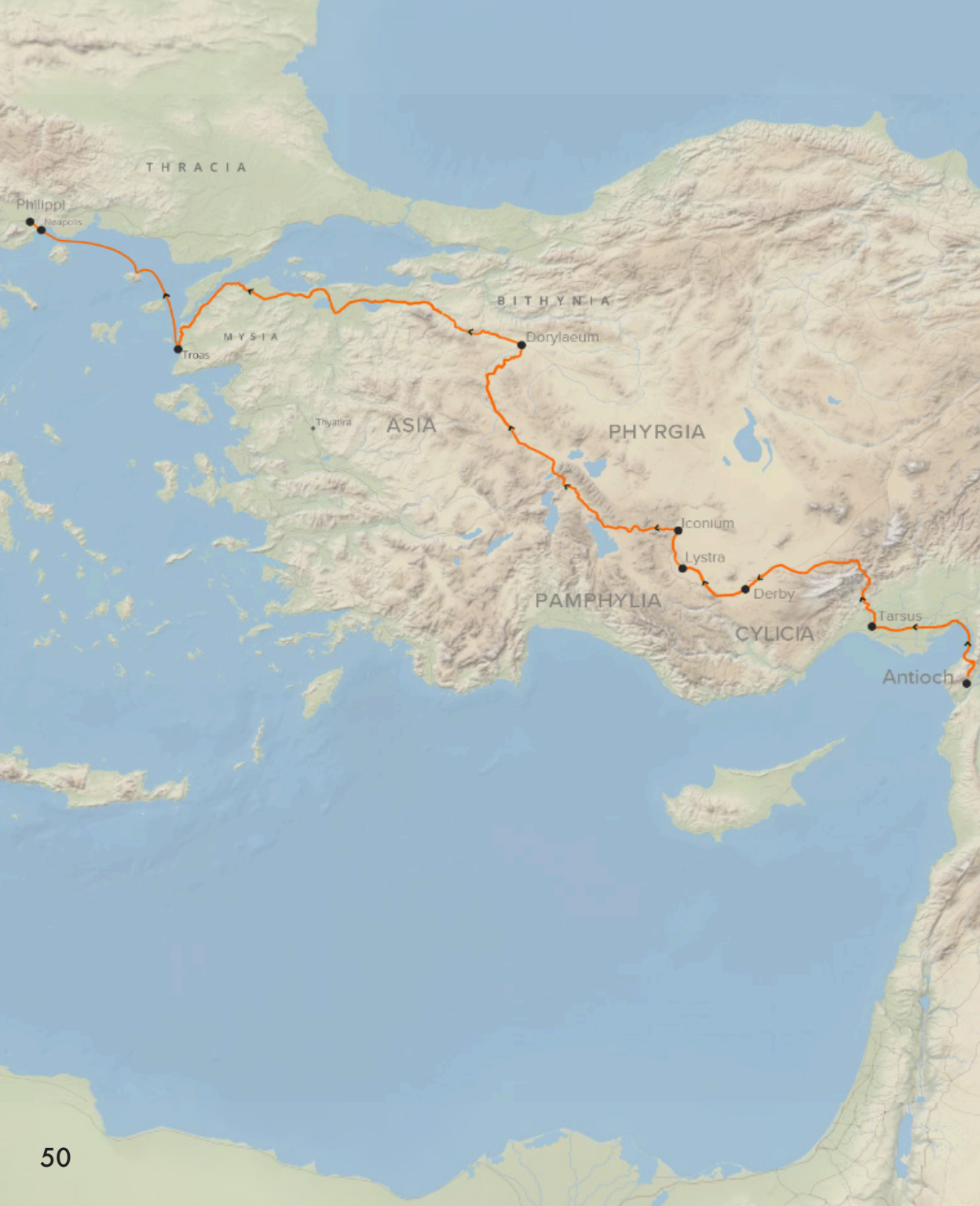
6. Do you think some rules got accidentally left out? Explain.
7. Where is the first mention of not eating blood in the Bible? Why might this be important?
8. Read Leviticus 17 and 18 looking for the main prohibitions. Look at what follows the words “strangers” or “sojourners” and discuss the main point of the two chapters. How does it compare to the prohibitions here in Acts?
9. What did Paul and Barnabas do on their way back to Jerusalem? What did they do when they returned with the council’s letter? Why were they encouraged? Have you ever experienced this kind of encouragement from someone? Explain.
10. In Acts 15:28 there is a desire to place “no greater burden” than the stated requirements. Have you ever thought your faith was a burden? What made it so? Explain.

