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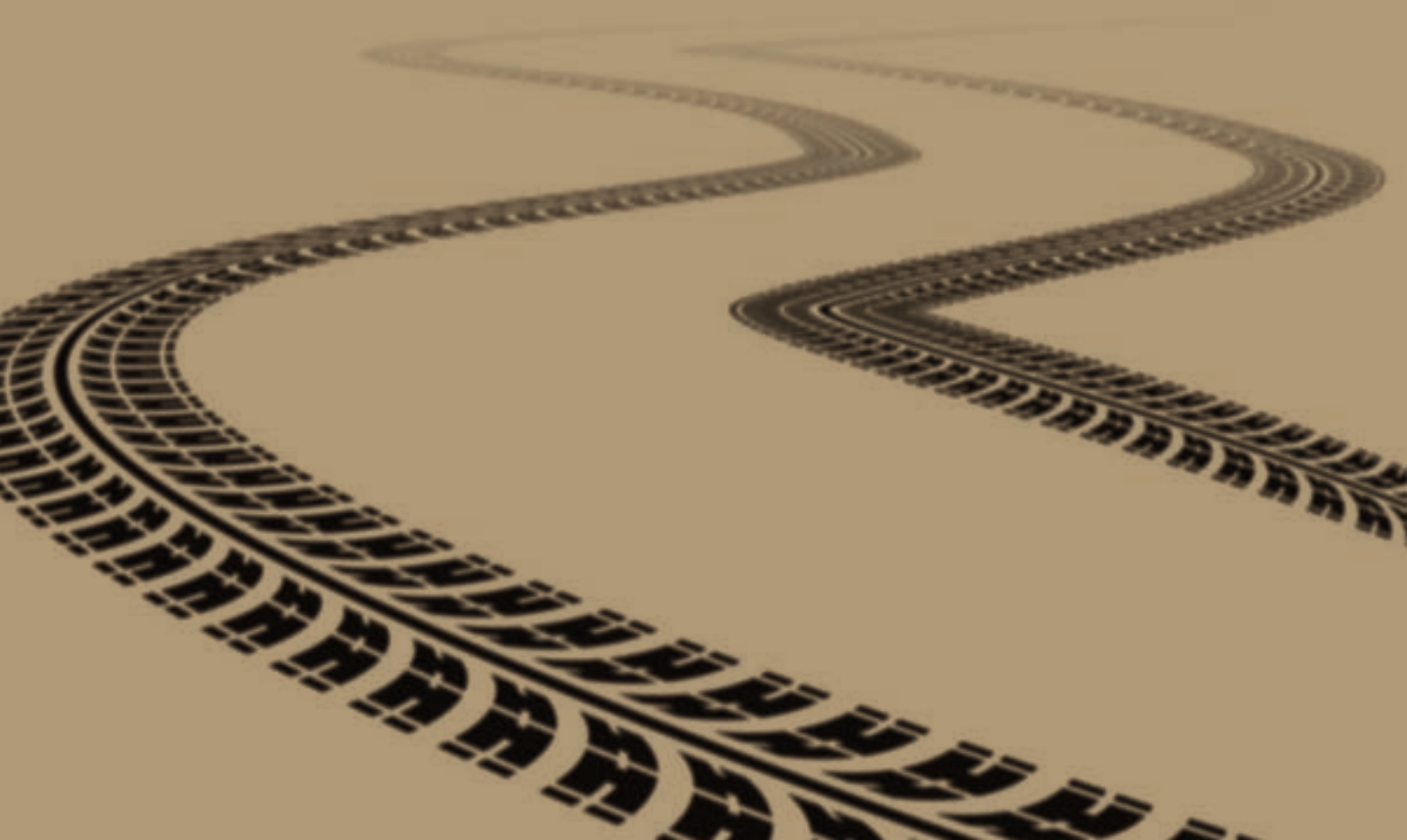
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infuse

Acts

are we there yet?

PART TWO



infuse

Acts

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PART TWO



by Cathie Brassler
and Micki Hilbrand



Grand Rapids, Michigan

*“God has helped me to this very day, so I stand here
and testify to small and great alike.”*

—Acts 26:22

We are grateful for the many comments and helpful suggestions of interested small groups and leaders who contributed to the development of this study.

In this study of Acts the lessons are written by Cathie Brassler, and most of the Break Away readings are written by Micki Hilbrand. The final Break Away reading in lesson 8 is written by Cathie Brassler.

