

Acts 12-16

NT #24 Bible Reading Class Pastor Warren Wang

BRC

Reading the Bible and
following Jesus

Seal Beach, CA

ENGLISH DRAFT VERSION
**English translation provided
by ChatGPT with editing by
Jaime Chen.
(ESV for most Bible verses:
Please refer to a Bible for
accurate translations.)*

A Bible Reader's Conviction

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and **training in righteousness**, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV)*

A Spiritual Journey

- May you read the Word of God with reverence, and walk in His will!
- May the word of the Lord prosper; May He add to your number those who are being saved!
- May the Lord bless the days you read His Word!

B R C

Read the Bible. Follow Jesus

Read the Bible. Follow Jesus.



The Guiding Principles of BRC



Christ-Centered

Bible-Based

Mission-Minded

Honor System and Agreement of BRC

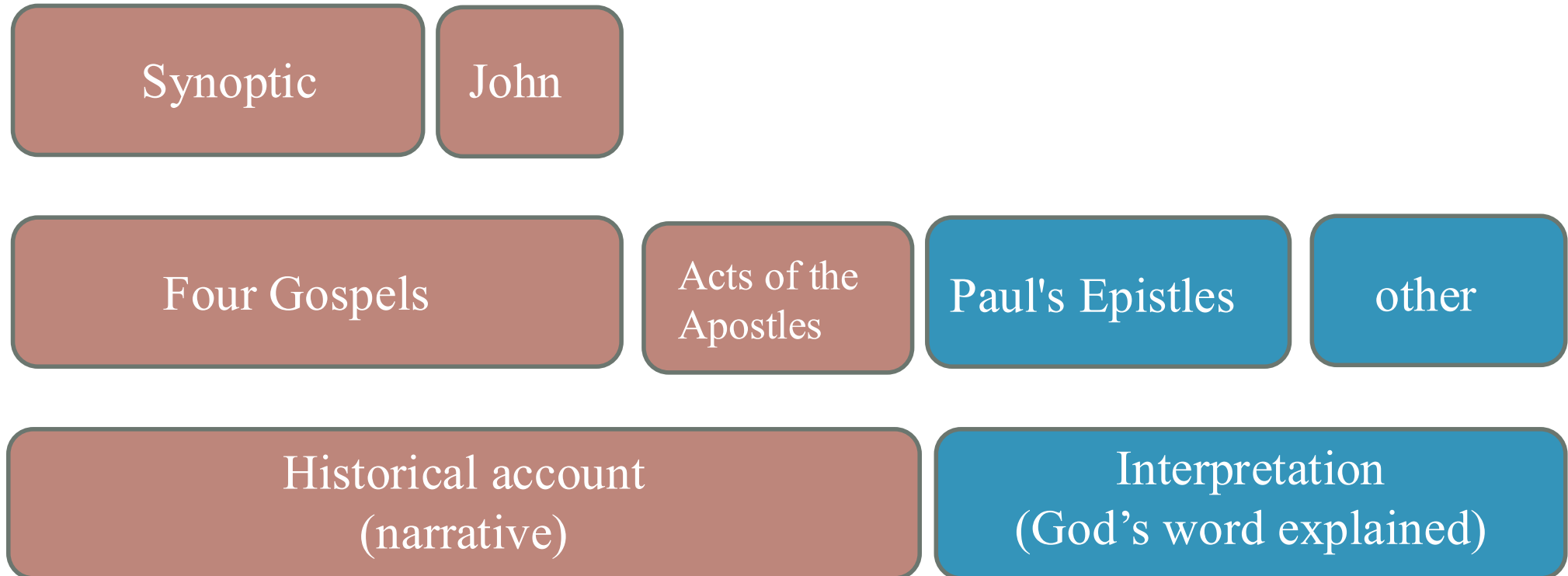


1. I will complete weekly reading assignment

2. I will watch weekly teaching video in its entirety

3. I will complete weekly quiz (closed book)

New Testament Structure





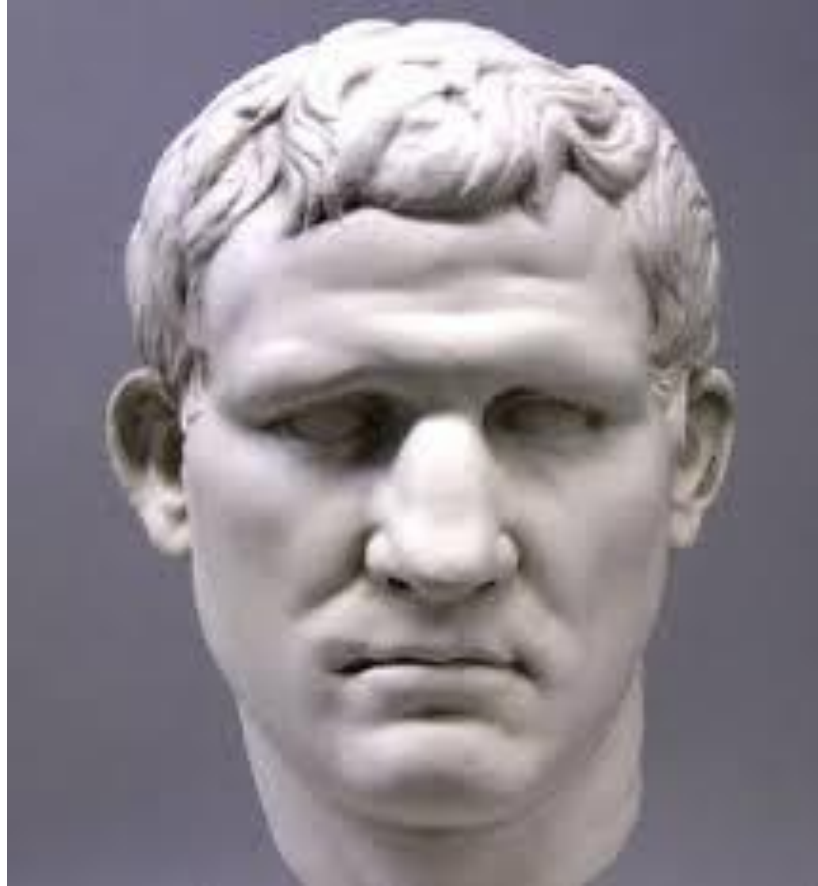
Acts 12

1. An Interlude

- They did so, sending their contribution to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul... When Barnabas and Saul had fulfilled their service, they returned from Jerusalem, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. (11:30; 12:25)
- **An Interlude**
