

# Empowered & Sent: *The Church Jesus Builds*



**A BIBLE STUDY ON THE BOOK OF ACTS**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Book of Acts is the second volume of Luke's work. In Acts, Luke tells the story of the early church, within which three major theological themes drive the story. The first begins at Pentecost. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descends upon the church, and throughout the Book, the Spirit leads the apostles, descends upon Gentiles, and opens hearts to receive the Gospel. The presence of the Holy Spirit now guides the early church.

## **Acts reveals the purpose of the church**

The second major theme is the power of the gospel and is best illustrated by Paul's conversion. Luke first introduces Saul as a righteous pharisee who breathes murderous threats against the church, and yet by the middle of the book, Paul has become the most important Christian witness to the gentiles. It is in Paul's conversion that we see the power of the gospel at work in the early church. Finally, the book of Acts recounts and is structured on the Gospel's movement from Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 1-7), to Samaria (8-12), and to the ends of the earth (13-28). Acts thus reveals the purpose of the church: to reach the lost and the gentiles. In the book of Acts, we see 1) the presence of the Holy Spirit in mission, 2) the power of the Gospel to convert lives, and 3) the purpose of the church to spread the gospel to all.

This study, however, does not cover all of Acts, but focuses on select passages to teach us how the early church received new converts, sent missionaries, and ultimately preached the word to Jews and Gentiles alike. This is especially applicable because St. John's is both sending out a church plant, King's Cross, and receiving 16 new refugees. Furthermore, we begin this series after Easter Sunday and we will cover it through Pentecost, two very important events that are covered in Acts. We hope this study will be a timely exploration into the lives of Christians as we figure out how to live in light of the resurrection.

## **Why the study format has changed**

The sermon series is an application series, so these studies are a bit different than previous studies. Instead of a normal four step exegesis, this study will focus on application. The hope and goal is for us as a community to think more deeply about our role as witnesses to Christ, to take practical steps towards these new roles, and to grow in Christ in both word and deed.



# ACTS STUDY 1



## THE COMMISSIONED CHURCH Acts 1:1-11

The Book of Acts is a continuation of the story told in the Gospel of Luke. Having finished writing about Jesus' life and ministry, Luke is now telling the story of the birth and spread of the early church by the power of the Spirit and efficacy of the word.

In Chapter 1, the resurrected Jesus and his apostles have one final meeting together, before he ascends to his heavenly throne. He leaves them with two major instructions: **(1)** to wait for the

baptism of the Holy Spirit (vv.4, 5, 8), and **(2)** to live as his witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In other words, Jesus commissions us and the Spirit empowers us to be active participants in the ongoing mission of Jesus. The very core of what it means to be a follower of Christ includes missional engagement.

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 1:1-11**

**Acts 1:1** In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, **2** until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. **3** He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

**Acts 1:4** And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

**Acts 1:6** So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” **7** He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. **8** 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.” **9** And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. **10** And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, **11** and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

**NOTES:**

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## **STEP 2. APPLYING THE TEXT**

- 1. In Acts 1:8, Jesus called his disciples his witnesses. What does it mean to be a “witness”? What are some examples of powerful witnesses in your life? What are some ways that we can witness in our every day behaviour?**
  
- 2. What is our role in spreading the gospel and what is God’s? Whose ministry is it and in what ways is this encouraging/challenging to us?**
  
- 3. There are two promises in this passage (1:8, 11). What are these promises? How do they help us witness?**