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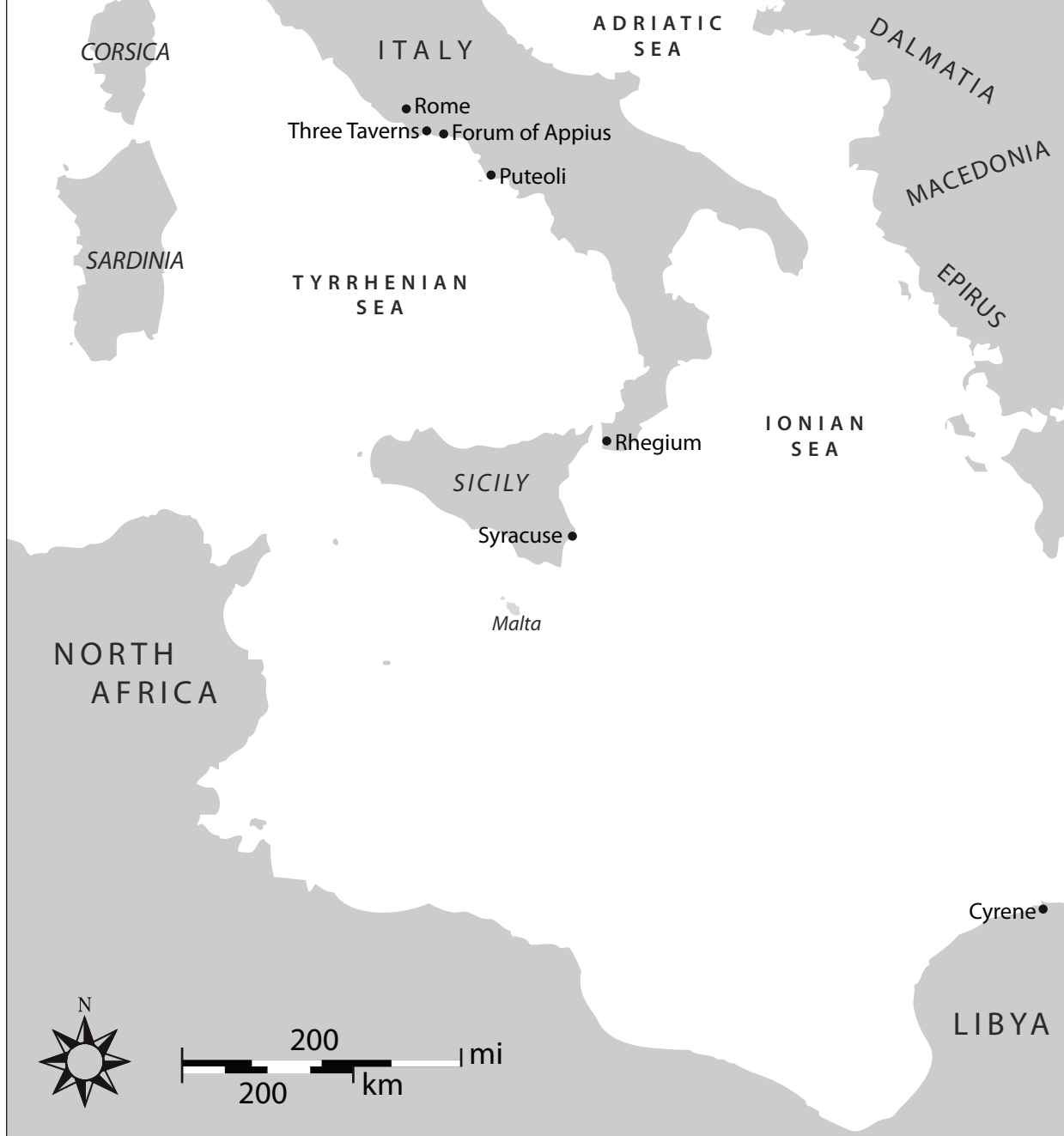
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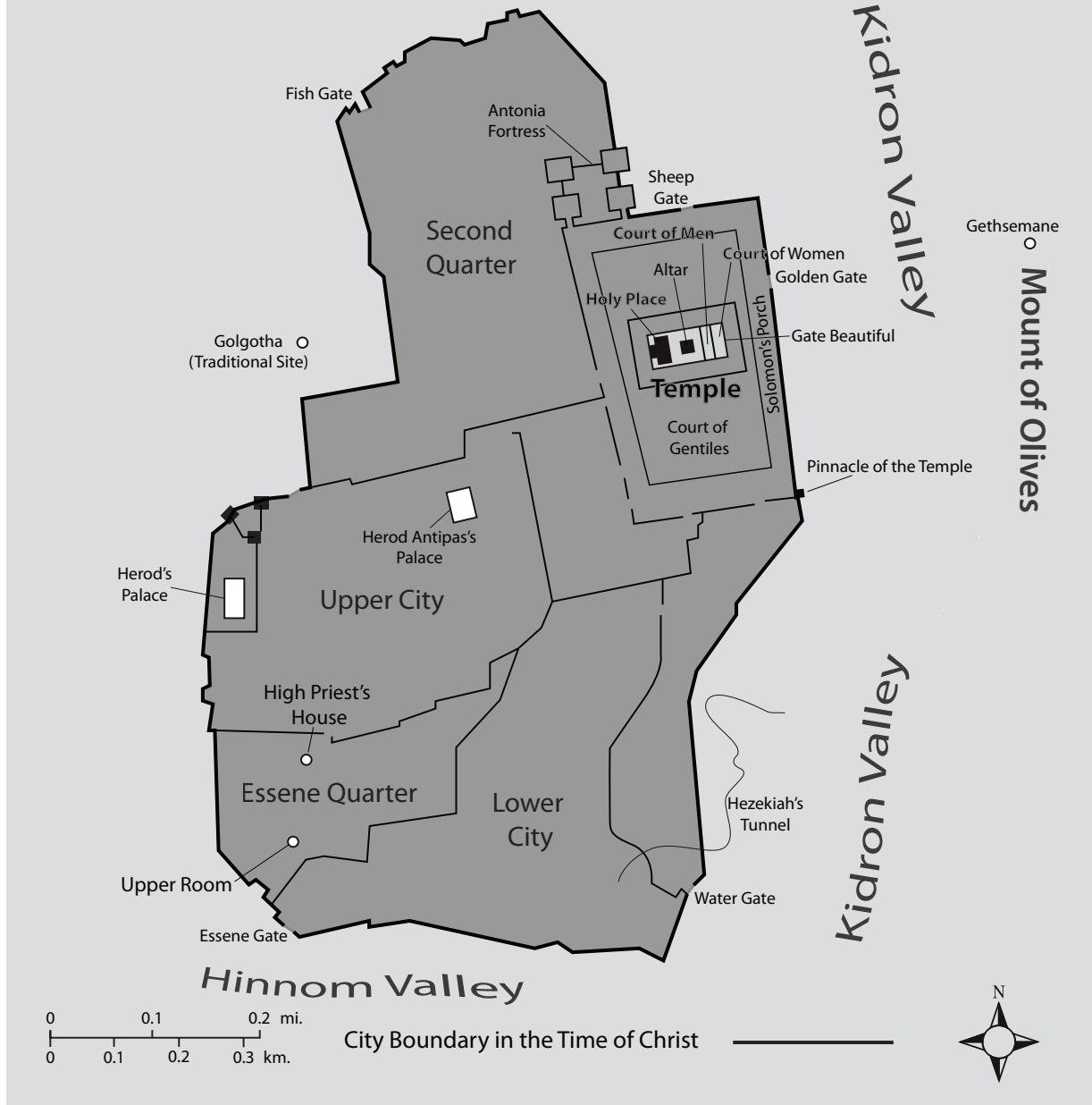
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The World of the Early Church (First Century A.D.)