TENDING THE FIRE



Gentiles don't need to become ethnically Jewish to follow the Jewish Messiah. There is no mention to follow the entire Torah. Their male children were not asked to be circumcised. No mention of the annual pilgrimages. Simply put they should avoid idolatry, sexual immorality, and blood. When the Israelites failed in the Old Testament, it was most often idolatry described as adultery, a sexual immorality that was unfaithfulness to the LORD. The linked sins of idolatry and unfaithfulness are at the core of the human heart. After the flood in Genesis 9:4 we find God blessing Noah and saying "you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" and that the shedding of blood is not acceptable. At such an early stage, the Jerusalem Council is at least identifying how Gentile converts can avoid false worship, whether directed toward false gods or human desire. We can read the New Testament epistles and see all of the implications of these simple rules, but it requires an understanding of culture and your own patterns of living. Thank God for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. His shed blood is our ultimate salvation when we submit our lives in trust to Him.

Are you paying attention to how your worship may be hijacked and misdirected? Can you identify the false places of worship that you still frequent? How can you be more aware of these patterns this week? Who can help?



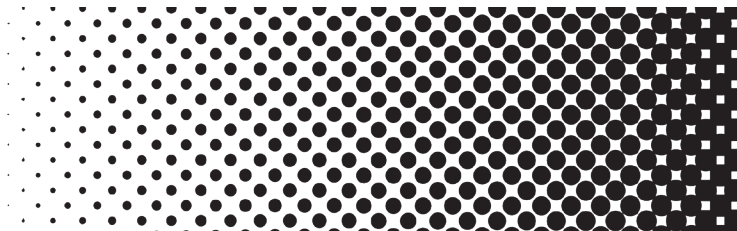


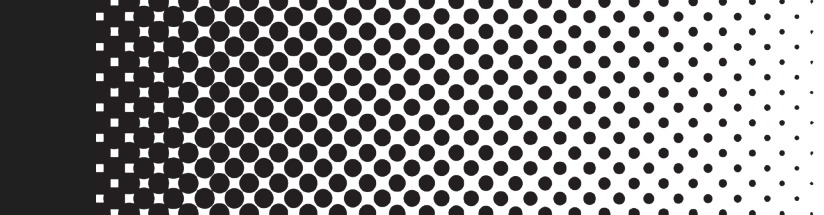
SESSION SIX
Acts 15:36-16:12

SESSION 6

³⁶ And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” ³⁷ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

¹ Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way





through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. ⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. ¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis,¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.

INTRODUCTION

A disagreement leads to a change in the team members. Interestingly enough, even with the separation of close relationships, God orchestrates new players into the mix. Not only that, but here we see how the Spirit of God continues to direct the path of the Christian mission. Sometimes He tells us where NOT to go, and when we should pause proclaiming the gospel. He knows where the fertile soil is.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In Acts 15:36, Paul decides they should go back to places they had visited. When thinking about our own faith, how can this rhythm of going back over previously tread ground be helpful whether relationally or foundational in our faith?
2. Recall the last time you were in “sharp disagreement” with someone. Who was it? How did it resolve? What might a faithful disagreement look like? Discuss.
3. Here we are first introduced to Timothy. Why might one who is part Greek and part Jewish be helpful to Paul? What did Paul ask Timothy to do and how would that be helpful to Paul’s mission?
4. Read Galatians 5:1-12. How should we think of this passage when considering what Paul did to Timothy in Acts 16:3? Is this a contradiction? Explain.

