

DAY  
4

## Acts 2

This passage is the exciting demonstration and advancement of the mission of Jesus. The disciples will (first) be the witnesses of the resurrected Jesus in Jerusalem, the place of his crucifixion.

The disciples receive the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's power. They go public and the manifestation or evidence of the Spirit poured out is speaking in other languages the wonders of God (2:11). The witness has begun. The salvation of God through Jesus is happening in Jerusalem where the Jewish people, scattered across the Roman Empire, are now together. The seeds of Acts 1:8 are being sown in Jerusalem.

The witnessing continues with a sermon from Peter. Jesus is the center of this sermon. The universality of God's mission is stressed. Everyone receives the Spirit. Everyone prophesies. God wants everyone to be saved, to be blessed, to enjoy the fullness of the Spirit, and to become part of his missional plan.

Peter calls people to respond. A response to the news of Jesus is always needed. We need to understand the truth, be assured of the truth, and respond to the truth with repentance. To repent is to turn from a former way and turn to a new way.

A new community gathered around the resurrected Christ is formed—the Church. Reread verses 42-47.

Key Verses: Verse 17 - the Spirit given to ALL people; verse 21 - call on the name of Jesus to be saved; verse 36 - God made Jesus our Lord and Savior; verse 38 - repent for the forgiveness of sins.

### Take-Away Action Steps:

The great sign of the Spirit is worship and missional witness.

Pray for Spirit fullness in your life, your LifeGroup, and Living Word.

Have you accepted Christ as Savior and Lord? If not, today is the day you should. Reread 2:21, 37-40.

Today you can live with joy and hope. Jesus is Lord and Savior. Death is defeated. God's promises are true. Worship Jesus.

Be fully engaged in the all the experiences (or characteristics) of new community called the Church.

DAY  
5

## Acts Unfinished...

I (Pastor Brian Rice) had an Acts 2 experience when I visited Living Word for the first time. I am convinced that I was “led by the Spirit” to Living Word. I had just graduated from college. I was 22 years old. I was an avid runner, but at the last moment I decided to run in a neighborhood that I NEVER ran through. As I turned down East Philadelphia Street Extended, about half a block in, I saw an old school building. But it was the sign in front of the building that got my attention.

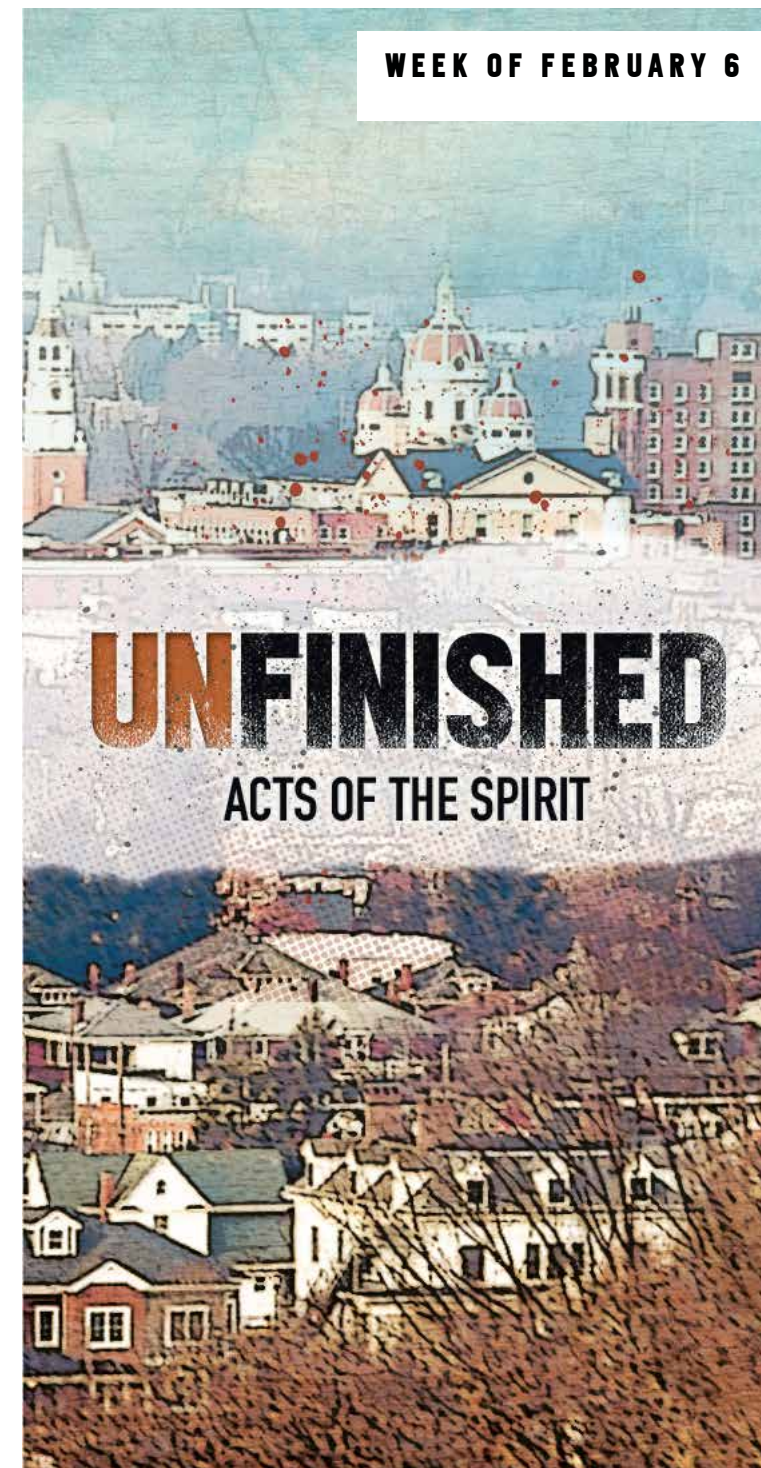
Living Word was meeting in an old school building. Because I had been a part of a very counter-cultural college fellowship group, I was looking for a church that was NOT like a typical church. I thought, “Any church that meets in an old school, that is worth checking out.” I remember thanking God for “detouring” me into this neighborhood. It was several months after I had graduated from college, and I had not found a church to replace the Christian community I had in college.