 - Acts 11:30 speaks of the church in Antioch sending Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem with relief for the famine. It doesn't pick back up until Acts 12:25, where it speaks of their return to Antioch from Jerusalem after their relief mission was completed. **The interlude section 12:1–24 is sandwiched between 11:30 and 12:25, and is a specifically placed interlude.** This interlude provides a focused sketch of the Jerusalem church at that time, detailing three events: the martyrdom of James, the imprisonment of Peter, and the sudden death of Herod.
 - After the martyrdom of Stephen, the Jerusalem church faced intense persecution, and the disciples were scattered, while the apostles remained in the city (8:1). As time passed and the situation eased somewhat, some disciples gradually returned to Jerusalem. Yet the condition of the church remained grim. They faced not only famine but also a second wave of persecution. This time, the attack came from King Herod, directed at the leaders of the church: the apostle James was killed, and Peter was imprisoned. The situation was extremely dire.



**Claudius, Roman Emperor
41-54 AD**



**Herod Agrippa I
King of Judah, 41-44 AD**

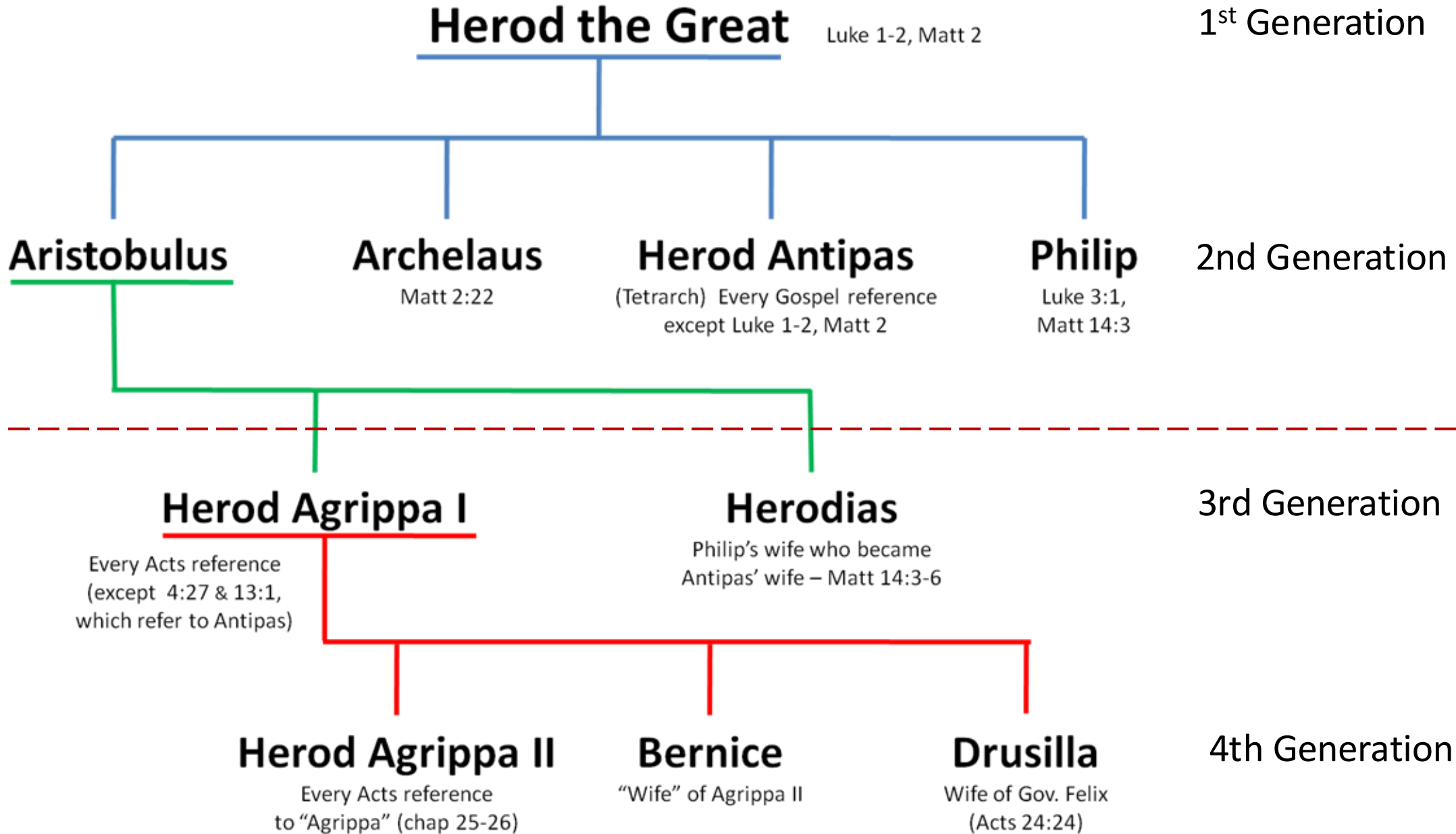
Acts 11–12 mentions two historical figures: **Claudius** and **Herod Agrippa I**. Claudius was the Roman emperor, and Herod was under his authority. During the reign of Claudius, there was a great famine throughout the world (11:28), and Herod Agrippa I killed the apostle James (12:1–2).