Jerusalem in Jesus and the Apostles' Day



Glossary

Alexandrian ship—a grain ship on its way to Rome with Egyptian grain from Alexandria (see Acts 27:6, 38).

angels—supernatural beings created by God to be messengers, to carry out God’s will in this world, and to serve and care for all who belong to God (Ps. 91:11-12).

apostle—“one sent forth”; refers to a messenger sent on a special mission. The New Testament apostles were leaders in the early Christian church; they were specially chosen by Jesus to be his witnesses (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 21-25; 9:1-15; 1 Cor. 9:1-2).

Aramaic—the everyday language of Palestinian Jews in the first century.

Asia—a Roman province in western Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

baptism, baptize—the act of sprinkling with or immersion in water as a sign of God’s claim on a person’s life to be part of the covenant family of God. Baptism is an outward sign that Christ’s blood washes the believer clean of the guilt of sin. Before Jesus began his preaching and healing ministry, John the Baptist preached and also baptized with water, calling people to repent and prepare for the coming of the Messiah (Jesus), saying, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11; see Acts 2:1-4; 19:1-6).

Castor and Pollux—in Greek mythology, these twin sons of Zeus were considered the guardians of sailors.

centurion—a Roman commander in charge of a hundred soldiers.

Christ—see **Jesus Christ, Messiah**.

circumcision—removal of the male foreskin. God commanded Abraham and his descendants to do this as a sign that they belonged to God and as a symbol of the cutting away of sin from their lives (Gen. 17). In the New Testament, circumcision is replaced with baptism in Christ. True circumcision is of the heart, not the flesh (Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:9-12).

Claudius—emperor of Rome from A.D. 41-54.

Day of Atonement—annual day of rest, fasting, and sacrifices for the cleansing of Old Testament priests and Israelites from their sins (Lev. 16). Depending on the year, it took place in late September or early October.

disciple—a follower; one who is taught. This term refers commonly to followers to Jesus.

Epicurean—a school of Greek philosophy that taught pleasure was the highest good.

faith—defined in Hebrews 11:1 as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”; can be defined in simple terms as “belief and trust.” True saving faith is a gift that consists of knowledge and confidence—a sure

knowledge by which we accept as true all that God has revealed in his Word, and confidence that all our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake.

flog—to beat with a rod or whip, which sometimes had sharp pieces of bone or metal at the whipping end.

Gentiles—all people who are not Jews.