I was not disappointed at all when I visited Living Word that very next Sunday. I was welcomed by so many people who were genuinely glad to see me. The worship was casual and fervent. We spent time in prayer. The message was solid Bible teaching AND practical. I met the founding pastor, Steve Almquist, who took time to talk with me. After the service was over, people stayed around for a long time, obviously enjoying their time together.

And I returned the following Sunday, and the Sunday after that, and my Christian life began to flourish in deeper and wider ways. Take a minute and read (again) Acts 2:42-47. That was the kind of experience God was creating at Living Word. It seemed as if every week there were more new people coming.

Now, 44 years later, the movement of the Spirit through the Church of Jesus continues at Living Word. And I wonder, where will the Spirit lead? What fresh expressions of life in Christ are ahead of us? Who will Jesus bring to us next? We will surely find out!

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 6



DAY  
1

## Acts: The Presence of the Missional God

*Do we claim to believe in God? He's a missionary God.  
You tell me you're committed to Christ. He's a missionary Christ.  
Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? He's a missionary Spirit.  
Do you belong to the church? It's a missionary society.*

—John Stott

The Book of Acts is a page turner! It is the continuing adventure of the People of God on a mission, with all its perils and promise. It is the bridge between Jesus' life on earth and the rapid expansion of Christianity to the known world.

But the story begins more than 2,000 years before Christ, with the Hebrew people. As we begin to study Acts, we reflect on the background of the book to the early Church.

Central to faith for the Jews was *the presence of God*.

And the symbol of God's presence was:

- The pillar of fire and the cloud in the desert (Exodus 13:21)
- The tabernacle (Exodus 25 and following verses)
- The first temple (prepared for by David and built by Solomon)
- The second temple (built after the Exile in 530 BC)

The Book of Acts begins around AD 35, when the second temple is still in existence. But in a generation the temple will be destroyed by the Romans, never to be rebuilt.

How is God's presence revealed and experienced today? In a NEW "temple." But it's not a building. The new temple is the Church—the community of Christ followers. We know God's presence with us especially because of the Holy Spirit who creates and advances the Church of Christ.

The Book of Acts continues the tapestry of God's presence with his people—from a cloud and fire to a tabernacle to the temple and now in the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

*For Reflection: As you begin reading Acts, how do you see yourself as part of this grand story of God's movement in the world? What question(s) do you have about Acts as we begin?*

DAY  
2

## Introducing Acts: Who, What, Where

Read Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-5.

The Book of Acts is the second part of a two-part letter written by Luke to someone named Theopolis. Luke is a doctor (Colossians 4:14) who joined Paul on his missionary journeys in Troas (Acts 16). He is mentioned only by Paul, in three letters, and he is with Paul at the end of the apostle's life (see 2 Timothy 4:11). Luke first wrote in his gospel about Jesus' life and ministry "to give an orderly account." In Acts he writes the follow up, the sequel to the story.

As you read through the 28 chapters of Acts, it is important to remember and reflect on two contexts.

First, Luke is writing about a 30-year time span. That is a long time—from immediately after Jesus' death and resurrection in or around AD 33 until Paul's house arrest in Rome in AD 60-64. This is like writing a book that covers American history from 1990 to 2020. There is a grand sweep of changes that happen in a 30-year period!

Second, the book of Acts "moves" geographically in dramatic fashion. It begins with a very small group of people in a small part of Jerusalem—the center of first century Jewish life. The book ends in the center of the vast Roman Empire in its epicenter—Rome. This movement is of great significance as we read Acts. It represents and reminds us of how the good news of Jesus travels from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

*For Reflection: Think about an epic movie or book that you know. How did you engage with it? (getting to know characters, plot twists and turns, high drama and resolution.) As you read through Acts, what questions are you asking of this early Church epic adventure? Ask God to give you new insight into these questions.*

DAY  
3

## Acts 1

Always read the assigned passage FIRST, then do the study and reflection we provide.