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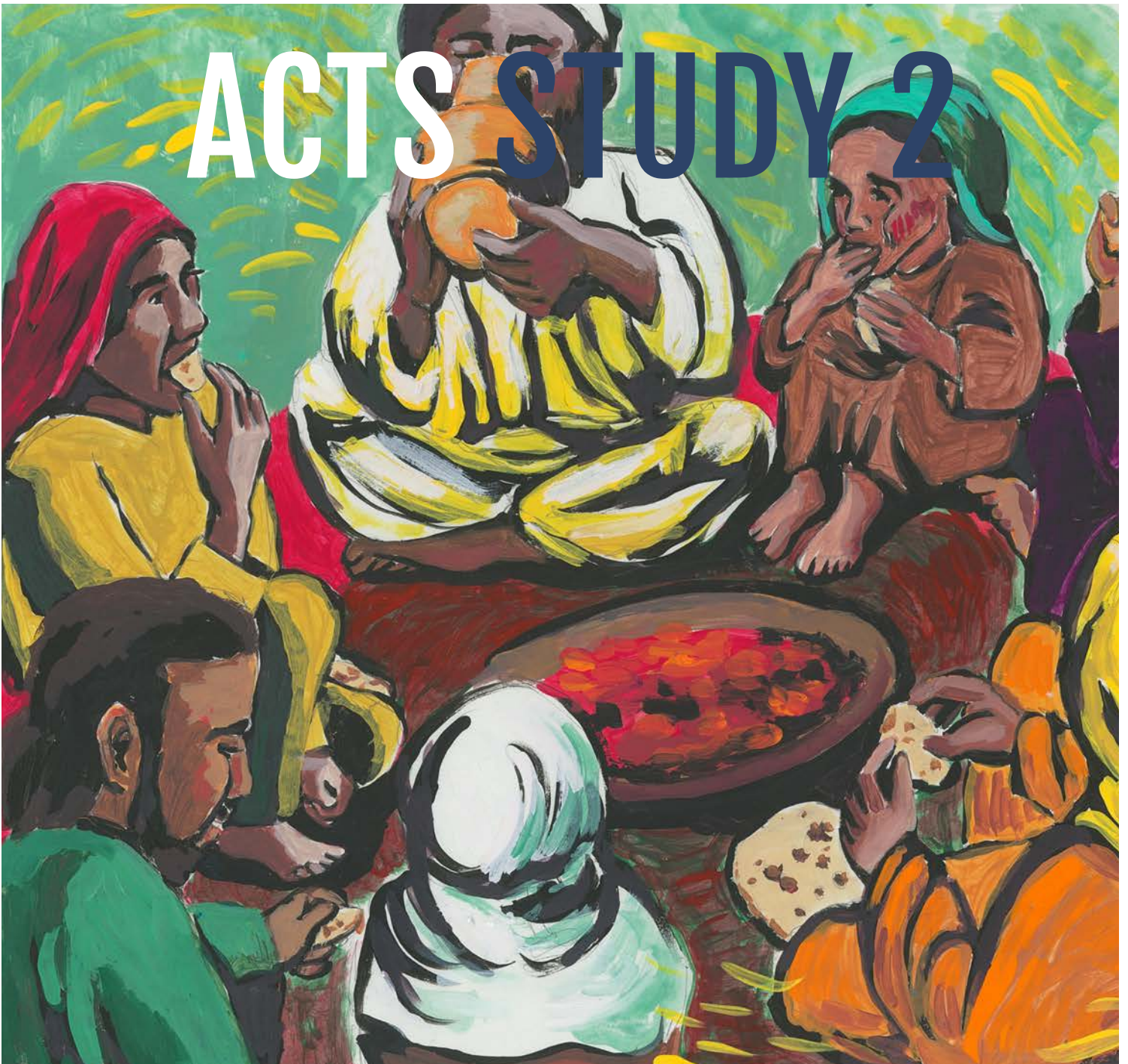
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# ACTS STUDY 2



## THE COMMUNAL CHURCH Acts 2:42-47

After the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) and Peter's first sermon (Acts 2:14-41), the church begins to grow and new believers are converted daily. Luke focuses on how God's grace transforms not just individuals but communities as well.

In Acts 2:42-47, Luke details the rhythms of this new community. We read about the practices that set the church apart from its surrounding culture. Their dedication to the apostles' teaching, prayer,

and radical spiritual fellowship marks them as God's people. These rhythms and practices are not motivated by politics or philosophy but are a response to the grace of God.

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 2:42-47

**Acts 2:42** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **43** And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** And all who believed were together and had all things in common. **45** And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

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# STEP 2. APPLYING THE TEXT

- 1. What are the rhythms and practices of the early church? Which of these early church activities do you think we do well as a Church body now? What are some areas God may be inviting us to grow as a community?**
- 2. One of the big ideas in this passage is the transforming work of the spirit. In what ways is the formative work of the spirit both personal and communal? How can we as Christians cultivate a community mindset in such an individualistic culture?**
- 3. How is the early church’s hospitality and stewardship of their possessions a sign of their radical faith? What does our culture say about independence and wealth? What are some opportunities for us to break the hold of independence and wealth in our lives?**