2. The Martyrdom of James

- At that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. (12:1–3)
- The persecution grew increasingly severe—at first, believers were only beaten or imprisoned, but gradually, some were killed. Stephen was the first martyr; James was the first “apostle” to be martyred. Beyond these two, we do not know how many others gave their lives.
- James was the brother of John and one of the twelve apostles. Jesus had called the two brothers by the Sea of Galilee to follow Him. Peter, James, and John were regarded as the three apostles closest to Jesus. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain and when He prayed in Gethsemane, He took only these three with Him, leaving the others behind.
- The one who killed James was Herod Agrippa I (who reigned A.D. 41–44). He was the grandson of Herod the Great, the king who ordered the massacre of the infants at the time of Jesus’ birth, the son of Aristobulus, and the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had John the Baptist beheaded.

2. The Martyrdom of James

- **The Close Companions of Jesus: Peter, James, and John**
- **The Mount of Transfiguration** – “After six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.” (Matthew 17:1–2)
- **The Garden of Gethsemane** – “And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ And he took with him Peter and James and John.” (Mark 14:32–33)



Gospels

History

Acts

2. The Martyrdom of James

- The Book of Acts specifically notes that “the Jews were pleased with this,” indicating that there were still many who opposed Jesus. When Stephen was stoned to death, Saul approved of his execution; when James was killed by the sword, the Jews were pleased with it. You may wonder: Was not the word of God increasing greatly? Were not many of the priests becoming obedient to the faith? (6:7) History is but a condensed reflection of real life—it does not show the whole picture. A single historical sentence may sweep across years, even decades, while real life unfolds moment by moment, full of intricacies and tensions. Some turn to the Lord, while others resist Him; some become disciples, while others persecute them. All these forces coexist—that is the reality of life.

3. Peter Imprisoned

- King Herod killed James, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he, having tasted blood, went on to arrest Peter as well, intending to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. He placed Peter under heavy guard—four squads of soldiers, four men each, taking turns to watch over him. Peter was chained with two iron chains, sleeping between two soldiers, locked deep within the prison. But an angel of the Lord came to rescue him, causing the chains to fall off his hands and leading him safely out of the prison. Meanwhile, the disciples were gathered at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, praying earnestly. Peter went there to meet them, spoke with them, and then departed to another place.
- Where did Peter go? Scripture does not tell us. The next time we see him is in Acts 15—by then, the Herod who had sought to kill him was already dead, and Peter had returned once again to Jerusalem.
- **The sovereignty and wisdom of God**: Why was James killed while Peter was saved, though both were apostles? In time, Peter too would be martyred; yet for the moment, the Lord still had work for him to do. All eleven of Jesus' apostles (excluding Judas, who betrayed Him) faced persecution—only John died a natural death, while all the others were martyred. As for why one was killed and the other spared—that is determined by the sovereignty and wisdom of God. He has a unique plan for each person's life, one that does not depend on the outcome of others. (refer to John 21:22)

3. Peter Imprisoned

- So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him... When they heard Peter's voice, in their joy they forgot to open the door and ran in to announce, "Peter is standing at the gate!" They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so, and they said, "It must be his angel!" (12:5, 14–15)
- **A Living Church**: The Book of Acts records the origin of the church and expresses with striking clarity that the **church is alive**. The news that people in Antioch had turned to the Lord reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem. Barnabas and Saul spent an entire year with the church in Antioch, teaching many people. When Peter was imprisoned, the church prayed earnestly to God for him. You see—the church has ears to hear, a mouth to pray, and gathers together to learn God's Word. The church is not a government body, nor is it a building. A group of believers gathering together—that is the church. When you come to church, you are joining a community of believers. If people gather in a park, the church is in the park. If people gather inside a building, the church is in the building. When you serve in the church, you are serving a group of people—not an institution, not a structure, but the Lord Jesus Himself and those who belong to Him.

3. Peter Imprisoned

- **Do you not believe that prayers are answered?** The church in Jerusalem prayed fervently for Peter. What did they pray for? Did they ask the Lord to grant Peter courage to face execution calmly, viewing death as a return home? Did they ask the Lord to lessen Peter's suffering so he would not be tormented before death? Did they ask the Lord to comfort Peter's family and provide for them later? Or did they ask the Lord to save Peter? I think they must have asked the Lord to save him! Peter was imprisoned, but not yet dead, so the church would surely have prayed for his survival. Even in the modern 21st century, if a brother or sister is seriously ill, the church will pray for their healing at a prayer meeting; they wouldn't immediately ask the Lord to grant them a peaceful death.
- However, when Peter, having been rescued by an angel, stood and knocked on the door, the church did not believe he had actually returned! What happened? They asked God for salvation, God answered, yet they didn't believe their own prayer had been answered? Hold on before you scold them, aren't we exactly the same? We pray in a formulaic way, holding no real expectation in our hearts, and then when the event comes to pass, we dare not believe it. The Book of Acts deliberately focuses on this, recording the contradiction of the prayer and the mighty salvation of God simultaneously. This is not to get a chuckle from later generations, but to remind us that we must have faith in our prayers.

4. Herod's Sudden and Violent Death

- Herod the King died suddenly in AD 44. The Bible says he was eaten by worms; history states he died a violent, sudden death (a sudden illness).
- The Bible says Herod was "[arrayed in royal robes](#)." Historical records state that he was "clad in a garment of silver, which, being struck by the first rays of the sun, shone out with dazzling brilliance, and filled those that looked upon him with awe." When he spoke to the people, the Bible says, "the people were shouting, '[This is the voice of a god, and not of a man!](#)'" (Acts 12:22)
- The Bible emphasizes that Herod's death was God's punishment for him: "[Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.](#)" (Acts 12:23) Secular history does not view events from God's perspective, but merely says that on that day, Herod, who was previously well, was suddenly struck by a violent illness and subsequently died.
- The Bible emphasizes that the gospel is fundamentally the power of God, and no matter what happens—even persecution, imprisonment, or murder—it cannot hinder the word of God. The Book of Acts concludes this interlude with the statement, "[But the word of God increased and multiplied.](#)" (Acts 12:24)



Reflecting on the Main Words #1: The Proper Mindset for Being Disciples

- **Main words**: James was killed, Peter was imprisoned, and the believers were persecuted.
- **Personal reflection**: What is my motive for following Jesus? Is it health, wealth, privilege, reward, or a sincere love for the Lord?