Acts chapter one has two main sections. Acts 1:1-11 describes the 40-day transitional time of Jesus with his disciples after the resurrection and before his ascension. Acts 1:12-26 focuses on the replacement of Judas the betrayer with Matthias. Here are the primary themes of chapter one.

Jesus is central to the life of the ongoing church. Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God, the mission of the disciples, and promises the Holy Spirit to empower them for their mission.

The ascension of Jesus concludes his earthly, incarnate ministry. The ascended Jesus is exalted to the eternal throne of the Kingdom of God (and the Davidic kingdom). King Jesus is exalted and only King Jesus is Lord (also see Philippians 2:9-11).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and the power of God now living inside the followers of Jesus. The Book of Acts is aptly described as the Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles. It is by Holy Spirit power that the Church exists and grows.

The core task of these apostolic disciples will be as witnesses of the good news of King Jesus—taking it to the whole world.

Key Verses: Verse 3 - the Kingdom of God; verse 5 - baptized with the Holy Spirit; verse 8 - power and commissioning to witness to the ends of the earth; verse 14 - they were constantly in prayer; verse 24 - the Lord knows everyone's heart.

### Take-Away Action Steps:

Learn the ways of the Kingdom of Christ.

You need to be full of the Spirit. Pray daily for this.

Disciples are witnesses about the life and love of Jesus.

Pray constantly for the Church and for our church.



DAY  
4

## Acts 6

This is a short chapter that sets the stage for a very long chapter. This chapter introduces a very significant leader who will have a very short ministry. The chapter also gives us some insights to the qualities needed for those who will provide leadership in the Church.

The situation is that some widows of the Jews from the Greek world were being overlooked and favoritism was toward the Hebraic (or Jerusalem dwelling) widows. The apostles agree this is a problem. Surprise! The early Church is not perfect either. The Church always has problems and spiritual leadership is needed to deal with problems in ways that honor God and bless the Church.

The apostles will keep their focus on their primary calling. They create a new organizational structure to deal with a new problem, and they need leaders to implement it.

They choose seven additional leaders. Look at the qualifications that were set for these leaders (6:3, 5, 8, 10). Make a list of those qualities.

New opposition arises against the Church. Now it is not from the established Jerusalem leadership, it is from Jews who live outside Jerusalem. They level very serious charges of blasphemy and heresy against Stephen (6:11-14). He is against the law, Moses, and the temple! They bring him before the Jerusalem leadership, the Sanhedrin.

### Take-Away Action Steps:

Pray for the staff and other leadership of the church, that they would have the qualities described of Stephen.

Don't be shocked when the church has problems and challenges. That is life.

Look for NEW and creative solutions. Old ways stop working and new ways are needed.

To be prepared for your own leadership calling, seek to be full of faith, Spirit, grace, and power.

DAY  
5

## The Reformed Church Always Reforming

I have been with Living Word from its very early days. If we could show you a movie of life at Living Word through the years, one thing would be very obvious. Living Word has changed immensely over the years.

New leadership, new staff, new programs, new ministries, new facilities, new strategies, new ways of doing life, new ways of worship, new ways of teaching the Bible, new ways of doing children's ministry, and the list could go on. Everything I just described is what Jesus refers to as "wineskins." That is a metaphor for the structure and system.

The Word of God stays the same, the Spirit of God stays the same, the good news of the gospel stays the same, the core mission of the Church remains the same, the essential beliefs of the faith remain the same. All this is the wine (see Matthew 9:17). But wineskins constantly change, and they need to change.