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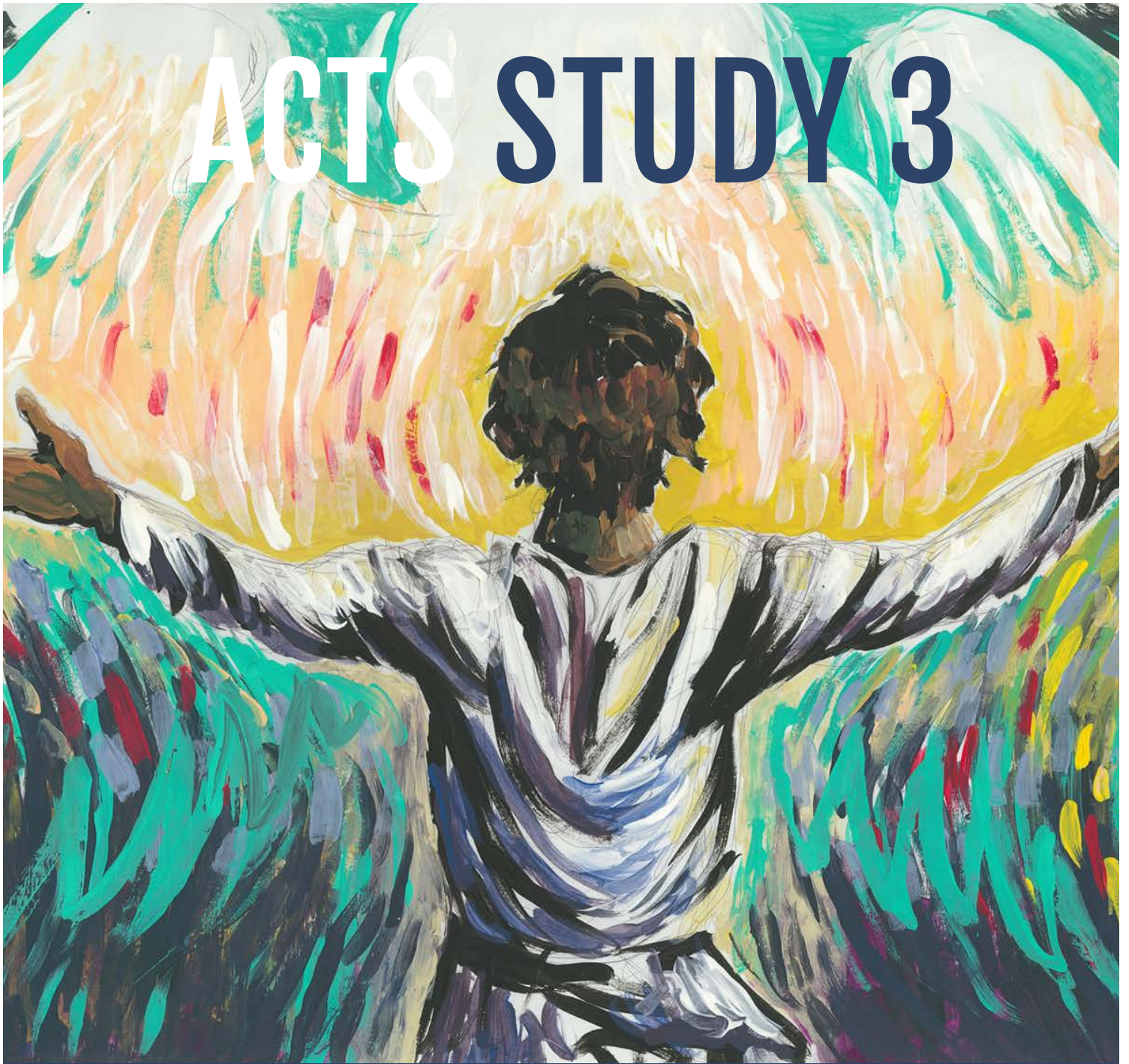
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# ACTS STUDY 3



## THE SENT CHURCH Acts 8:1-25

In Acts 2-7, the church in Jerusalem and Israel continues to multiply and at the same time, opposition continues to intensify. Though persecution intensifies, the apostles continue to preach God's word, and through the power of God's word, the church has raised new leaders called deacons. Acts follows two of these deacons Stephen (Acts 7) and Phillip (Acts 8). In Acts 7, opposition turns violent and we read about the first martyr of the church, Stephen. Yet it is through his death, that the church now spreads beyond Israel.

Luke also introduces Saul, a zealous teacher of the law bent on the destruction of this new church. In Acts 9, however, he will become God's evangelist to the gentiles.

In Acts 8, a great persecution of the church has begun and will continue for many years. It is through this oppression and pain however, that the Lord will spread his word far and wide. Through persecution the scattered church brings the word of God to new people fulfilling the plan Jesus laid out in Acts 1:8.

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 8:1-25

**Acts 8:1** 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. **2** Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. **3** But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

**Acts 8:4** Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. **5** Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. **6** And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. **7** For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. **8** So there was much joy in that city.