Reflecting on the Main Words #2: Leaders Change, God Does Not Change

- **Main words**: The apostles departed from Jerusalem, and the elders continued the work of the church.
- **Personal reflection**: I serve the Lord faithfully, not considering myself indispensable. Only God is indispensable.



Reflecting on the Main Words #3: God Reigns

- **Main words**: God delivered Peter and punished Herod. Though the church was persecuted, God's word continued to flourish.
- **Personal reflection**: God is sovereign in every circumstance, and I trust in Him.



Reflecting on the Main Words #4: God Reigns

- Main words: God had a distinct, different plan for James, Peter, and Paul.
- Personal reflection: God acts according to His will, not according to my desires. God's way is best.



Proclaiming the Good News

ACTS 13

1. What the Names Say

- In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, after fasting and praying, they laid hands on them and sent them off. (13:1–3)
- The five leaders of the Antioch church served the Lord together, and the Bible specifically records their names:
 - 1) Barnabas, a Jew from Cyprus.
 - 2) Simeon who was called Niger. The original meaning of “Niger” is “black.”
 - 3) Lucius of Cyrene. Cyrene is located in North Africa; Lucius may also have been black.
 - 4) Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch. This person, having been raised with the king, was very likely of noble status.
 - 5) Saul, a Jew from Tarsus, a Pharisee trained rigorously in Jerusalem.

1. What the Names Say

- The five leaders in Antioch display a beautiful picture: different races, different statuses, different cultures, different experiences, yet united in Christ. Then we see an even more beautiful scene: apostles preaching in Asia and Europe, meeting people of various races and cultures, proclaiming Jesus to them, and leading many to the Lord. The various differences among people are like countless rivers, one in the east, one in the west, all flowing into the vast and boundless ocean of the Gospel, all accepted, all united in Christ.
- This is vastly different from the modern Christianity we see. Tribalism and nationalism prevail, emphasizing that the Christian faith is a characteristic of certain cultures, accepting those who identify with their own national culture while excluding outsiders. Because the difference is so great, it is completely contrary to what is recorded in the Bible. No matter how many theology professors you invite to say this is reasonable, it remains unreasonable. If Christ is great, if the Gospel is great, it can embrace different ethnic cultures. If ethnic culture is held great, then Christianity becomes an exclusionary religion. Which is right? Is the Bible right, or are these (nationalism, tribalism) people right?

2. Sent by the Holy Spirit

- So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (13:4)
- The Voice Heard During Worship: The five leaders of the Antioch church, while ministering (worshiping) to God, received revelation from the Holy Spirit, instructing them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them. *(YouTube P.Wang: note that they were that church's two most capable leaders)*
- Obedience to the Holy Spirit: The church obeyed the Holy Spirit, sending the two out to do the Lord's work. The two obeyed the Holy Spirit, going out as sent. They first preached in Cyprus, then went on to Asia Minor to preach. In Asia Minor, they primarily preached in three cities: Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, and Lystra.

Asia Minor

ASIA MINOR

THRACE

Black Sea

PONTUS

BITHYNIA

MYSIA

GALATIA

CAPPADOCIA

LYDIA

LYCAONIA

1 Antioch

Iconium

Lystra

Derbe

PISIDIA

Perga

Attalia

PAMPHYLIA

CILICIA

LYCIA

Seleucia

Antioch

Mediterranean Sea

CYPRUS

Salamis

Paphos

SYRIA

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Jerusalem
Bible History Online

The Commission of the Holy Spirit

While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me **Barnabas** and **Saul** for the work to which I have called them." Then, after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (13:2-3)

Paul's First Missionary Journey

A Tale of Three Cities

	Gospel Preached?	Any Believed in the Lord?	Any Opposed?	Departed How	Returned Later?
Antioch in Pisidia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Driven out (13:50)	Yes
Iconium	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fled out (14:6)	Yes
Lystra	Yes	Yes	Yes	Dragged out (14:19)	Yes

3. Saul, Also Called Paul

- Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 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? ...” (13:9–10)
- The main figure of the Book of Acts, Paul was at first called “Saul”; from Acts 13:9 onward, he is referred to as “Paul”.
- While preaching in Cyprus, Saul encountered a magician named Bar-Jesus, also called Elymas (which means “magician”), who opposed the apostles. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, rebuked him and caused him to become blind, unable to see the sun for a time, and the man was struck blind.
- Saul was sent by the Holy Spirit; now, being filled again with the Holy Spirit, he rebuked the magician, manifesting the authority granted by God. In performing this act, his referred name changed from Saul (his original Jewish name) to Paul (his Gentile name, meaning “small”).

4. Paul's Preaching

- When Paul was still called Saul, whenever Barnabas and Saul were mentioned together, Barnabas was always named first and Saul second. After his name was changed to Paul, in most instances Paul is mentioned first and Barnabas afterward. This is because, in the work of preaching, God used Paul more extensively.
- Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia, and his sermon there is preserved in Acts 13:16–41. It is the longest sermon of Paul recorded in the Book of Acts. Paul's defense before King Agrippa is also lengthy, but that was a defense, not a sermon.
- **Antioch of Pisidia**: Antioch was the name of the royal family of the Syrian kingdom, and many cities were named after it. The city of Antioch from which Paul set out had been the capital of the Syrian kingdom and, after being conquered by Rome, became the third largest city of the Roman Empire. When they went out to preach, they came to a region in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) called Pisidia, where there was also a city named Antioch.