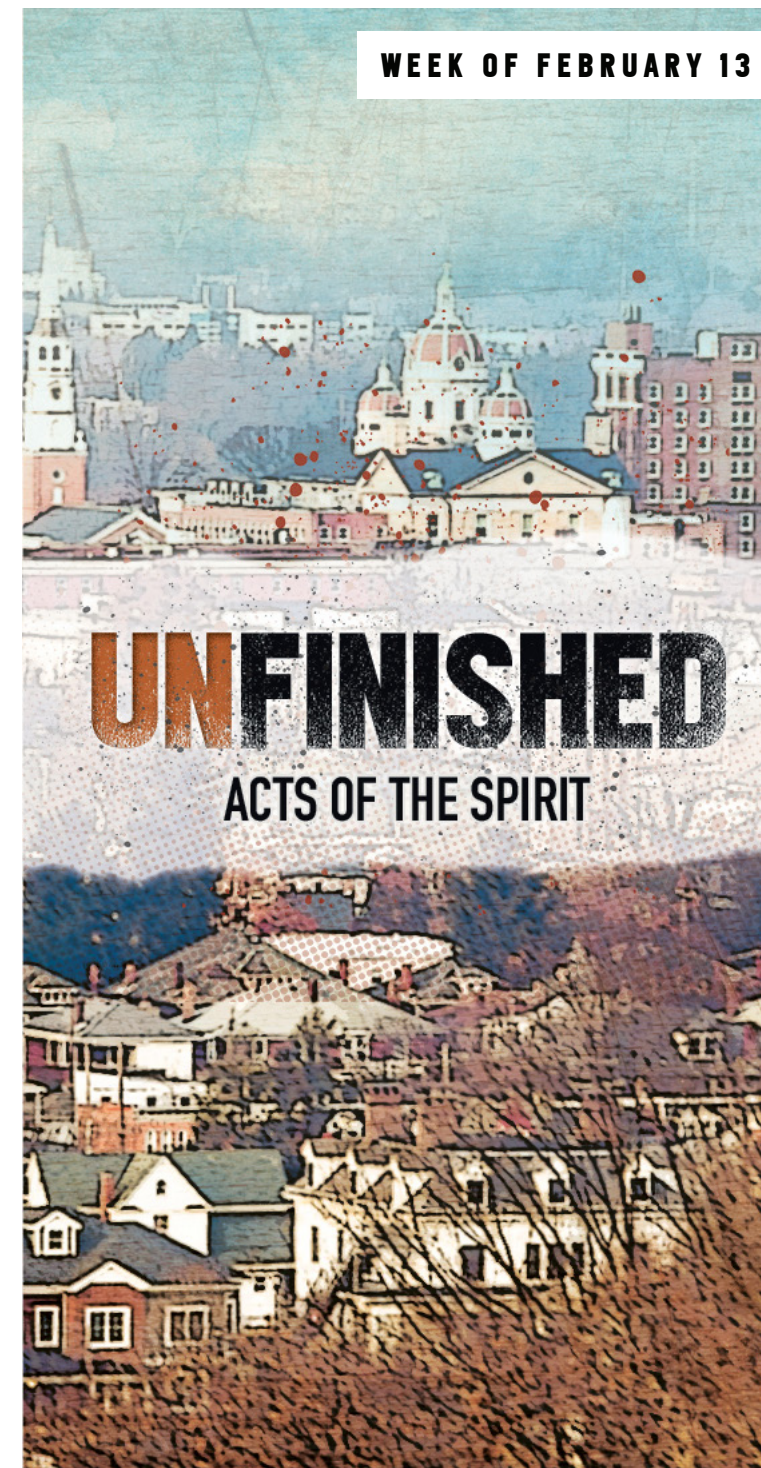
But change is hard. Often change is resisted by the very people who will be helped by the change. Living Word has been blessed. Over the decades, we have held loosely to wineskins and held tight to the wine.

As our world changes fast and hard, there are new changes we will make. Living Word Online is one of those changes. New ways of evangelism are needed. New ways of engaging our community are needed. Our Board is always working on the best way to be a leadership team that serves the church.

It is a great comfort to know that the Book of Acts shows us a Church that is constantly changing. The Spirit of God leads them into new ways of being the people of God. Sometimes it is very hard. There are some who resist the change. But God is at work, and we seek to keep in step with the Spirit as he leads us into the future God has for us.

Pray for the leadership of Living Word. We live in exciting and challenging times. May the Holy Spirit guide us in the ways of our Lord.

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 13



## DAY 1 Acts 3

Chapters 3 and 4 of Acts are a seamless story. Today is part one of that story. Chapter 3 has two main sections. First is the miracle of healing that takes place at the temple gate (vv. 1-11). Then there is the sermon Peter gives to the crowd about the healing. This healing takes you back to a similar miracle by Jesus (John 5:1-15). Here are a few ideas to consider.

Hurting people are all around and we get so use to seeing them, we stop seeing them. The man sees Peter and John and they see the man. The Spirit of God wants you to pay attention to the people who are often unseen.

In Acts, the witness of the good news goes hand in hand with signs and wonders; there are miracles and healings. God was confirming the truth of Jesus by the power of Jesus (3:6). Be bold in prayers and even bolder in love that reaches out to connect with those in need.

Peter uses this occasion to preach the Gospel of Jesus. There is a core belief system that is always communicated. Jesus was crucified and then risen from the dead. Resurrection is a constant theme in the sermons preached. Be sure to notice all that is said to describe Jesus. The apostles are witnesses that Jesus is alive. The healing is the confirmation that Jesus is alive and at work. Peter grounds the good news of Jesus in the story of Israel. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise.

Peter asks for a response. Repent and turn to Jesus. The benefits of salvation are: 1) sins are wiped out, 2) times of refreshing come upon them, and 3) to bless them (3:26).

Key Verses: Verse 6; verse 16.

### Take-Away Action Steps:

Pray for your eyes to be opened to those in need around you.

What do you have to give to those in need?

Don't ever hesitate to pray bold prayers for miracles. Who do you know that could use a miracle? Pray for them right now.

## DAY 2 Acts 4

There are three parts to this chapter. There is the confrontation with the Jewish leadership (1-22); there is the trust in God the Church demonstrates (23-31); and there is a summary statement about the Church growing (32-37).

The disciples know there will be confrontation and consequences for preaching Jesus (John 15:20-21). The Gospel Way of Life will contradict the ideologies of Empire—whether the Jewish religious empire or the Roman political empire. Preaching about resurrection leads to their imprisonment. At the same time, more people believe.