**Acts 8:9** But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. **10** They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” **11** And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. **12** But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. **13** Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

**Acts 8:14** Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, **15** who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, **16** for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **17** Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

**18** Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, **19** saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” **20** But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! **21** You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. **22** Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. **23** For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” **24** And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

**Acts 8:25** Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

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# STEP 1. DIVING INTO THE TEXT

## A. Pray

## B. Look Closely

*This step is for observation and close reading. What details do you notice? This could include: characters, setting, commands, promises, repetitions, Big Bible words, etc.*

## C. Look Structurally

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# ACTS STUDY 4



## THE SENDING CHURCH

Acts 13:1-13

The story of the early church is one of growth and opposition. After the stoning of Stephen in chapter 7, Phillip takes the gospel into Samaria (Acts 8), Peter takes the gospel to the gentile Cornelius (Acts 10-11), and now Paul and Barnabas' take the gospel to gentile lands during their first missionary journey. Though the Spirit sets apart Paul and Barnabas, the church plays an active role in commissioning and sending the two evangelists. After traveling through the island of Paphos, they meet their first opposition in Bar-Jesus, or Elymas,

the false prophet.

It's also worth noting that the list of names in verses 1-2 tells us a lot about the multicultural makeup of the early church. Barnabas was a Cypriot Jew (4:36), Simeon was called "Niger" which means "the black" and indicates that he was a black African, Lucius was from Cyrene, which is North Africa, Manaen, as a friend of Herod, would have come from royal upper class, and finally we have Saul, who was a Jew. Such a multi-cultural makeup would have been radical in the ancient world, and it reveals the transforming power of the gospel both personally and communally.

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 13:1-13**

**NOTES:**

**Acts 13:1** 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. **2** 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.” **3** So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

**4** The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. **5** When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. **6** They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, **7** 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. **8** But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. **9** Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, **10** “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? **11** 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. **12** When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

**13** From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

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## STEP 2. APPLYING THE TEXT

1. In verses 1-3, we're given a glimpse into the early church. (See the introduction for more information). What has been the makeup of the churches you've attended? How is this passage encouraging and how is it challenging?
2. Sergius Paulus is astonished at the teaching of the Lord. How has the word been shared with you in your life? What makes it difficult to share the word with others?
3. In this passage we see Paul, through the Spirit, judge Elymas. What is the implicit warning for us in this story especially v.10-11?
4. Paul and Barnabas encounter a major opposition in Elymas. What is the goal of the opposition? How does this text encourage us in our own witness?

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# ACTS STUDY 5

*Peter's vision of the Gentile inclusion in Acts 10:9-16*

## THE ENCOURAGING CHURCH Acts 13:1-13

The city of Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire; only Rome and Alexandria were larger. Because of its size and strategic location it was highly multi-cultural and contained large communities of Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Africans. It is here that the followers of Jesus are first called Christians, and it will become a vital staging ground for Paul's missionary journeys.

In Acts 11:19-28, we read about the church's early mission to the Greeks, the formation of the church

in Antioch, and the inclusion of Saul into the church. A key player in this section is Barnabas, whom we first met in Acts 4:36-37. Barnabas was such an encouraging figure that his name literally means "son of encouragement." It's worth noting that when the church first hears of Greeks coming to the faith, they choose to send a man known for encouragement. Not only does Barnabas encourage new Christians but he also goes and brings Saul, who had previously breathed "murderous threats" (Acts 9:1), into the church. This would have constituted a radical act of reconciliation and would have showcased the power of the gospel to bring those far away (literally persecutors of Christians) into the family of God.

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 11:19-26

**Acts 11:19** 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.

**20** 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. **21** The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

**22** News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. **23** 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. **24** He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

**25** Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, **26** 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.

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## STEP 2. APPLYING THE TEXT

1. We see the continuing expansion of the church to include Gentiles (v. 20). What do we learn about the early church’s response to outsiders and newcomers from this passage? Who are the people in Vancouver that God is calling us to reach out to? In what ways are we encouraging our brothers and sisters throughout the week?
2. Barnabas brings Saul into the church family in Antioch. What does this reveal about reconciliation/ forgiveness in the gospel? How does this encourage and challenge us to live as Christians with one another?
3. In 11:26, the disciples of Christ are called Christians for the first time. What does the text reveal about what it means to be a Christian, and what does it mean for us today to be called Christians? How are we called to live in such a way that we’re marked as different from the surrounding culture? What are some practical ways we can do that as a group?

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# ACTS STUDY 6

## THE GLOBAL CHURCH Acts 8:26-40

In our third study (Acts 8:1-25), we looked at Phillip's evangelistic mission to the Samaritans. We now return to Phillip's evangelistic journey and witness the conversion of one individual, a high ranking Ethiopian eunuch. As a quick note, the "Ethiopia" of those days corresponded to what we would call the "Upper Nile." This eunuch was also a high ranking official within his Kingdom. He's likely returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem which implies that he is either a Jew by birth or else by conversion. It seems unlikely that he

would be a gentile, since Luke claims Cornelius (Acts 10-11) as the first true Gentile convert.

