

Acts The Gospel on the Move

Study 11

The Start of World Missions

Acts 12-13

A. Beginning of World Missions

Acts 11:19-30 (NIV)

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

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

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

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

1. a) According to the video lecture, in Acts 11:23 where Barnabas was sent to Antioch and he saw what the grace of God had done, list down some examples of what the grace of God looked like in Antioch.

- 1) Converts
- 2) Changed lives
- 3) New international community
- 4) Faith that extends beyond ethnicity

b) Based on the video lecture, what are some of the Acts that were accompanied by the Word which demonstrates the Gospel?

Gospel = Word + Deed	
Acts 2	Not a single person is in need
Acts 6	The widows were taken care of (Care of Widows)
Acts 12	International Famine Relief

B. The Kingdom Strikes Back

Acts 12:4-16 (NIV)

After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

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

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she

recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

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

But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

2. a) Objective Question. How did the Church respond when Peter was thrown into prison?

A. Planned an escape for Peter

B. Pray to God

b) Reflection Question. Although the Church prayed to God to rescue Peter, they said that Rhoda was crazy when she informed them that Peter was at the door. Were there occasions when you prayed to God but you struggled to believe that God would answer your prayers?

C. Multicultural Church

Acts 13:1-3 (NIV)

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While 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." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

3. Fill in the Blanks. According to the video lecture, list the people who were part of the multicultural church in Antioch.

Description	Name
A Jew	Barnabas
Called Niger (Black)	Simeon
From Cyrene (Greek)	Lucius
Nobleman	Manaen

Former Pharisee	Saul
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D. The Journey to Cyprus

Acts 13:4-12

The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

4. a) Objective Question. Why did Sergius Paulus (the proconsul) believe the Word of God?

- A. Because he was fearful that he would be made blind like Elymas
- B. Because of the amazing power that Paul demonstrated
- C. Because he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

b) Reflection Question. Whilst miracles can point people to God, churches today are often drawn to miracles, signs, and wonders.

i) How can we shift our focus back to the foundational truths of the gospel and the teaching of the Lord?

ii) Have you witness anyone relying more on miraculous signs to share the Gospel rather than relying on the truth of Scripture?

E. Preaching to the Jews

Acts 13:14-16 (NIV)

From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak."

Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!

5. a) Fill in the Blanks. According to the video lecture, how did Paul present the Gospel to the Jews?

Gospel Witness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- God chose Israel and saved them from Egypt- Gave Canaan a promised land for 450 years- Gave Kings and Judges and prophesied that the Savior would come from the line of David (i.e. Jesus)
Gospel Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- John prophesied the coming of Messiah- The people of Jerusalem and the Rulers did not recognize Jesus- Sentenced Jesus to death even though they found no proper ground for a death sentence- Witnessed by Paul and the apostles
Gospel Promises	Acts 13:38 (NIV): Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.
Gospel Conditions	Acts 13:39 (NIV): Through him (Jesus) everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

b) Discussion Question. Paul also preached about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, both as a fact (Acts 13:30-31) and as a fulfillment of Scripture (Acts 13:32-33). But the idea of the resurrection of Jesus poses as a stumbling block to the Jews (e.g. the Sadducees) and appears as foolishness to the Gentiles and

certain Christians. Can we then share the gospel and just leave out the topic of resurrection?

No, we cannot share the gospel and leave out the topic of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the Christian faith and the gospel message. In Acts 13:30-31, Paul emphasizes the resurrection as a fact, and in verses 32-33, he presents it as the fulfillment of Scripture. The resurrection is not just an additional detail; it is the foundation of our faith.

In 1 Corinthians 15:17, Paul explicitly states, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." Without the resurrection, Jesus' death would have been meaningless, and there would be no victory over sin and death. The resurrection confirms Jesus' divine identity and the truth of His teachings, proving that His sacrifice was sufficient to atone for our sins.

F. The Next Sabbath

Acts 13:44-52 (NIV)

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

6. a) Discussion Question. Despite Paul and Barnabas being abused, persecuted, and expelled from their region, the disciples are filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Why are they joyful despite these circumstances?

The disciples are joyful because they witnessed the Gentiles responding with gladness and honoring the word of the Lord, and many of those appointed by the Lord believed. They saw the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region, which was a clear sign that their mission was succeeding despite the persecution. Hence, the disciples understood that they were called to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Takeaway

The church, comprised of diverse races, backgrounds, and talents, is called to proclaim the gospel and be witnesses of Christ. We are to trust in the Lord and remain steadfast in our mission, even amidst opposition and adversity.