Notice the specific positions and names of the Jewish leaders who are opposed to the apostles (4:1, 5, 6). These are the ones who crucified Jesus.

Peter preaches another sermon and directly confronts those who crucified Jesus and repeats, “Jesus is alive.” In 13-17 the Jewish leaders don't know what to do, other than threaten them not to talk about Jesus. Verse 19 is one of the most powerful words of faith in Jesus to stand against the authorities.

Read the strong prayer and praise of verses 23-31. This is the Church at prayer. The Church of today needs to pray like this.

Verses 32-35 repeat Acts 2:41-47. The Spirit is on the move, the Church is growing, and a new kind of community is emerging. And then the last two verses introduce a new person who will be core to the expansion of the Church.

Key Verses: Verse 13 – ordinary people who have been with Jesus; verse 19 – we must obey God not man; verse 33 – God's grace working powerfully.

### Take-Away Action Steps:

Where do you need to have more boldness on behalf of Jesus and making him known?

Begin to pray much more for God to be at work, moving and shaking us with his Spirit.

## DAY 3 Acts 5

There are two parts to this chapter. The first is a very tragic story of Ananias and Sapphira, who lie to the apostles about being generous. They both die. They are contrasted with the generosity of Barnabas in 4:36-37. The second part of the chapter describes a more serious attack from the Jewish leaders against the apostles preaching about Jesus.

We'll briefly touch on the Ananias and Sapphira tragedy. God's holy presence is among his people. His people are becoming a new kind of compassionate community with each other and taking care of one another. This couple acts with full intention to deceive the Church. There are about eight phrases used to describe the condition of their soul.

The rest of the chapter is about the power of the Spirit working through the new Church. It is growing rapidly, and the Jewish leaders are jealous and threatened. They respond with a more severe punishment. Peter and John are put in jail. God sets them free. They go right back to preaching Jesus. While the Jewish leadership does punish them more, they receive wise counsel from one of their members. Wait and see if God is in this.

The apostles keep preaching and doing ministry and the Church keeps growing. Jesus is the Messiah.

Key Verses: Verse 29 – we must obey God!; verses 38-39 – if God is in this, you can't stop it; verse 41 – they rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer for Jesus!

### Take-Away Action Steps:

Realize that no matter what God does, some people will not believe and will oppose you.

Will you trust that Jesus is Messiah and Lord and obey him in all things?

The Church grows in spite of and sometimes because of opposition. Don't be afraid of opposition.

Don't be afraid of consequences of following Jesus.



DAY  
4

## Acts 9:1-31

Chapter 9 is one of the most important chapters in Acts. It is Saul's experience on the road to Damascus, where he encounters Jesus and is forever changed. In Acts 9:32-43 the story turns back to Peter. After reading Acts 9:1-31, read Philippians 3:1-11. Acts 9 is the biography of what happened. Philippians is Paul's spiritual explanation of his conversion to Jesus.

The radical conversion and transformation of Saul is central to the Book of Acts. Here are several core insights.

No one is beyond the grace of Jesus, who wants all to be saved. It is hard to imagine anyone worse than Saul, or more unlikely than Saul, to be saved, much less become the greatest leader the Church of the first century would have. Reflect on this a bit.

How do you see people? Ananias saw Saul as a dangerous person. Jesus saw Saul as his chosen servant. We must learn to see people as Jesus sees them, no matter how much we may not like them.

Read Acts 9:15-16. This is God's plan for Saul! Read Colossians 1:24 for how Paul received that plan. Yes, God wants to bless you, but even more, God wants to bless you to be a blessing for others. A Jesus-shaped reality often has elements of sacrificial love for others. How ready are you for those assignments? They may be more frequent in our cultural season of life in our time.

Saul's turnaround is fast. After some time with the disciples (learning more about Jesus) he immediately begins to share the good news. Jesus is the Son of God. Not only is this good news, but to the Jews it is heretical news, for there is only One God (vv. 19-22). How can Jesus be God? Saul proves he is. Saul is speaking truth, but in ways that immediately arouse intense opposition (vv. 23-29). Saul will go on a sabbatical to grow in his understanding of Jesus and how to do the mission of Jesus.

Acts 9:31 is the sixth time a summary of this type is provided. The Spirit is at work, the mission is growing, and so is the Church. Advancing but still UNFINISHED. . . and much more to come.

DAY  
5

## Living Word's Mission in Ethiopia

Acts 8:26-40 told the story of the Ethiopian eunuch who accepted Christ. Luke the historian was very selective in his early Church history. He focuses mainly on Peter and then on Paul. There are other Church leaders who have important missional roles. You have already read about Stephen and Philip. There are more to come. But Luke does not talk about any of the other apostles, what they did, where they went, how the gospel went to other parts of the world. And this reference is the only mention of the gospel arriving in Ethiopia. You can learn more about the very early possibilities at the Wikipedia article, "Christianity in Ethiopia."