In our text below, we read how God gives the eunuch two gifts. The first gift is scripture and the second is a teacher who can open up, explain, and apply the scriptures. Through the teaching of scripture, Phillip guides the Ethiopian to Christ and to his baptism.

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 8:26-40

**Acts 8:26** Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” **27** So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, **28** and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. **29** The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

**30** Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

**31** “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

**32** This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

**33** In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.  
Who can speak of his descendants?  
For his life was taken from the earth.”

**34** The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” **35** Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

**36** As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” **138** And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

**39** When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. **40** Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

1. **Acts 8:37** Some manuscripts include here *Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*

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# ACTS STUDY 7



## THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH Acts 2:1-13

At Pentecost, the Spirit equipped the apostles to be the primary witnesses of Jesus Christ and this event was the fulfillment of Jesus's promises (cf. John 14-16). Although Pentecost itself was a unique event in history, believers of every age now have access to the same Spirit, and He equips us, just as He equipped the apostles, to be witnesses to Christ.

Our text tells us that the apostles and disciples experienced three different supernatural

phenomena: noise from heaven, tongues of fire, and speaking in tongues. Luke focuses on the third sign, the speaking of tongues, and describes the nations in the room. This event is the reversal of the curse of Tower of Babel (Gen. 8). At Babel, human languages were confused and scattered because humanity attempted to reach heaven. At Pentecost, God descended from heaven to earth to overcome the language barrier. This is a sign that all nations would be gathered under Christ. Pentecost symbolizes a new unity transcending national, ethnic, and linguistic barriers, and emphasizes the multicultural makeup of the church.

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 2:1-13

**Acts 2:1** When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

**5** Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. **7** Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? **9** Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome **11** (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” **12** Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

**13** Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

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## STEP 2. APPLYING THE TEXT

- 1. At Pentecost, the Spirit breaks down language barriers as a sign that the nations would now gather together in Christ. How have we seen our church engage with brothers and sisters across ethnic, national, and language barriers both abroad and in Vancouver? Vancouver itself is a very cosmopolitan city. What are ways that we as a group can reach across these barriers? What's challenging about this?**
- 2. Multiculturalism and diversity have become a big topic in today's secular environment as well. What are the ways people outside the church speak of multiculturalism? How is it similar to Scripture and how is it different?**
- 3. Throughout Acts, we read of the Holy Spirit empowering and strengthening both people and communities. It doesn't always look the same, but what is the purpose of the Spirit's work? Read Galatians 5:22–23. What are the markers of the Holy Spirit in ourselves and others?**

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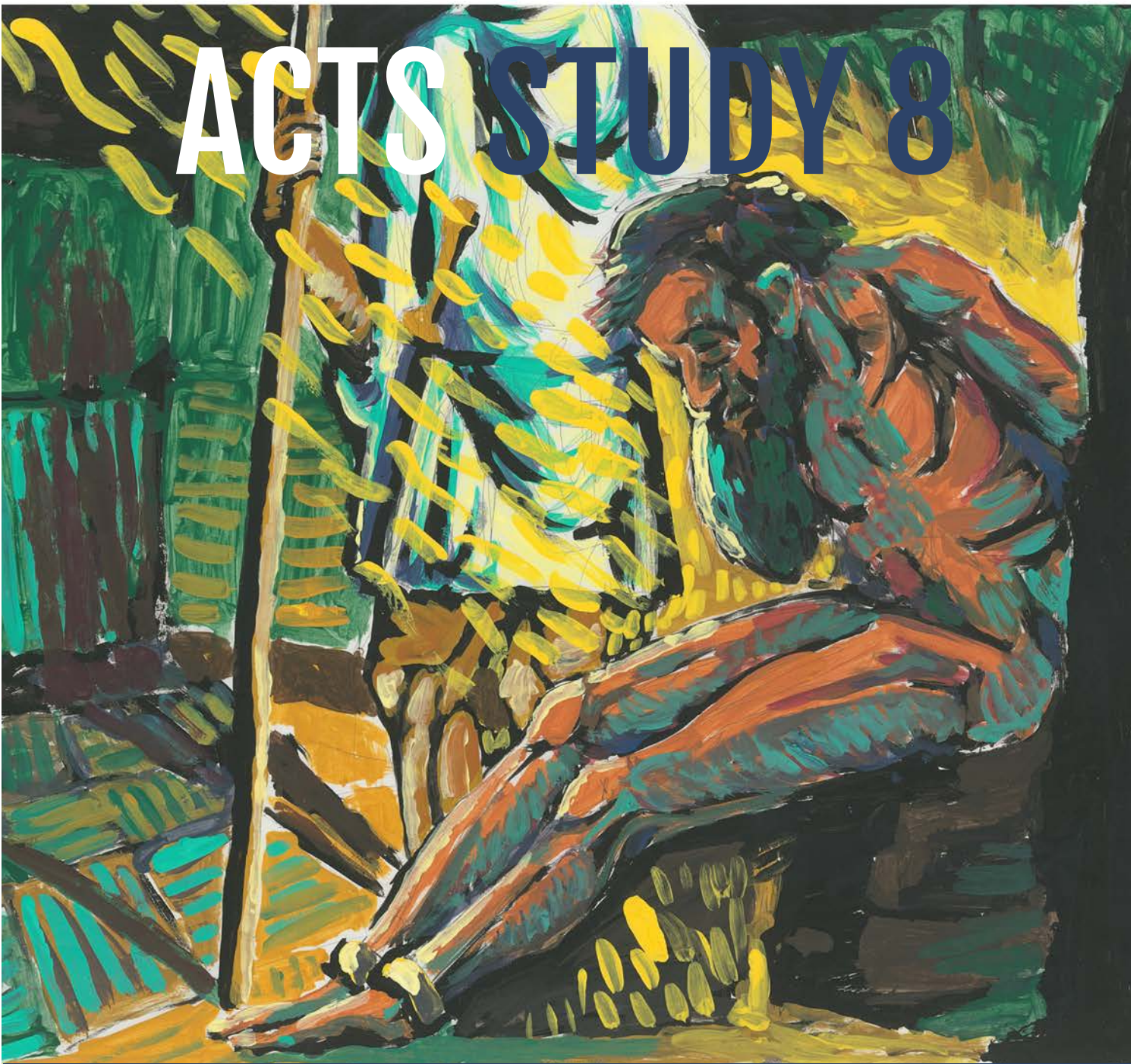
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# ACTS STUDY 8