4. Paul's Preaching

- Bearing Witness to Jesus: The content of Paul's preaching was entirely a testimony to Jesus. He proved that Jesus is the Savior of Israel, the descendant of David whom God had promised. He testified that Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. He declared that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins and is justified."
- Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. 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.
- But God raised him from the dead.
- Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses." (13:23, 29–30, 38–39)

4. Paul's Preaching

- Therefore, brothers, let it be known to you that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:““ 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.””
- As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. 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. The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. (13:38–44)
- Paul's preaching received a tremendous response. After the meeting, many followed them, and by the next Sabbath, almost the entire city had gathered to hear their message.

What It Means to Preach

- One of the clearest teachings in the Book of Acts is what it truly means to preach the word. To preach the word means to bear witness to Jesus, that is, to proclaim the gospel. The content includes: Jesus is the Savior appointed by God (the Christ, the Messiah), who was crucified and raised from the dead; those who believe in Him receive forgiveness of sins and are justified by God. Taking the five places where Paul preached as examples:
 1. **Cyprus:**
 - “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.” (13:4–5)
 2. **Antioch of Pisidia:**
 - “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. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.” (13:48–49)

What It Means to Preach

3. Iconium

- “They stayed there for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.” (14:3)

4. Lystra

- “When the apostles learned of it, they fled to the cities of Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia and to the surrounding region, where they continued to preach the gospel.” (14:6–7)

5. Derbe

- “The next day they went on to Derbe, where they preached the gospel and made many disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain faithful to the faith.” (14:20–22)

What It Means to Preach

- **Returning to Antioch, the Starting Point – Reporting on the Mission**
- “When they arrived, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” (14:27)
- Paul clearly presents his missionary experience with orderly clarity and steadfast faith in the Epistle to the Romans:
- “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:14–17)

5. The Rise of Opposition

- But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and contradicted what Paul said, slandering him. Paul and Barnabas boldly declared, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first. Since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles...
- “But the Jews incited the devout and prominent women and the leading men of the city to persecute Paul and Barnabas, driving them out of their territory. They shook the dust from their feet against them and went on to Iconium. Yet some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, inciting the crowds, and they stoned Paul, thinking he was dead, and dragged him out of the city. (13:45–46, 50–51; 14:19)
- Many believed in the Lord, though many opposed as well. The opponents were “Jews” —not referring to all ethnic Jews, but specifically to those who adhered to Judaism while persecuting the Christian faith. How did they persecute? They used both words and violence. They contradicted and slandered the message Paul preached, forcibly driving Paul and Barnabas out. Wherever Paul went, they pursued him. They even stoned him and, believing he was dead, dragged him out of the city.

6. All Who Were Appointed to Eternal Life Believed

- When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. (13:48–49)
- How to reconcile God's sovereignty with human free will has long been a major challenge in theology. Some believe that a person comes to faith because of God's sovereignty—that God has predestined who will be saved, and they inevitably will be. Others maintain that a person comes to faith by their own free will—that you believe in the Lord because you yourself choose to do so. Both sides cite numerous Scriptures to support their view and hold firmly to their positions.
- How can this issue be resolved? Since the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther, Christians have debated this question for over five hundred years. Even in England alone, there are the Calvinist Presbyterians and the Arminian Methodists—both believing in the same Lord Jesus, yet differing on this theological point. As for us, we are reading the Bible, not teaching theology. God is great, beyond what humans can measure. After reading the entire Bible, whether you choose to confine your understanding of God within a particular theological system is a personal choice.

7. The Gospel is Turned to the Gentiles

- 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**. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.’” (13:46–47)
- This passage records a historic moment. Paul and Barnabas came to Antioch in Pisidia and preached in the synagogue of the Jews. In the synagogue, besides the Jews, there were also “devout Gentiles” (proselytes to Judaism). The Gentiles gladly received the message, and many believed in the Lord. Yet some of the Jews strongly opposed and persecuted the apostles. Paul and Barnabas then declared that since the Jews rejected the word, from that point on they would turn to the Gentiles. **From then on, although Paul still went into Jewish synagogues to preach wherever he went, his focus increasingly turned toward the Gentiles, until he later referred to himself as “an apostle to the Gentiles”** (Romans 11:13).
- God’s purpose is to save the people of the world, and the mission of Jesus is for His disciples to go to the ends of the earth, bearing witness and proclaiming the gospel to all nations. In the Jews’ rejection, the Gentiles’ acceptance, and the turning of the gospel, there is the gracious purpose of God—that all people throughout the world might hear the gospel. To this day, whether Jew or Gentile, anyone who is willing may believe in the Lord and be saved.

THE POWER OF GOD

The Power of God

1. The Gospel is the Power of God

- For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is **the power of God** that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile . *Romans 1:16*

The Power of God

2. The Word of the Cross is the Power of of God

- For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is **the power of God**. *1 Corinthians 1:18*

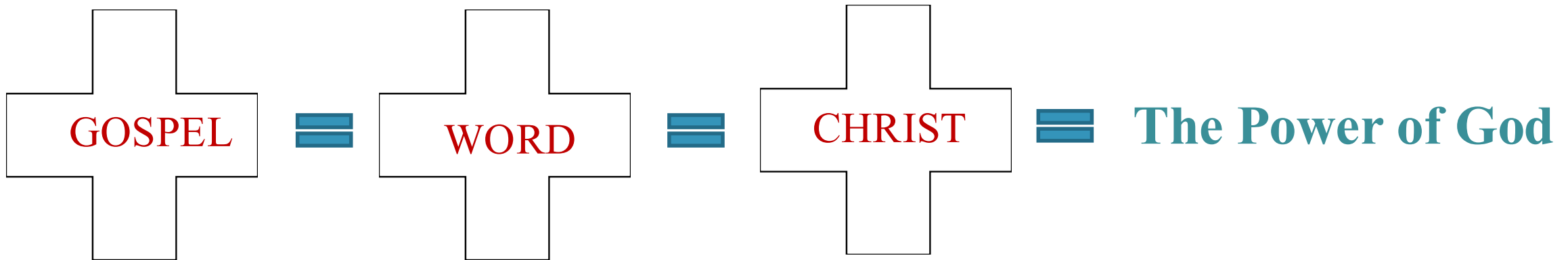
The Power of God

3. Christ is the Power of God

- But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ **the power of God** and the wisdom of God. *1 Corinthians 1:24*