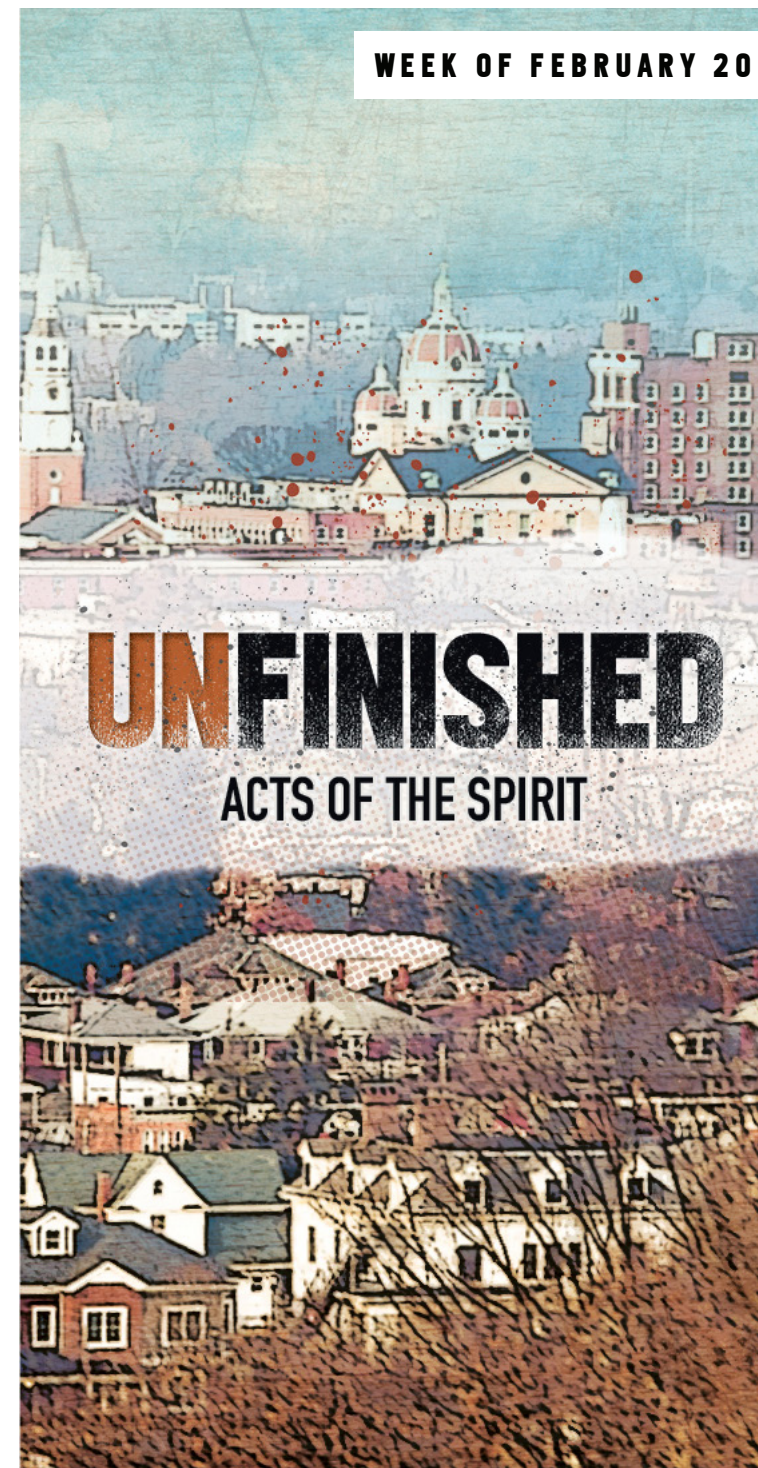


Living Word has been involved in Ethiopia almost from the beginning of our church. We had the great privilege of working with Dr. Melese Wogu, founder of Ethiopian Outreach Ministry. Because of civil war, Ethiopians are a scattered people around the world. Melese had a worldwide ministry of evangelism, teaching, and discipleship through radio broadcasts and books. He has a leadership training institute in Addis Ababa.

Through Melese we started a church for Ethiopian refugees in Djibouti. Through Melese we met Dr. Frew and began a major work in Sendafa, a town outside of Addis. We were introduced to Misker Abede, who has a wonderful church in the east of Ethiopia, in Dire Dawa. Ethiopia is a wonderful country that has been and is going through hard times.

Through these partners, we support a wide range of ministry in Ethiopia: teaching, evangelism, discipleship, church planting, church growth, leadership development, medical mission, micro-enterprise startups, community development, public health improvement, and more. We have had many people go on short-term mission trips to Ethiopia. The work remains UNFINISHED and it is our joy to be a part of new Acts of the Spirit in Ethiopia. Pray for our missional partners in Ethiopia.

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 20





## DAY 1

### Acts 7

Acts 6 and 7 are a unit. Acts 6 introduced Stephen as one of the leaders in the Jerusalem Church—a powerful preacher, one through whom the Spirit performed signs and wonders. And he will be the hinge point for a growing hostility toward the Church and the scattering of the Church.

Stephen is on trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin (6:12-15). False charges have been brought against him. Acts 7:2-53 is his defense. His defense is a sermon. It is the longest sermon in Acts at 1,014 words. Paul's longest sermon is 470 words and Peter's longest is 429 words. This sermon is different from the others. Stephen takes the Jewish leadership through the entire Old Testament story, to emphasize God's goodness to his people and show the hard hearts of God's people.