5. Acts 16:1 identifies Timothy as a “disciple.” Read 2 Timothy 1:3-7, Philippians 2:19-24 and 1 Corinthians 4:14-17. Paul would spend a lot of time with Timothy and call him a “son.” What are the characteristics that Timothy has displayed from these passages?

6. The “Spirit of Jesus” is used in Acts 16:7. Read Romans 8:9-11 and Philippians 1:18-21. Clearly, there is no distinction with the “Holy Spirit,” so why do you think Luke uses this phrase here in Acts?

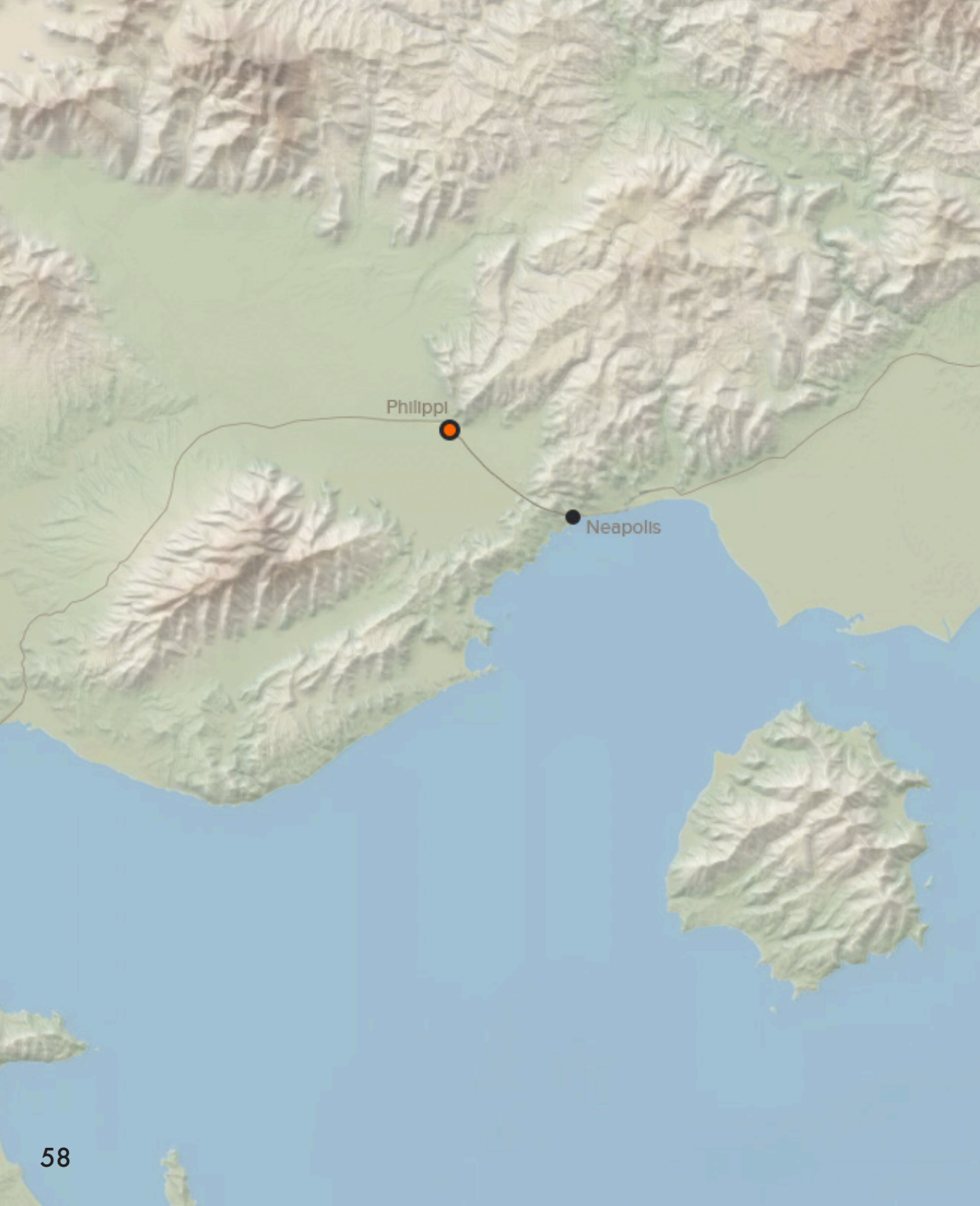
7. Do you listen for God’s will through His Spirit in this way? Have you ever experienced God saying “no”? Explain.