The Power of God

1. The Gospel is the Power of God
2. The Word of the Cross is the Power of God
3. Christ is the Power of God





Acts 14

1. The Jews' Persistent Opposition and Persecution

- The Book of Acts, written in the style of a historical record, records the persecution by the Jews against the gospel in various places one by one.
- Hatred and persecution: The so-called Jews refer to those “unbelieving Jews” (14:2. To believe is to obey; not to believe is to disobey). These people were led by the leaders of Judaism (leaders of the temple and the synagogues), along with the people who followed them. At the beginning of the gospel, many Jews believed, and even the apostles themselves were Jews. But the majority of the Jews still rejected Jesus, and they hated those who preached Jesus. The main reasons for their hatred were twofold: first, jealousy; second, their disagreement that Jesus is the Christ. Hatred was a powerful motivation, even driving them to pursue the gospel from one place to another—wherever the gospel was preached, there they persecuted.
- Take the apostles' experiences in the three cities of Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra as examples:

1. The Jews' Persistent Opposition and Persecution

1. Pisidian Antioch

- When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.... 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. (13:44-45,50)

2. Iconium

- Now 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. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.... When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them. (14:1-2,5)

1. The Jews' Persistent Opposition and Persecution

3. Lystra

- 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. (14:19)

2. Fickle Crowds

- 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.” ... 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. (14:11,19)
- Paul healed a man in Lystra that was crippled from birth, and the people were astonished, thinking that gods had descended among them. They called Barnabas Zeus (the king of the gods in Greek mythology) and Paul Hermes (the messenger god), and they brought oxen and garlands, intending to offer sacrifice to them. At that moment, Paul and Barnabas were held in the highest esteem, and the people treated them with reverence and awe. Yet in a short while, after hearing the Jews’ incitement, the same crowd stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead. What happened? Why such a sudden reversal? Anyone who has studied crowd behavior knows that crowds are impulsive and fickle, easily swayed and lacking calm judgment. Just a few agitators repeating accusations can turn a multitude’s opinion. Because of human sinfulness, people prefer to hear and believe evil reports more readily than good ones. Paul and Barnabas personally experienced the fickleness of the crowd in Lystra.

3. Missionary Report

- From there they sailed back to **Antioch**. They reported all that God had done through them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. (14:26-27)
- Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary journey and returned to Antioch. They had traveled to Cyprus and Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), including Paphos, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. Having been sent out by the church in Antioch, they now returned to report to the congregation all that God had accomplished through them, especially how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.



Acts 15

1. Jerusalem Council

- **Cause:** Some people came to Antioch, claiming that unless one was circumcised according to the custom of Moses, one could not be saved, which caused a great dispute.
 - 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.” Paul and Barnabas strongly disagreed and debated with them. The whole church decided to send Paul, Barnabas, and some others from their group to Jerusalem to consult the apostles and elders about this matter. (15:1-2)
- **The significance of this meeting:**
 - This was the first major obstacle the gospel faced regarding truth, concerning the doctrine of salvation. Is salvation received simply by believing in Jesus, or must it include additional requirements? For example, must one also be circumcised? If circumcision is required, what about the rest of the law? What next? Does this then mean that a Gentile, uncircumcised and does not follow the Jewish law, cannot be saved?

1. The Jerusalem Council

- **The claim of the Pharisees' followers** (**Youtube P.Wang: Christians who were originally Pharisees*)
 - But 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.” (15:5)
- **Peter's testimony:**
 - “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... But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” (15:7–11)

1. The Jerusalem Council

- **Conclusion: Christ alone**

- The chairman of the council, James (the apostle James had already died; this James was the brother of Jesus and the author of the Epistle of James), made the conclusion: “Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God.” (15:19)
- Although this council reached a conclusion, it did not completely settle the controversy over salvation. The “circumcision party” did not give up their position and continued to disturb the believers in various places. In his letters—especially Romans and Galatians—Paul continued to contend earnestly for this matter, emphasizing that people are saved through faith in Jesus, not by keeping the Law.

2. Healthy Debate

- **A Debate About Salvation**

- Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into **sharp dispute and debate** with them. (15:1-2)

2. Healthy Debate

- **A debate about salvation**
 - The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. After there had been **much debate**…… (15:6-7)

2. Healthy Debate

- **A healthy debate is**
 1. For the common good
 2. Not involving personal ego
 3. Obedient to the leadership of the Holy Spirit

3. Going to Antioch to Announce the Council's Decision

- After the Jerusalem Council had reached a conclusion, they wrote a letter to announce the result of the meeting (15:22–29). They also sent two messengers—Judas called Barsabbas and Silas—to go with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. Later, Silas became Paul's coworker on his second missionary journey.

4. The Dispute Between Paul and Barnabas

- **The reason for the dispute: selection of co-workers**
 - 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.” Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 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. (15:36–38))
- **The result of the dispute: separate mission fields**
 - And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. (15:39–40)

4. The Dispute Between Paul and Barnabas

- **Mark's relationship with Barnabas**

- Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. (Colossians 4:10)

- **Mark's relationship with Paul**

- “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him).” (Colossians 4:10)
- “Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry (original language: *diakonia*) ” (2 Timothy 4:11)
- Many years later, Paul and Mark had a good relationship. When Paul was imprisoned, Mark came to serve him. Paul regarded Mark as useful to him in the work of preaching (or service, from the Greek *diakonia*, meaning service or ministry).*
- **YouTube P.Wang: By then, Mark also did much ministry with Peter. And later Mark brought the gospel to Egypt*

4. The Dispute Between Paul and Barnabas

- **The nature of dispute**

- Paul and Barnabas had been coworkers for many years. They had faced life-and-death situations together in the work of preaching. Yet now they quarreled over Mark and even separated. How should Christians view this matter? Does this dispute reveal human weakness, or was this separation permitted by the Holy Spirit?