God-fearing—a term describing a non-Jewish person (Gentile) who followed Jewish religious practices.

good news—see **gospel**.

gospel—literally means “good news” and refers to the message of God’s salvation from sin and the promise of eternal life through Christ.

grace—God’s undeserved favor and forgiving love. Jesus is the full expression of God’s grace for the salvation of all who believe in him as Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8-10).

holy—pure; set apart to bring glory to God.

Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). They are three persons in one being. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, works true faith in our hearts, and empowers us to live holy lives. The Spirit’s presence in our hearts guarantees that we will receive God’s promises (John 16:7-15; Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:13-14).

hope—in combination with faith this means looking ahead in solid trust to the fulfillment of all God’s promises (Heb. 7:19; 11:1).

idols—anything worshiped or honored ahead of or in place of God. Idolatry can mean bowing down to a physical image of a god; it can also

mean allowing one’s possessions or desires to become more important than God.

Isaiah—a Hebrew prophet from around 700 B.C. who foretold the coming of Christ (Messiah) and described his service and suffering.

Jerusalem—Israel’s historic capital city. As the location for God’s temple, it became the center for the Jewish religion and the spiritual headquarters of the nation of Israel.

Jesus Christ—the sinless Son of God, who gave his life as the payment for our sin. *Jesus* means “Savior,” and *Christ* means “Anointed One.” He is the second person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. They are three persons in one being. See also *Messiah*.

Jews—the people of Israel, descendants of Abraham; God’s special people chosen to be a blessing to all other nations (Gen. 12:2-3).

John’s baptism—see **baptism**.

kingdom of God—God’s rule over all things, especially evident in the lives of his people, who follow Jesus and believe in him as Savior.

law—(the law of Moses) the Ten Commandments and hundreds of ceremonial and social laws given by God to the nation of Israel and prescribed in Genesis through Deuteronomy.

the Law and the Prophets—the teachings of the Old Testament. See **Scriptures**.

Messiah—the promised deliverer of God’s people. Both the Hebrew word *Messiah* and the Greek word *Christ* mean “Anointed One.” Through the prophets God promised to send the Messiah, the Savior-King, to

deliver his people from oppressors and to rule in righteousness forever. The people misunderstood those promises, however, and looked for a Messiah who would be a political ruler and gather an army to rout all physical enemies (see John 6:15; Acts 1:6). But as Jesus revealed through his work and teaching, the Messiah came to save God's people from the oppression of sin and death and to give them new life forever with God. He rules today in heaven at the right hand of God the Father, and when he comes again at the end of time, Jesus will fully establish God's everlasting kingdom of righteousness on earth. (See Matt. 26:63-64; John 16:5-16; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5.)

Moses—the Old Testament prophet who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to the promised land of Canaan. During his leadership Moses received from God and taught Israel the laws that would govern them as God's chosen people. See also **law**.

Nazareth—a small town in the province of Galilee where Jesus grew up.

Nazarene sect—a term used by Jewish leaders to describe Christianity.

Passover—This feast took place each spring to celebrate the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt. The name commemorates God's protection of Israelite households during a final plague sent to convince the Egyptian king (pharaoh) to let the Israelites go. God promised that upon seeing the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorframes of a house, God would *pass over* that house and not allow the plague of death to take the life of the firstborn

there (see Ex. 12). The feast pointed to our ultimate deliverance from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Rev. 5). All Jewish men were required to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, bringing their families from all over the Roman Empire.

Pentecost—the first day of the Festival of Weeks, this was the fiftieth day (Pentecost) after the Feast of Passover; it was also called "the day of firstfruits" (Num. 28:26), in which people brought a thank offering of new grain to the Lord, the firstfruits of their harvest. For this yearly festival people gathered in Jerusalem from all the Jewish communities scattered around the Roman Empire and beyond (see Acts 2:9-11).

Pharisees—one of the main religious sects at the time of Christ and the apostles. Pharisees emphasized precise obedience to scriptural and traditional law. A number of Pharisees were part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

priests—the Jewish priests were Levites, descendants of the Israelite tribe of Levi. God had set aside this tribe to be priests, to care for the house of God, to attend to the details of worship, and to teach the Israelites God's ways. They continued in this role until Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the law and the ceremonial laws were no longer necessary (see Heb. 7-10).

proconsul—governor of a Roman province.

prophet—someone who speaks God's message (see Deut. 18:17-19); generally a person who

preached God's Word and (in some cases) foretold the future as revealed by the Lord.

Prophets, the—a section of the Old Testament Jewish Scriptures. See **Scriptures**.

repent—to turn back to God out of sorrow for sin.

righteous—considered right with God. As God's people, we are called to be righteous and are credited with Christ's righteousness: we are made right with God through Jesus' death and given the ability to live in right relationships with others through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 3:21-26).

Righteous One—a reference to Jesus Christ.