## THE DIVERSE CHURCH Acts 16:11-40

The Jewish prayer book includes the long-debated phrase, “Blessed are you O God, King of the Universe, who has not made me a gentile, a slave, and a woman.” Yet, in Philippi, Christ’s salvation comes to a gentile jail-keeper, a wealthy business woman, and a possessed slave girl. They are converted, baptized, and they respond to the gospel with Christ-like acts. The jail-keeper washes his prisoner’s wounds, the business-woman opens her heart to the word and her home to Paul and Silas. In this passage, we see how

the gospel transforms relationships in ways that disrupt the social status quo. At the same time, the gospel creates space for relationship, hospitality, and service among people with little to no other common ground.

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 16:11-40

**Acts 16:11** 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. **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 fortune-telling. **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.



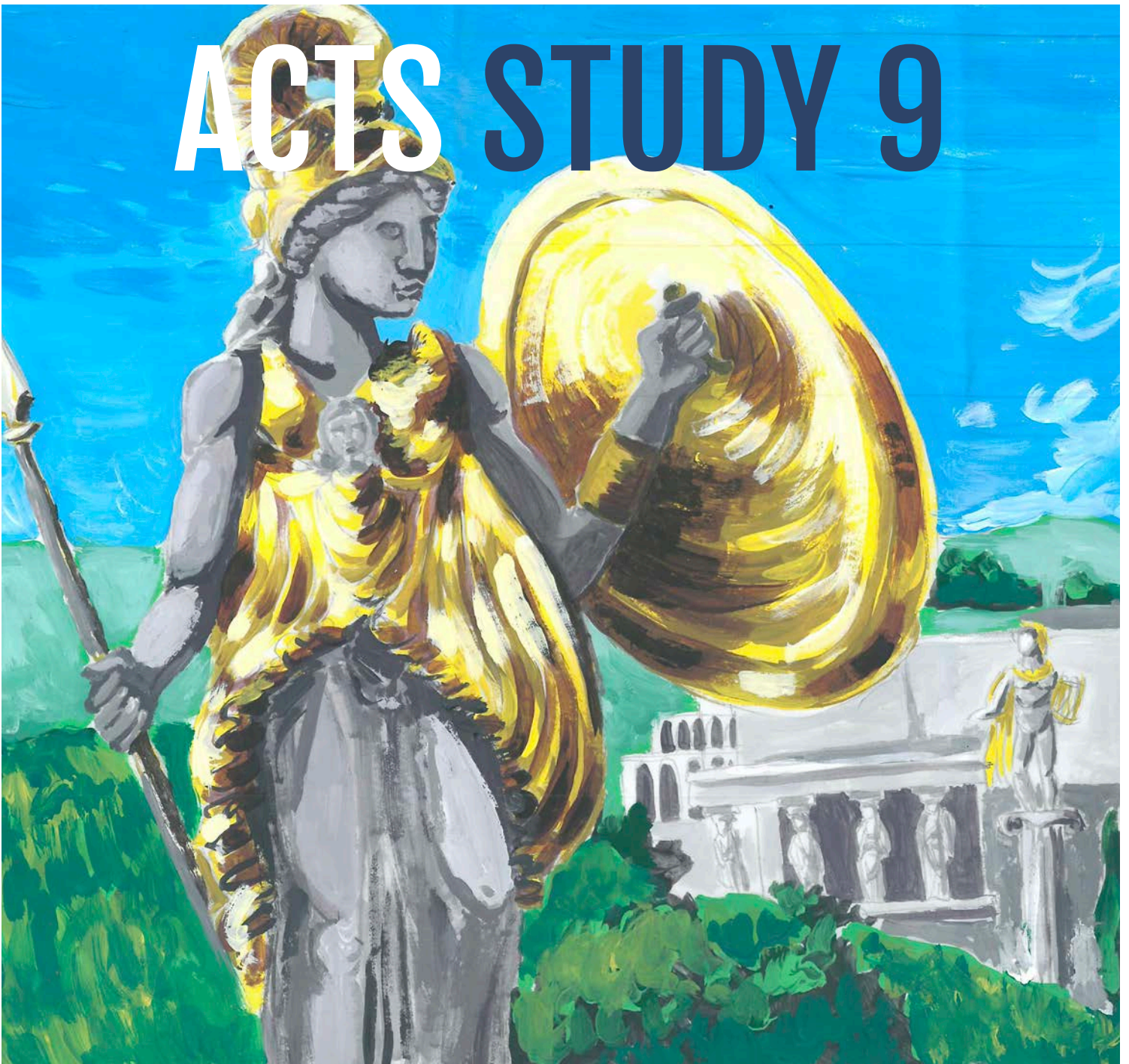








# ACTS STUDY 9



## THE CHURCH THAT KNOWS ITS CITY Acts 17:16-40

Paul's visit to Athens occurs in the middle of his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. After a mob from Thessalonica pursues Paul and his companions to Berea, Paul escapes, leaving his companions in Berea, and waits in Athens for Timothy and Silas to join him.

While waiting for his companions' arrival, he begins to observe the way of life there. He can't help but notice the overwhelming presence of idolatry, mixed with a religiosity and philosophical hunger for new ideas. He spends time preaching

in the marketplace, in the synagogue, and in the Aeropagus, the Greek council that had influence over the religious, political, and intellectual life of the city. From a deep knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the Athenians, Paul is able to preach to them on their own terms, and even in the language of their own poets. This passage provides a paradigm for us to share the gospel across cultures, and to understand and communicate it better in our own.

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 17:16-40

**Acts 17:16** Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. **17** So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. **18** Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babblers wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. **19** And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? **20** For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” **21** Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

**22** So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. **23** For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. **24** The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, **25** nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. **26** And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, **27** that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, **28** for

“‘In him we live and move and have our being’;  
as even some of your own poets have said,  
“‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

**29** Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. **30** The times of ignorance

God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, **31** because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

**32** Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” **33** So Paul went out from their midst. **34** But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

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## **STEP 2. APPLYING THE TEXT**

- 1. When you look around at Vancouver, what are the things that make Vancouver what it is? What are the myths and stories that people live by, what are the values and sources of meaning? What defines the way people live and what they live for?**
- 2. Where do you perceive God’s presence in our city, and how can we help those who might already be seeking for God and feeling their way toward him to find him?**
- 3. Have you ever felt alone or in your beliefs or told someone about God who thought you were naive? What can you gain from Paul’s response to the Athenians for those moments?**

