

# Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ  
Through the Holy Spirit

## Lesson 11

### Day One: Dealing with the Ups and Downs of Ministry

We have come to the end of the first major section of the book of Acts and to a turning point in the story. Up to this point in time, Peter has been the predominant figure, preaching the gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem and preaching throughout Judea and Samaria. Peter now exits from the scene and here in Acts 13–14, Luke describes the preaching of Paul through six cities, beginning and ending in Antioch. Now we see the gospel message going forth to the Gentiles, and reaching to the uttermost parts of the earth. This next major section of the book (Acts 13–28), has often been referred to as the *Acts of Paul*, who now becomes the dominant figure, and Antioch the epicenter of church activity.

We saw earlier in our study how the church in Antioch was established, that as persecution followed the stoning of Stephen, believers were scattered to the outer areas of Cyprus and Phoenicia and Antioch. Because many were being saved, the news of new converts reached the elders in Jerusalem, and Barnabas was sent out. He brought Paul to join him in Antioch and for an entire year they taught the newest disciples in the truth of God’s Word. Next Luke brings into focus Paul’s first missionary journey, where he proclaims a universal gospel offering salvation to all who will hear and receive it.

### Read Acts 13:1–52.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord.

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**Memory verse: James 5:16** Write out the verse; repeat it daily to commit it to memory.

*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

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The spotlight has now shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch, from the Jews to the Gentiles, and from Peter to Paul (*Saul*).

1. Using Acts 12:25 and 13:1–2 pick out the key words that describe the congregation at work in Antioch.

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The word “called”—*proskaleo*—in the Greek, speaks of a divine setting apart for service to God. The Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to a mission field that was yet unknown to them. As the congregation continued their work of fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and *sent them away*, meaning they “released them from their duties” at Antioch. We learn from this that Barnabas and Saul believed they were under the authority of the church at Antioch. Their first ministry team consisted of two “eyewitnesses” who had the opportunity to see and hear Jesus. They took along John Mark who, though new to service, was well accustomed to prayer meetings in his home. (We will examine him more closely on *Day Four* of our lesson.)

2. What are some of the benefits you can think of when individuals form a service team to accomplish God’s work? Give some examples.

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3. Personal: Have *you* ever teamed up to share the gospel of Christ? How?

### Deeper Discoveries ~

Verses 6–12 reveal the mixed results to be expected when the gospel is preached. Look closely at what is happening in these verses and compose a lesson and an application from them.

Vv. 6–7 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

Vv. 8–11 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

v. 12 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: We must point out the name change in v. 9 from that of *Saul* to *Paul*. Up until now, Saul was known primarily as a Jew (born of Hebrew parents) preaching to his fellow Jews. Here we find him in a Roman setting and Luke is referring to him by his Roman name of *Paul*, which he will continue to use throughout the remainder of Acts as he preaches to Gentile audiences.

## Day Two: The New Church's Old Testament Foundation

Read Acts 13:13–41 for review.

In this passage, Luke records the first of Paul's sermons in Acts. As we follow Paul's travels, we will see that he had a specific approach in mind: target a strategic city, plant a church, and then evangelize the surrounding cities. He usually went first to the local synagogue where he could find both Jews and Gentiles who were eager to hear the Word of God. The synagogue rulers offered the opportunity for their guests to share a word of encouragement (v.15). Paul accepted and rising to his feet, he began to masterfully weave passages from Israel's history and Old Testament prophecy with the message of salvation in Christ alone.

1. Notice in verses 16–20, Paul's initial focus is on God's control of history (spanning some 450 years) and the unique place God had for the nation of Israel. Write down the specific verbs in these verses that clearly put the character of God on display. Ex: *God chose*. . .

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2. In the following, briefly restate the point of history that forms the tapestry of Paul's testimony:

a. Vv. 21–22: \_\_\_\_\_

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b. v. 23: \_\_\_\_\_

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c. Vv. 24–25: \_\_\_\_\_

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d. v. 26: \_\_\_\_\_

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e. Vv. 27–29: \_\_\_\_\_

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f. Vv. 30–37: \_\_\_\_\_

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g. Vv. 38–39: \_\_\_\_\_

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Paul's message was that the law could not justify the sinner; it could only point out that all men are sinners (Romans 3:20). What the law could not do, God through Christ did for us—granting the forgiveness of sins and imputing to us the righteousness of Christ, declaring us justified, or *just as if I'd never sinned!* That was good news to the religious audience of Jews and Gentiles listening to Paul—they could leave knowing peace for the first time. What about *you*—do you want peace? No Christ, no peace. Know Christ and you'll also know peace. Ask Him to come inside as your Lord and Savior right now. Tell someone today about your commitment to Him.