- **The focus of the dispute:**

- Coworkers will inevitably quarrel when they have different views about people or matters. In times of disagreement, one must ask: Are we quarreling for the sake of people, or for the sake of God? Are we quarreling for our own opinions, personal honor, or relationships, or for God's work?
- Why did Paul refuse to take Mark? Was it because he personally disliked Mark, or because he judged that Mark was not suitable to participate in this particular ministry?

4. The Dispute Between Paul and Barnabas

- **The situation of separation:**
 - Even in separation, there can be a separation with goodwill or a separation with ill will. A separation with goodwill involves blessing one another and each working diligently to preach the gospel. A separation with ill will involves anger in the heart, broken friendship, and mutual resentment. How did Paul and Barnabas separate?
- **The Holy Spirit did not intervene:**
 - Earlier, a dispute arose over the matter of salvation, and the Holy Spirit intervened, so that all reached a common conclusion ([for the Holy Spirit and we have decided this, Acts 15:28](#)). This time, however, Paul and Barnabas quarreled, and the Holy Spirit did not intervene. Their conclusions differed, resulting in separation. Why did the Holy Spirit not intervene? Because one issue concerned the great matter of salvation, while the other concerned the composition of a ministry team. God allows human choice in the formation of a ministry team and does not intervene.

4. The Dispute Between Paul and Barnabas

- **The Direction of the Bible:**
 - After Paul and Barnabas parted ways, the Bible thereafter records only Paul, and does not record Barnabas. It does not record both their separate paths.

5. "Just as" and "Did not discriminate"

- God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, **just as** he did to us. He **did not discriminate** between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. (15:8-9)
 - **God shows no partiality. A healthy church practices both "just as" and "does not discriminate."**
 1. Just as: speaks to the sharing of grace. Has God shown grace to them just as He has to us?
 2. Do not discriminate: speaks to disappearance of distinctions: In Christ, there is no distinction between them and us.

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us

1. Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church
2. It seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to
3. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.....(15:22,25,28)
 - **All decisions of the Church are not a matter of committee consensus of the opinions of the people, but of collective obedience to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**



Acts 16

1. The Gospel Enters Europe

- Background:
 - Acts chapters 16–18 record the process of the gospel entering Europe. During Paul's second missionary journey, God called him to go to Macedonia to preach the gospel (16:10). Macedonia, located in Europe, was the homeland of Alexander the Great and at that time a province of the Roman Empire.
 - After going to Macedonia, Paul also went to Achaia, the province to the south.

1. The Gospel Enters Europe

- Five Cities in Europe:
 - Paul went to five cities in Europe: three in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) and two in Achaia (Athens, Corinth). Among them, he stayed the longest in Corinth, where he lived for a year and six months (18:11).
 - In every place they faced persecution—beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, brought before the tribunal in Corinth, escaping by night from Thessalonica, and hastily setting sail from Berea so that their coworkers were scattered. Yet many also turned to the Lord (16:15, 34; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:8).



**Paul's Second Missionary Journey —
The Five Cities in Europe:**
1. Philippi 2. Thessalonica 3. Berea 4.
Athens 5. Corinth

	City	Persecuted how	Departed how	Any believed in the Lord?
1	Philippi	Arrested and punished by the authorities; imprisoned	After imprisonment, asked by the authorities to leave	Yes
2	Thessalonica	Their lodging was broken into, disturbing the officials	Escaped in the night	Yes
3	Berea	Pursued by people who stirred up the crowds against them	Hurriedly set sail and departed, coworkers scattered	Yes
4	Athens	Mocked and despised by people	Left by himself	Yes
5	Corinth	Opposed and slandered by people; brought before the court	Left by himself	Yes

1. The Gospel Enters Europe

- Understanding the nature of the gospel:
 - Years later, Paul expressed his firm conviction about the gospel in his letter to the Romans: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16)
 - Paul and his coworkers (Silas, Timothy, and Luke), holding to this conviction, pressed forward alone into the heart of the pagan and hostile continent of Europe. They pressed through many obstacles, sowing the seeds of the gospel and reaping its fruit.
 - Today, Europe is filled with Christians—yet who would have known that it all began with a gospel team of merely four people? They firmly believed that the gospel is the power of God, and with this conviction they preached, bringing about the scene we see today.

2. What Did They Proclaim?

1. At Philippi: “Believe in the Lord Jesus!” (16:31)
2. At Thessalonica: As was his custom, Paul went in, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” (17:2–3)
3. At Berea: Paul proclaimed the word of God in Berea. (17:13)
4. At Athens: Paul was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. (17:18)
5. At Corinth: Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. (18:5)

3. Interracial Marriage

- Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra. There was a disciple there named Timothy, the son of a **Jewish** woman who believed in the Lord, but his father was a **Greek**. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium all spoke well of him. (16:1–2)
- Timothy was an important coworker of Paul. Of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, two are named after him. Because he believed in the Lord, he became Paul's true son — “**To Timothy, my true child in the faith**” (1 Timothy 1:2); and the two of them related to each other like father and son — “**To Timothy, my beloved child**” (2 Timothy 1:2). Timothy's biological father was a Greek, and his mother was a believing Jewish woman. Timothy came from a family of intermarriage between different peoples.
- Can Christians intermarry with people of other ethnic groups? Just look at Timothy and you will know. Wasn't intermarriage forbidden in the Old Testament era? Didn't Ezra become distressed, trembling, and appalled when he saw Jews intermarrying with foreign peoples? Didn't Nehemiah strike people and pull out their hair because of this? That was the Old Testament era; this is the New Testament era. In Acts 10, Peter entered the house of the Gentile Cornelius. In chapter 11, Jews and Gentiles became one together in Antioch. In chapter 15, the Jerusalem Council decided not to place the regulations of the Old Testament upon the believers. In chapter 16, Paul brought a child of an intermarried family with him to preach the gospel. Gentiles and Jews have become one in Christ; if salvation is so, how much more marriage?