Sabbath—the seventh day of the week (Saturday), set aside as a holy day of rest and worship according to the law of Moses.

Sadducees—one of the main religious sects in Jesus and the apostles' day. Sadducees recognized only the five books of Moses as the law of God and did not believe in spirits, angels, resurrection, or life after death. A number of Sadducees were part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

saints—believers in Christ.

Sanhedrin—the ruling council of the Jews, made up of seventy-one officials including Pharisees, Sadducees, leading elders, legal experts, and priests.

Satan—this name means "accuser" (see Zech. 3:1) and refers to the fallen angel who tempted humanity to sin and wants to destroy God's kingdom.

Scriptures—the Jewish Scriptures, which today make up the Old Testament part of the Bible.

As a whole, these Scriptures are sometimes called "the Law and the Prophets" in the New Testament (Matt. 22:40; Rom. 3:21; Acts 28:23), and they consist of the Law (*Torah*, Pentateuch, first five books [of Moses]: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) and books known as "the Prophets" (Joshua through Kings; Isaiah through Malachi) as well as "the Writings" (remaining books of history, poetry, songs, and wisdom literature).

sin—disobedience to God; refers to breaking God's law (1 John 3:4).

speaking in tongues—the ability, given by the Holy Spirit, to speak another language without previous instruction (see Acts 2:4-11; 19:6).

Spirit (Holy Spirit)—see **Holy Spirit**.

Stoic—a school of Greek philosophy that taught self-sufficiency and the absence of emotion.

synagogue—a place where a local community of Jews gathered for religious instruction, worship, and prayer. A synagogue could be organized if a Jewish community had a minimum of ten men.

temple—the religious center of Judaism in the Old Testament and in Jesus and the apostles' day. Located in Jerusalem, it was the place of worship and sacrifice, the site of major Jewish festivals, and the gathering place of religious thinkers, teachers, and leaders.

tongues—see **speaking in tongues**.

Way, the—a term used occasionally in Acts to refer to followers of Christ. The name probably came from Jesus' description of himself as "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

How to Use This Study

This Bible study aims to help people engage in lively discussion and Bible discovery without having studied the text before doing each lesson together.

Maps, Glossary

Near the front of this booklet are maps and a glossary that can be useful for locating places and the meanings of terms mentioned in the book of Acts. Use the map on pages 4-5 to trace the journeys described in Acts.

Questions for Discussion

The main questions for discussion are numbered and are in bold print. Along with these questions you'll find points "to think about as you discuss" to help spark ideas for responding to each main question. In addition, you'll often see questions that help us connect the story to everyday life under the subheading "What does this mean to me?"

Please do not feel you have to answer every question in the lesson material. Our goal is to help make Bible study a creative, flexible, exploratory exercise in which you engage with your group and grow to know God and each other better.

Episodes

Some of the lesson materials are divided into Episodes. Together with your group you should

feel free to decide whether you want to do all the episodes of a lesson in one meeting, or perhaps do just one or two episodes and then wait till your next meeting to pick up where you left off.

Follow-up Ideas

At the end of each lesson are Explore! ideas that you might like to use for follow-up. These include activities that can help you learn more about items of interest related to the lesson and apply your learning to everyday life. There are also music and video suggestions.

Break Away (at-home readings)

After the study material for each lesson you'll find readings for use at home. Take a break with God and do some thinking about the lesson material and how the Lord can use it to shape your life. If you like, clip these pages out and set them in places around your home or at work where they can remind you to spend time with God. You might also like to memorize some of the Scriptures used in these pieces.

An Invitation and Prayer of Commitment

If you're searching for a relationship with God, or studying with a friend who is searching, see An Invitation (to believe and commit to God) and a Prayer of Commitment provided at the back of this booklet. These can be helpful in talking one-

to-one with God or with someone who is ready to make a faith commitment to God.

Leader's Notes

At the Faith Alive website page featuring this Bible study—see www.FaithAliveResources.org, search for “Acts: Are We There Yet?” and click on the link to “Leader’s Notes”—you’ll find tips for leading this small group study.

We wish you God’s blessing as you participate in Bible study together. Have fun as you learn and grow closer to God and one another!

Introduction

If you have completed *Acts: Church on the Edge (Part One)*, you will recall that the book of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit comes to Jesus' followers (Acts 1:8; 2:1-41) and how the church forms and spreads.

In *Acts: Are We There Yet? (Part Two)* we will follow Paul and his missionary companions as they preach the good news of salvation throughout the Gentile world of the Roman Empire. We will see painful rejection as well as acceptance and transformation as the Holy Spirit works through these courageous witnesses who gave everything they had to tell the story of God's love and the offer of new life through Jesus Christ.

Lesson 1

“Let Us Go Back and Visit . . .”

Acts 15:36-16:40

Last year my friend Micki and I had the opportunity to travel with a local college group to the land of Israel. It was an exciting time for both of us as we walked and ventured in and around “the land of the Bible.” Our days were long and tiring as we met the rugged terrain head on, but they were also exciting as we visited and studied places where Jesus and his followers had lived and taught.