## Day Three: Blessing and Conflict at Antioch

Read Acts 13:42–52 for review.

Along with the invitation to believe, Paul quotes from Habakkuk 1:5, a word of warning that faith would bring forgiveness but that rejection would bring judgment. Paul and Barnabas left with the invitation to return the next week and again preach to the Gentiles. Luke notes that the entire city was stirred up to *hear the Word of God* (v. 44).

Write down the mixed reviews and responses to Paul’s sermon by each of the following groups:

- a. The Jews (Vv. 45–46): \_\_\_\_\_  
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- b. The Gentiles (Vv. 47–49): \_\_\_\_\_  
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- c. The city’s leaders (Vv. 50–51): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. The disciples (v. 52): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Paul’s message in the synagogue was that God had sent the Word to the Jews first, but they had now rejected it. As a result, Paul would now take the message of the *Good News* to the Gentiles. In his defense, Paul quoted the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah 49:6, “I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Sadly, the unbelieving Jews were not going to sit back and allow Paul and Barnabas to accomplish their mission without disrupting them. In the end, the Jews expelled both men from their city, but Paul and Barnabas were not discouraged or disheartened; they simply shook off the dust from their feet and moved on toward the next city, leaving behind them the joyful disciples who believed.

We can see from Acts 13 that ministry does indeed have its ups and downs, but the important thing to remember is that we are merely the messengers—it is the work of the Holy Spirit to save souls! We testify, but He transforms. We humbly present the message and God receives the glory. And it is important for us to always remember that the responses and results are not our responsibility . . . we leave those to Him!

- e. Personal: Share a time when you ministered the gospel only to received mixed reviews and responses. As you look back on it today, in light of what you have just learned, how does it strengthen your resolve to keep on sharing the message?  
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## Day Four:

## John Mark: Deferred Service

We know him best as Mark, author of the second of the four gospels. He is introduced to us in Acts as *John* (Hebrew meaning *Yahweh has shown grace*). John Mark's mother was Mary (sister of Barnabas), a Christian woman of wealth and position with a home large enough to accommodate prayer gatherings. It is to their house that Peter came earlier when the Lord set him free from prison. John Mark would've been quite accustomed to ministry, yet we find that he was a young man torn between his desire to serve the Lord and personal weaknesses that, for a time, would hold him back from service.

John Mark apparently remained at home until being brought to Antioch by Barnabas and Saul (12:25). He had accepted their invitation to accompany them as their *assistant* until the difficulties of the journey prompted his retreat and return home. Did he perhaps not appreciate the position of "assistant" to these two strong leaders? Or was it that the hardships of traveling became too much for him? The reasons for his desertion are not clearly defined for us. It may have been that the privileges of wealth did little to prepare him for the demands of ministry. In any case, serving the Lord did not turn out to be what he expected it to be, so he did an abrupt about-face and headed for Jerusalem. We will see further down the road that God did indeed have a place of service for John Mark, but it would be another two years before he would be ready to step forward again. Whatever it was that John Mark did, the Apostle Paul considered it severe, prompting Paul's refusal to enlist his help for a long time.

1. Look ahead at Acts 15:36–39. What do you see in these verses about the seriousness of John Mark's actions for Paul?

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Paul would later enlist another young man named Timothy (Acts 16:1–3) to take John Mark's place as his assistant. Eventually, John Mark was able to redeem himself and was restored and reassigned to service.

2. Again we are not told the specific details, but how do we know John Mark had made amends with Paul? See 2 Timothy 4:11.

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What about *you*? Have you ever failed in your service for the Lord? Perhaps you can relate to John Mark—*tried; failed; waited two years to try again!* Did your own personal expectations of what you thought ministry would be become the stumbling block that sent you back home?

3. Personal: Think about a time when you became discouraged because ministry didn't work out the way you had planned. What were you hoping to accomplish? What actually ended up happening?

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- a. What valuable lesson did you learn from that failed experience on your part?
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## Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

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2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

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3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

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4. Personal: If you were to select one life-lesson you've learned about ministry that you could pass on to someone else, what would it be?

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**Prayer Time:** Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.

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