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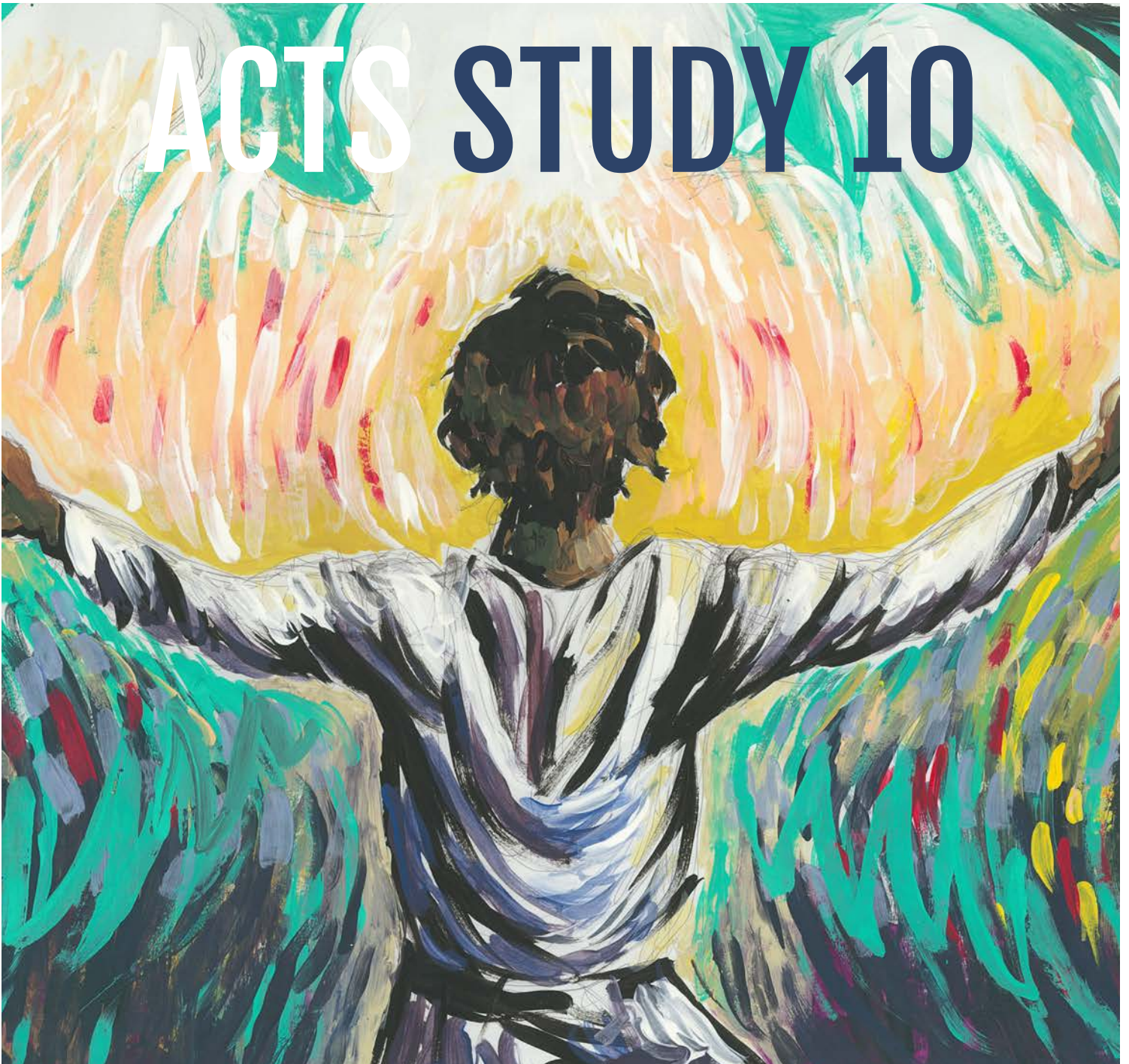
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# ACTS STUDY 10



## THE CITY—TRANSFORMING CHURCH Acts 19:1-41

After leaving Athens, and traveling from place to place, Paul travels over land to Ephesus, a financially prosperous city renowned as the centre of the cult of Artemis, and commercially situated along trade routes into Asia. In Ephesus, Paul encounters a city that has built its reputation and economy on its self-proclaimed spiritual authority. He meets three groups who respond to the gospel in different ways:

- 1) A group of John the Baptist's disciples who gladly receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) Traveling Jewish exorcists encounter Jesus by

attempting to use his name in their practice of magic. Many of these believed, confessed their practices, and burned their books of magic.

- 3) Silversmiths who had a well-established trade of making statues of Artemis for worship. They felt threatened by Paul's gospel preaching and stirred up a riot in defense of Artemis, and incidentally, their own livelihoods.

Acts 19:1-41 shows the cost of following Jesus. It appears to threaten the livelihoods, success, and reputations of the Ephesians but for some it is worth far more. This passage shifts the focus from individual conversion (Ch. 16) to group conversion—whole communities getting baptized and restructuring their way of life around their newfound faith.

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGE | Acts 19:1-41

**Acts 19:1** And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. **2** And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” **3** And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” **4** And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” **5** On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **6** And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. **7** There were about twelve men in all.

**8** And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. **9** But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. **10** This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

**11** And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, **12** so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. **13** Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” **14** Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. **15** But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” **16** And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. **17** And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. **18** Also many of those

who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. **19** And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. **20** So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

**21** Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” **22** And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

**23** About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. **24** For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. **25** These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. **26** And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. **27** And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”

**28** When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” **29** So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. **30** But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. **31** And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. **32** Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. **33** Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the

crowd. **34** But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

**35** And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, “Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? **36** Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. **37** For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. **38** If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. **39** But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. **40** For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.” **41** And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

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