In the opening verse of our Scripture for this lesson, Paul says to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing” (Acts 15:36). We studied about those people and places in Acts 13-14 in Part One of this study, and we’ll discover more as we follow Paul and his friends throughout the rest of the book of Acts, aiming to reach “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) with the message of salvation and new life in Christ.

Opener (optional)

What is the longest time or the farthest distance you have been away from home? Where did you go?

EPISODE 1

Acts 15:36-41

1. From these verses, what do we learn about how the second missionary journey began?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- what Paul and Barnabas agreed on—and disagreed about
- what their plan tells us about them
- what we can learn from this event in their lives



Acts 16:1-5

Use the map on pages 4-5 to begin tracing Paul's next missionary journey (recorded in Acts 15:41-18:22). With a pencil, draw lines from place to place as you read about Paul and his friends' travels.

2. Who joined Paul and Silas in their missionary efforts in these verses? What do we learn about him?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- Timothy's background and why Paul would circumcise him (see "circumcision" in glossary)
- Paul's goal of reaching Jews as well as Gentiles, and why

3. What did Paul and his friends do "as they traveled from town to town" (v. 4)? What was the result?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the ways in which God affirms people in all kinds of ministry work today

What does this mean to me?

- Recall that Paul was nearly killed in Lystra on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:19-20). Have you ever had to revisit a place where you had a difficult experience, perhaps even a close brush with death? If so, what went through your mind, and how did the Lord help you overcome fears or anxieties or other obstacles?

Why circumcise Timothy?

Many readers have wondered why Paul had Timothy circumcised, especially after the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) had agreed that circumcision (along with some other parts of the law of Moses) was not required for salvation in Christ. But, as we learn from Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, he aimed to avoid being offensive to his listeners (Jews as well as Gentiles) so that they could hear the gospel ("good news") of Jesus and be saved. Note also that wherever Paul went, he sought out Jewish communities (synagogues) so that they would hear the gospel first (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1) and thus become followers who could help spread the good news of Jesus in their area.

Since Timothy was half-Jew and half-Gentile and was not circumcised, any Jews who were not yet believers would consider him "unclean" and would not even associate with him. He probably would not even be allowed in their synagogues. Yet Paul wanted Timothy to be able to work alongside him in his missionary work, so it made sense to have Timothy circumcised so that he would be accepted in communities of not-yet-believing Jews as well as Gentiles.

Acts 16:6-10

Continue tracing the missionary journey.

4. Who was in charge of Paul and his friends' travel plans? What gave them the confidence to keep moving forward? Explain.

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the road blocks or “closed doors” they encountered
- how a “closed door” can point to another opportunity
- Jesus' commission in Acts 1:8, and the significance of going to Macedonia

What does this mean to me?

- Have you ever been certain of God's leading to do something? Were any fears or obstacles involved? What did God accomplish in this?

EPISODE 2

Acts 16:11-15

Continue tracing the missionary journey.

5. Where did the group go, and what did they do on the Sabbath? Why would they look outside the city for “a place of prayer”?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the people who gathered there on the Sabbath, and why
- Paul's usual practice of visiting first with Jews

A new team member

At Troas, another member quietly joined the Paul and Silas team. Did you notice that? Reread Acts 16:10 carefully. No names are given, but the subtle insertion of the pronouns “we” and “us” tell the reader that the author of Acts, Luke, has just signed on to the missionary journey. Much of what Luke writes from this point on is from his recollections as an eyewitness.

Jewish rabbinical law

required that a community of Jews had to have ten married men in order to form a synagogue. If they had no synagogue, it was customary to meet for prayer together outdoors near a flowing stream or river.

6. What do we learn about Lydia in these verses? What happens to her, and how does she help Paul and his friends?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- Lydia's occupation
- what she is, what she hears, and who opens her heart

What does this mean to me?

- Has the Lord opened your heart to respond to the gospel? In what ways can you respond, to show God's love to others?

Local facts and figures

Philippi was located about 10 miles (16 km) from the port city of Neapolis. This Roman colony was named for Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, and was a popular place for Roman military leaders to live in their retirement.

Purple dye was expensive, so purple fabrics were bought mainly by wealthy people at premium prices. Lydia was apparently a prosperous merchant who did business with the upper-class residents of Philippi.

Acts 16:16-21

7. What do the missionaries encounter as they head to the place of prayer one day?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- why Paul cast the spirit out of the slave girl
- why her owners rejected what Paul was saying, and what they did for revenge

What does this mean to me?

- Think about ways in which financial concerns can keep people from following the Lord today. Are any financial issues keeping you from serving God faithfully? Explain.