Case Study

Case 1 – New faces, different generation

Acts-ion Connexion is a Life Group predominantly made up of young adults in their 20s to early 30s who meet every Saturday for fellowship, Bible study, and prayer. Nathaniel serves as the Life Group leader, and the group is well known for its vibrant worship and lively discussions among its members.

Ms. Wanda Er, a part-time tutor in her early 50s, is new to the Christian faith. She had always thought that Christians were a group of dull and boring people who gather only to read, and sing hymns all day. She has a daughter named Samantha, whom she drops off at the Life Group every Saturday.

Recently, Wanda expressed interest in joining the Life Group with her daughter because she was captivated by the youthful energy and engaging discussions among the young adults. However, some of the younger members felt uncomfortable with the generational gap. After one of the meetings, a few group members approached Nathaniel and suggested that Wanda might be better suited to a group for older adults, where she might find peers closer to her age.

1. a) Discussion question. How would you respond if you were:

i) Nathaniel (the Life Group leader)

ii) or Samantha (the daughter)?

b) Many churches separate/segregate their small gatherings by age group, demographics, or language. What are the pros and cons of this form of separation/segregation?

Pros:

● **Tailored Content:**

- For youth groups: Topics like self-identity and social media.
- For single adults: Topics on loneliness and building community.
- For seniors and elders: Topics on dealing with loss.

● **Ease of Communication / Practical:**

- Services in different languages (e.g., a Chinese service for Chinese speakers, a Tamil service for Tamil speakers) facilitate better understanding and engagement.

● **Comfort and Familiarity:**

- Members may feel more at ease discussing issues relevant to their specific life stage or cultural background.

Cons:

● **Missed perspective:**

- Lack of interaction between groups may result in missed opportunities for single adults and married couples to learn from each other, or for working adults to share insights with young adults.

● **Risk of Generational Silos:**

- There is a potential for age groups to become insular, with young adults or other groups interacting primarily within their own demographic and being resistant to mingling with other groups.

● **Risk of division:**

- Excessive segregation may lead to a fragmented church community, where different groups become isolated and the overall unity of the church is weakened.

Case 2 – Effective Missions

Miss Chanel is currently serving in the Missions Ministry at Global Church Christian Centre. She has recently returned from a mission trip to Indonesia and attended a debriefing session to discuss the trip.

During the discussion, the Missions team reviewed their recent experience serving the community in Indonesia with approximately 100 people. They realized that only a handful of individuals (around 5-8 people) expressed curiosity about their purpose, and none of them had decided to become Christians.

At this point, Mr. Wang Der proposed a new strategy. He suggested that, in addition to serving the community, they should establish a healing ministry. His idea was that demonstrating God's healing power could make their mission efforts more effective and attract more people to Christ.

2. a) Discussion question. How would you respond if you were Miss Chanel?

b) Discussion question. Is there anything wrong with what the Missions Ministry is doing? What are the other solutions/points of view you can provide? If you have previously served in the Missions team, feel free to share your experience with your group.

c) Should the Missions team continue their plans to serve the Indonesian community? Or should they start exploring a new community altogether?

d) When planning the next mission trip, the team has asked their friends to pray for a successful harvest. Some team members doubt the effectiveness of prayer,

questioning if they should even pray when they lack faith in the trip's success due to past experiences. How would you respond to this concern?

Though Acts 12:5-16 shows that prayer can be made even amidst uncertainty, James 1:5-8 gives a solemn warning that when we ask God through prayer, we must believe in God and not doubt. Otherwise, we should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

However, this doesn't mean we should pray with the belief that our specific outcomes will be granted, or that prayer is a means to get something from God. Instead, we pray with the belief that God **can** answer our prayers.

In Mark 9:24, the father of the demon-possessed boy approached Jesus and prefaced that if Jesus can do anything, he should take pity and help him. Jesus highlighted the father's initial words "If you can?", which implies that the father questioned Jesus' ability, followed with "Everything is possible for one who believes."

The father, realising this, responded "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!", demonstrating that even with doubts, he trusted in Jesus' power to help.

Similarly, while we may have doubts about the success of the mission trip, we should still pray with faith that God is powerful and capable of bringing about what is needed. Prayer is about seeking God's will and support, regardless of our uncertainties.

Further reading:

James 1:5-8 (NIV)

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Mark 9:20-27 (NIV)

So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

Full article: <https://www.gotquestions.org/I-believe-help-my-unbelief.html>