Verses 51-53 are a strong prophetic rebuke of the Jewish people and their leadership. Stephen delivers the accusation that the current leadership has rejected God in rejecting Jesus. They are furious with him (v. 54). Then Stephen seals his fate with verses 55-56. See how Jesus is described. For the Jews, this is blasphemy, and they decide to execute Stephen by stoning (vv. 57-59). Stephen's prayer reminds us of Jesus' own prayer (Luke 23:46). And he dies asking God to forgive those who have killed him!

Luke provides this story for several reasons. First, it is the story of God's love, Israel's rebellion, God's judgment, and now God's salvation given in Jesus. They have rejected Jesus, the salvation of God. Second, it is the start of the next phase of the Church in Jerusalem. It will now be more difficult and dangerous to be a follower of Jesus in that area. Third, it sets the stage for a new dispersal and mobilization of Christians, and the advancement of the gospel into Samaria (Acts 1:8). Finally, it introduces a new main character who will soon take center stage in Acts: Saul (v. 58). Saul is the one who approves the stoning (v. 60).

The Church is now facing dangerous enemies who use extreme punishment. What will the Church do? Stephen models the way. Be filled with the Spirit, witness to Jesus, speak truth, trust the resurrected Jesus. Death is not the end.

## DAY 2

### Acts 8:1-25

Read Acts 1:8, then Acts 8:1. If Acts 7 was bleak and Acts 8 begins that way, it quickly turns into a great missional expansion to Judea (lower portion of yellow part on map) and then across the religious-cultural border into Samaria (the upper part).

Read Acts 8:1-3. A great persecution! This is the world at its most negative about Christ and Christianity. Saul is a lead persecutor. The apostles remained in Jerusalem, but the great majority would have scattered.

Read Acts 8:4-8 and see the scattering disciples preaching wherever they went. They have great success. Another core leader emerges: Philip (one of the seven in Acts 6:5). The mission to Samaria has begun and it is fruitful. Luke describes the power encounter story of Simon, a magician (vv. 9-24).

More important, Luke stresses the spiritual legitimacy of the mission in Samaria. Peter and John go to check it out. They fully approve. The Spirit is given (like Pentecost) to confirm that God's salvation has come for Samaritans! The Jewish believers need to know of God's love for the non-Jewish world. As Peter and John return to Jerusalem, they too preach in many Samaritan villages (v. 25). This is a major leap forward of mission.

#### Take-Away Action Steps:

God uses even the worst situations, turns them around, and advances his kingdom. Trust him to do the same for you.

God's power does miraculous things and is always greater than evil. Stand firm against spiritual forces of evil.

Reach out to someone who is different from your own cultural group and build a relationship with them.



## DAY 3

### Acts 8:26-40

The second half of Acts 8 is another story of Philip. The first story showed Philip as the catalyst for mission to Samaria. The second story will be a “teaser” about mission to the ends of the earth.

Read 8:26 and look at the map. The Holy Spirit will take Philip from the Samaria mission in the north, down to Gaza. That city is on the bottom left part of the map. There is a major road through this region, down to Egypt.

Philip meets an important Ethiopian. He is a eunuch, an important official in charge of the treasury of the Queen of Ethiopia. He is a God-seeker, a non-Jew who attends a Jewish synagogue and worship the God of Israel. He was in Jerusalem to worship. He is returning home and reading Isaiah 53.

There are important details we often miss because we are not familiar with the cultural significance of what is described. The Ethiopian is reading the prophet Isaiah, and most likely in the well-known Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. Greek was like an international second language around that part of the world. The Ethiopian does not understand the Old Testament until Philip explains Jesus as the fulfillment of it.

While the Ethiopian has tremendous power, he also has a tremendous need. He wants to know the true God. God is always chasing us down. Read Isaiah 56:3-8 for the good news for eunuchs. God orchestrates a major mission to get to this man. He responds and becomes a follower of Jesus (vv. 34-39). Then the Spirit takes Philip up to the area of Caesarea (top of the yellow portion). The Spirit is on the move. The mission is growing.

#### Take-Away Action Steps:

God spent a great deal of time chasing after you! Who did God use to get the good news of Jesus to you? Be grateful.

God will use you to chase down others that he loves. God wants to make you a Philip.

Have a heart of love to see the needs and hurts around you. Be full of the Spirit and reach out with the love of Jesus.



# DAY 4

## Acts 13

The rest of Acts will focus on the three missionary journeys of Saul. Chapters 13 and 14 describe the first missionary journey. A map is provided, but it may be helpful for you to do a Google search for: Paul's First Missionary Journey and use a bigger version. Acts 13 covers the work on Cyprus and finishes on the mainland, in a major city of Galatia—Antioch in Pisidia.

Luke provides many historical details. The church in the Syrian Antioch is a missional HUB. It has a multiracial/ethnic leadership team (vv. 1-3). They are sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and the Spirit is going to advance the Gentile mission through Paul and Barnabas. In this chapter, Saul's name is changed to the more useful Greek equivalent—Paul.