Acts 16:22-28

8. How are Paul and Silas treated when they are accused, and how do they maintain their faithfulness and character as Christians?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the brutality they are shown
- what they do while they are in prison
- how this affects the other prisoners
- how Paul encourages the jailer

The “inner cell” (Acts 16:24) was the most secure part of the prison. The prisoners’ legs would have been spread apart and locked into a painful position.

What does this mean to me?

- Reflect on how you react to difficult situations and how this might affect the people who are watching.

- Reflect on the uplifting effects of prayer and singing hymns in a difficult situation. How can this story help to encourage us in difficult times?



Traditional site of Paul and Silas's prison in Philippi

Acts 16:29-34

9. Comment on the jailer's question in verse 30. What is he most likely referring to?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the shock and panic he is experiencing, and why
- the relief he must feel, knowing that no one has escaped

10. How do Paul and Silas answer the jailer's question (v. 31), and what is the result?

What does this mean to me?

- What do these verses indicate about salvation in Jesus Christ?

- How would you answer someone today who asks, “What must I do to be saved”?

Acts 16:35-40

11. How do Paul and Silas speak up for themselves when they are released? What does this show us about people’s rights in that society?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- why Paul and Silas might speak up now rather than before
- how their example might help the believers in Philippi



What does this mean to me?

- How important are civil rights in our society today? How does this issue tie in with teachings of godly justice that we find in the Bible? (See Ex. 22:21-24; Num. 9:14; 2 Sam. 23:3; Isa. 1:17; Mic. 6:8; Acts 5:29; Rom. 13:1-7.)

- In what ways are people treated differently today than in ancient Philippi? In what ways not?



Explore!

- Do some research into the towns and cities Paul and his friends visited on their missionary journey. Learn about the population, culture, religion, geographic features, and so on, to better understand what the missionaries encountered in their travels. One fun way to do that is to zero in on these areas using a program like Google maps.
- If you were imprisoned like Paul and Silas (as some people are today), what songs do you think you might sing? At websites like www.youtube.com and www.Godtube.com, search for songs of worship and praise using keywords like “God’s amazing grace, love, care, forgiveness” and so on. Let one song lead into another as you worship God through music.
- Think and learn about what it would take to be part of the culture of ancient Philippi and to work in some of the occupations at that time: cargo shipping, sailing, cloth trade, business in the marketplace, jailer, magistrate, and so on.
- Explore the background story of the city of Philippi as a retirement colony for Roman veterans (decorated heroes) in the first century, thus giving Lydia a market for her purple cloth. Because there were so many old soldiers in the area, what would the atmosphere be like?

Break Away (at-home readings)

People Divide; God Multiplies

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. —Isaiah 55:8

When something good is happening, why do conflicts often enter in and foul things up?

Our story in this lesson begins with an argument (Acts 15:36-41). Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement and went separate ways. Does it make you curious that this is included in the Bible? Paul and Barnabas wanted to return to the churches they had planted, to strengthen them. But because Mark had deserted them during their first journey together, “Paul did not think it wise to take him” (15:38). So Paul and Silas went one way (through Syria and Cilicia, Paul’s homeland), and Barnabas and John Mark went





another (to Cyprus, Barnabas's homeland). Despite their disagreement, God continued to work through them. The missionary team multiplied, and the result was that new Christians in all the new churches were encouraged and more people were reached with the good news.

My church, which I had attended for twelve years, went through a nasty division. There were disagreements about the type of music, worship style, mission focus, and more. The dispute spiraled out of control in spite of efforts to please everyone. I was devastated that we couldn't all agree. After much pleading and struggling with wounded hearts, the members ended up picking sides, and about half of the congregation left.

As painful as that was at the time, I can see now that although God didn't want us to break up because of a dispute, he turned that circumstance into later growth for his church. The traditional worship service of one group meets the needs of many in the community, and so does the contemporary style of the group that meets in the school building nearby. Both congregations are healthy and vibrant. They are different in many ways, but they serve the same holy, awesome God. All praise and honor belong to God!

We don't see the whole picture or plan that God has laid out for us. If you have been facing difficulties in your life, be patient and trust that God is in control. Some circumstances don't make sense to us while we are walking through them. But he will use all things for his glory!

(Later, Paul and Mark apparently reconciled and worked together again—see Col. 4:10 and 2 Tim. 4:11, where Paul speaks warmly of Mark, noting that the younger man is also Barnabas's cousin. Mark is traditionally credited with writing the gospel book of Mark in the New Testament.)

Are You Ready?

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. . . . —Colossians 3:16

I have been thirsty for the Word since I was 16 years old. Certainly there have been some dry periods when I didn't open my Bible except on Sunday. But, thankfully, God keeps drawing me back to the Scriptures, and I am continually wowed by the truth that is revealed to me through the Holy

Spirit. As I absorb wisdom and align myself with the will of God, I can't help telling others how he has worked in my life.