TENDING THE FIRE



“Forbidden by the Holy Spirit” and “the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” are phrases used in this text. God, in essence, is declaring “don’t preach in this place” and “don’t go to that place.” When we talk about “faith,” moments like this can be very telling. Do Paul and his crew “trust” God? Are they listening? We have no idea how or why these prohibitions were given, but we know that Paul has been set apart to speak the gospel to the Gentiles, which was his plan for Asia and Bithynia, but God’s plan supersedes. We don’t know the amount of time that passed, the number of prayers, or the wise discussions between the disciples that took place on this journey, but immediately we understand why. God has new ground for them to cover and it is a greater distance from home. These missionaries are listening to what God wants them to do even as they plan to do what they think He wants.

How much do you ask God into your plans when you should be asking how to fit into His? Let your prayers this week be filled with submission to the One who is truly in control.



Philippi

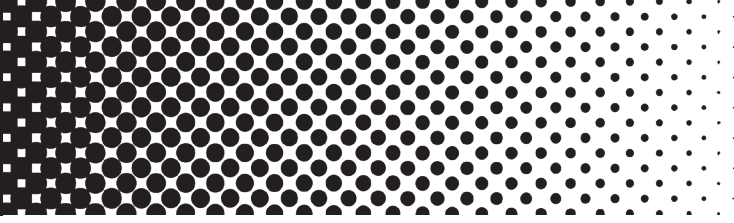
Neapolis



SESSION SEVEN
Acts 16:13-40

SESSION 7

¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us. ¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortunetelling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” ¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰ And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹ They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and



suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. ³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

ACTS 16:13-40

INTRODUCTION

In submission to the Spirit's leading, Paul and his cohorts enter into this important city in Macedonia that is named after Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. At this Roman colony called Philippi, the missionaries come into contact with a diverse group of people: a wealthy woman, a poor and oppressed slave girl, and a jailor.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The last sentence in Acts 16:14 is instructive. How would you describe Lydia's conversion?
2. Read Deuteronomy 18:10-14. What is the problem with "divination"?
3. In reading Acts 16:16-19, how is Paul's motivation different from the slave girl's owners? Was the girl telling the truth?
4. Read Luke 8:26-39. What is similar in these accounts? What does the episode with Paul and the slave girl illustrate?
5. In Acts 16:22-24 the consequence of freeing the slave girl of her spiritual oppression was high. Read Philippians 1:12-30. What does Paul want the Philippians to understand about suffering consequences for the gospel?

6. The image in Acts 16:25 is crazy. In your most challenging and chaotic moments, do you sing? Do you pray? Why/why not?
7. How do “households” play an important part in today’s text?
8. What is the irony of this section related to Roman customs and citizenship?
9. Compare how “being saved” works through the three episodes. How is each saved? How might each describe “salvation”?
10. Discuss the diversity of these three encounters with Paul.