The "We" Passage

- *They passed by Mysia and went down to Troas... 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. (16:8–10)*
- Beginning from 16:11, the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles changes from “they” to “we.” The most natural explanation for this obvious shift is that the author, Luke, joined the missionary team at this point and described what happened in the first-person voice as one who was present. Silas joined Paul in Antioch at 15:40; Timothy joined at Lystra in 16:1; Luke joined at Troas in 16:10; Paul’s missionary team now had at least four people. Brothers and sisters, mission is not the work of one person but the collective effort of disciples. May you also join the missionary team..
- **The "We" passages.**
- (1)16:10-17, (2)20:5-15, (3)21:1-18, (4)27:1-28:16

5. A Phrase that is often Misunderstood by Christians

- And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”* And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he and all his family were baptized at once. 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. (16:30–34)
- Christians often say: “God has promised us, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you and your household will be saved.’ I believe that one day my whole family will be saved, because this is God’s promise!” The problem is: did God make such a promise?
- If you simply read the context, you will know the answer. The jailer asked Paul and Silas how he could be saved. They said: Believe in the Lord Jesus, you and your household, and you will be saved! What happened next? Next, the apostles *spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his household*; they all believed in the Lord Jesus, and he and those who belonged to him were immediately baptized.

5. A Phrase that is often Misunderstood by Christians

- God did not promise that when one person believes in the Lord the whole family will be saved. Salvation is personal. God's way is that one person believes in the Lord and one person is saved—not that one person believes in the Lord and the whole family is saved. If that is so, then why was the jailer's whole household saved? Because the apostles preached the word to the jailer's entire household; the whole household heard the gospel; the whole household believed in the Lord Jesus; the whole household was baptized; therefore the whole household was saved. This passage states it very clearly—what is the problem?
- The problem is that some Christians read only one verse. They read 16:31 and then say, “God has promised us, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you and your household will be saved!’” Some preachers read only one verse, and then declare, “You must claim God's promise by faith—‘you and your household will be saved!’”
- Is it so hard to read a few more verses? Five verses of Scripture—one minute is enough to read them—is that difficult? When the Bible records something so plainly, why is there such confusion? Not only are they confused themselves, they also repeat what others say, pass on errors, and confuse others. Brothers and sisters, we ought to read God's word with a reverent heart. Do not read casually, do not listen casually, do not speak casually. When there are more people in the church or in a fellowship who read the Bible, they will understand the truth, will not be confused, and will walk in the will of God.

FIVE “M” OF EVANGELISM

1. The Mission
2. The Messenger
3. The Message
4. The Method
5. The Movement

1. The Mission

- *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8)
- *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19–20)
- **Mission: to bear witness for Jesus, to make all nations the Lord’s disciples.**

2. The Messenger

1. A Former Enemy: Paul
2. An Outsider: Barnabas
3. Anyone who is willing to be used by the Lord

3. The Message

1. Christ-centered
2. Bible-Based

4. The Method of Evangelism

1. Direct Proclamation
2. Direct Invitation
3. Strengthening the disciples

5. The Movement of Evangelism

- **Historical Movement**

- First the Jews, then to the Greeks

- **Ministry Movement**

1. Following the leading of the Holy Spirit
2. Moving toward hearts that are ready to receive

SENT BY THE LORD

1. The God Who Sends

1. Father sends Himself
2. Father sends Son
3. Son sends His disciples
 - a) *“But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”*
(Genesis 3:9, ESV)
 - b) *“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (John 20:21)*
 - c) *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:19)*
 - d) *“...in Jerusalem... and to the end of the earth.” “...you will be my witnesses.”*
(Acts 1:8)

2. Disciples Sent by the Lord

- **Jerusalem**

- In the first ten years, the disciples preached in Jerusalem, and many were brought to the Lord, including priests:
- *“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:7)*

- **All Judea and Samaria**

- After the martyrdom of Stephen, the church in Jerusalem was scattered, and the disciples went about preaching:
- *“And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles... Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” (Acts 8:1,4)*

2. Disciples Sent by the Lord

- **To the end of earth**
- The gospel reached Antioch, and the first church was established where Jews and Gentiles were united.
- The church in Antioch sent out Paul and Barnabas to do the work of the Lord.
- Following the footsteps of those sent, the gospel spread farther and farther, entering Europe...
- *“So, setting sail from Troas*, we ran a straight course to Samothrace** , and the next day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi...” (Acts 16:11–12)*

*Located in Asia

**Located in Europe

People God Prepared for Your Mission

- **Lydia**

- She was a businesswoman, selling purple cloth.
- She was a Thyatiran from Asia who came to Philippi in Europe to do business.
- She had always worshiped God, and when Paul preached, the Lord opened her heart. In her house, the first church in Europe was established.
- *“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.” (Acts 16:14)*

People God Prepared for Your Mission

- **A slave-girl with a spirit of divination**
 - Because of her spirit, her owners gained a great deal of money. Paul cast the spirit out of her.
 - The owners were very angry and seized Paul and Silas to bring them before the authorities.
 - *She kept doing this for many days, and Paul became 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 at that very moment. (Acts 16:18)*

People God Prepared for Your Mission

- **A Jailer**

- Paul and Silas were put in prison, and at midnight they were praying and singing hymns to God.
- There was an earthquake, and the doors of the prison were all opened, yet Paul and Silas did not escape.
- *The jailer asked Paul and Silas, how he could be saved. He called for a light, sprang in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas; and he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:29–30)*

4. Sent by God, in Your Time

1. God, in your time, calls those who are willing to be sent by Him.
2. Once sent, God will guide your steps.
3. God will prepare everything, including those who will believe in the Lord and help in times of trouble.

➤ Are you willing to be sent?

- 1) Make the Great Commission the goal of your life, unchanging for a lifetime.**
- 2) Obey God and go wherever He wants you to go.**

WORK IN PROGRESS



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