In Part One of this study, we discovered that Paul changed from being an enemy of believers in Christ to a missionary of the gospel ("good news") of salvation in Christ (Acts 9). He had been born in Tarsus and was well educated as a Pharisee, part of a group in Judaism that specialized in strict obedience to the law. He was sent to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel, the leading teacher at that time. As a young man, Paul became a patriotic zealot and a persecutor of Christians. But God had other plans for this passionate man. The Lord set him apart to bring the good news to Gentiles (Acts 9:15), people who were not Jews.

As students of the Word, how do we know when it is time to transition into teaching others about the gospel? Did God intend for us to be sponges of the truth only? Will God equip us with the knowledge and wisdom required to share the gospel? How? Pray for answers to these questions. Open your heart and mind to let the Spirit lead you.

A Role Model for Me

Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth . . . was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. —Acts 16:14

In Acts 16:14, Lydia is described as a businesswoman. The text doesn't say whether she was married, single, or widowed. It describes her as "a dealer in purple cloth." Purple cloth was very expensive because it was so difficult to make. The dye for the cloth came from a liquid in the glands of a shellfish. The liquid was white inside the shellfish, but when it was exposed to the sun, it changed to a bright purple. Lydia either purchased the cloth to resell or she employed other people in her business. It was a lot of work to collect enough shellfish to dye a piece of fabric. The rare and beautiful cloth was mainly used for clothing for royal families and Roman dignitaries who wore a purple band around the bottom of their garments.

Along with being a hardworking entrepreneur, Lydia was a fine example of hospitality. After she heard the good news of Jesus, "the Lord opened her heart to respond." She believed and was baptized, along with her





household. Then she invited the missionaries to stay at her home. Lydia had the means and the gracious attitude to host these servants of God.

How about you? Do you want to be the type of person that can bless others by welcoming and sharing with them the blessings you have received? “With the measure you use,” promises Jesus, “it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38).

Trouble

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
—John 16:33

Paul spent nearly a quarter of his missionary career in prison. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were stripped and beaten and thrown into prison. Why? Because they shared with others the good news of Jesus. Their words and actions made some crooked business people and local leaders uncomfortable, so they used their power to try to stop the missionaries.

Roman imprisonment was a humiliating, painful experience. Bleeding wounds from a flogging went untreated, prisoners sat in painful positions in chains or stocks without even their outer clothing to keep them warm. The inner cell, where Paul and Silas were kept, was most likely dark and crowded. The smell and threat of disease would have been overwhelming. Yet the missionaries were praying and singing hymns to God.

If you search on the Internet, you’ll find that Christians are being persecuted today in India, China, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Mexico, and many other places around the world. Men, women, and children are suffering for their belief in Jesus Christ. In John 15:18-21 Jesus tells his disciples, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. . . . I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. . . . They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.” Let’s pray today for Christians who are persecuted, asking that we may all be strong in faith.

Love in Action

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. —2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Just two years after my mom died, my older brother died suddenly of a heart attack. I was still raw and wounded from losing my mother, mentor, and friend when my brother's death rocked my world again. Numb with grief, I received comfort from a friend who came to share my pain. When she heard the news, she rushed to my door. I remember falling into her arms and crying out in my sorrow. She was what I needed at that moment. She didn't have to say a word; she just held me and dried my tears.

Did you notice how the jailer in Philippi received assurance and comfort from Paul and Silas—and then was able to show Christ's love to them? After an earthquake loosed all his prisoners, the jailer was ready to take his own life, for the Roman authorities would have executed him for letting any prisoners escape. But Paul assured the jailer that no one had left the prison. Then the jailer rushed in and asked them, "What must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus . . ." and they explained the word of the Lord to him and his household. The fruit of his conversion was immediate and sincere. He cleaned up Paul and Silas's wounds and fed them. They had probably not had any nourishment since being beaten earlier in the day. Only God can change our hearts to be open and sensitive to others' needs, whatever they may be.

I praise God for Paul and Silas, who even in their pain and agony were able to share the love and message of Christ—and for that unnamed jailer who cared for them when they needed it. How encouraging and comforting their actions must have been to one another. I also praise God for my friend who showed up when I needed her most.

Do you act on opportunities to show God's love to those who are hurting? Ask the Creator to give you wisdom on how to help, and then follow God's direction. The impact you make could be more helpful than you know.



In *Acts: Are We There Yet?* follow Paul and his missionary companions as they preach the good news of salvation throughout the Gentile world of the Roman Empire. Witness painful rejection as well as acceptance and transformation as the Holy Spirit works through these courageous witnesses. They gave everything they had to tell the story of God's love through Jesus Christ.

This eight-session study is the continuation of *Acts: Church on the Edge*.



Infuse Bible Studies aim to help people discover where faith and life meet. With these studies you can engage in lively discussion and learning without having studied the Bible before doing each lesson, and you can use these effectively for small group or personal study.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). Additional insights from history and other sources help to fill in details that connect this story to the larger story of God's love and care for us all.

We hope this study stirs your heart to fully know God and the abundant life the Lord intends for us.