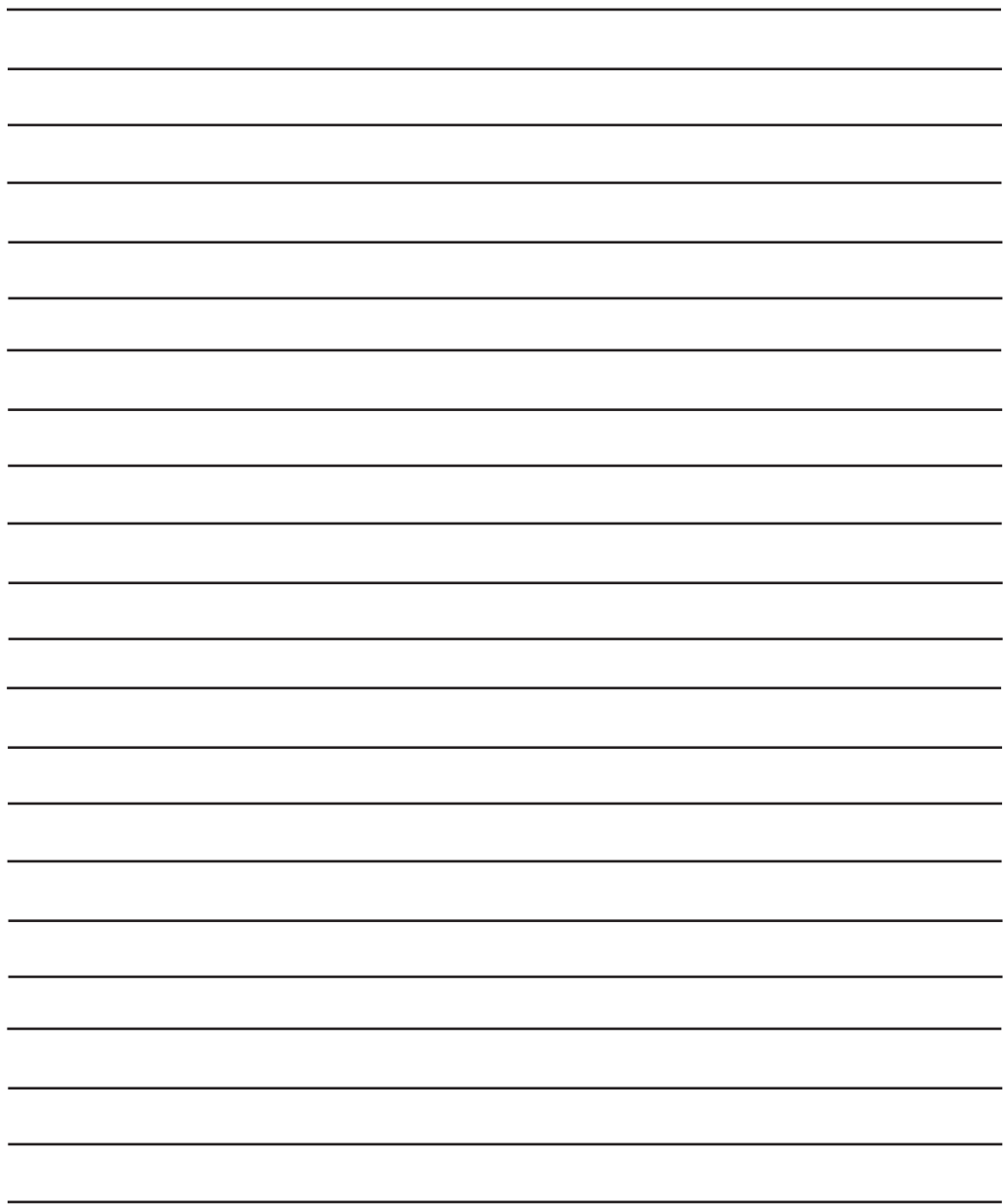
TENDING THE FIRE



These three stories have a location in common, but very little else. It is hard to imagine any common ground between them. If we assume that they all came to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we know at least One thing that could unify them. What if these were the seeds of the local church in Philippi? What if the diversity of rich, poor, male, female, powerful, and powerless shared the gospel as their central belief? Do we see church this way?

This week look around your church family. Who is most unlike you? Have you met them? Does your mutual submission to the King of the Universe create a unity amidst your differences? Introduce yourself.

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