This chapter records a striking power encounter with a sorcerer. Paul preaches a profound message of Jesus: the crucified Savior, the resurrected God, and the sovereign Lord. Paul will consistently use a pattern. He starts in the local synagogue and speaks to Jews who are open, and to the God-fearing Gentiles (v. 26). He then goes to the marketplace to preach to the larger Gentile crowds. The gospel of grace and forgiveness of sin is preached (vv. 38-39).

Luke reports the fruit of the mission as well as the opposition. You will see the negative world striking back in almost every chapter. But the gospel is unstoppable, and the work is unfinished. Be sure to read verse 52. May you be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit today.



# DAY 5

## Acts 14

This chapter covers a lot of territory. If you look at the map, they travel through the region of Galatia and then they backtrack and sail back home to Antioch. Pay attention to these notes from Luke.

They are always led by the Spirit and their teaching is always the apostolic teaching of the Lord Jesus.

They are not only doing evangelism, the mission is to see self-supporting churches started everywhere.

There is always strong opposition from some of the Jews, while some Jews believe and so do many God-fearing Gentiles. God is at work at all times.

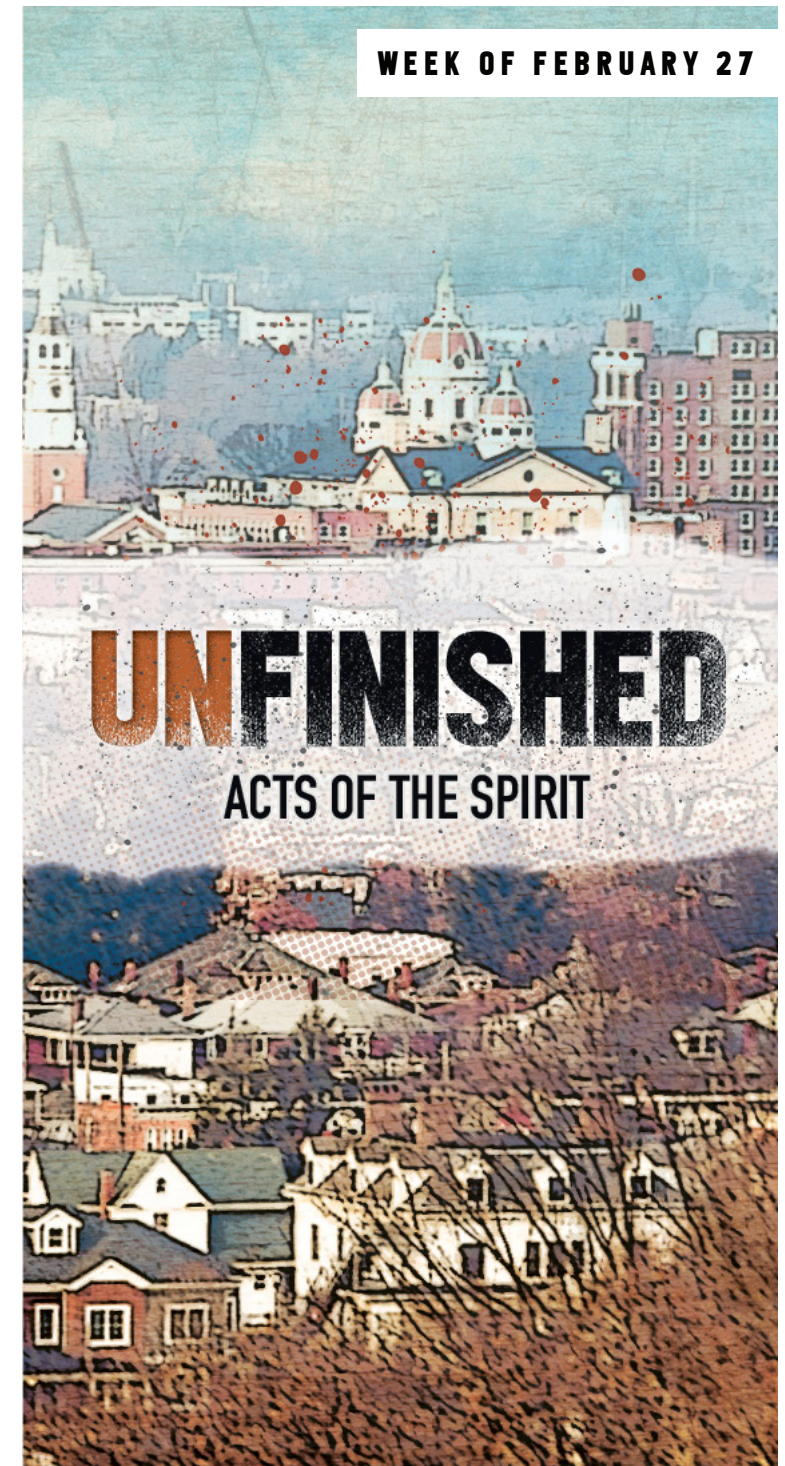
The mission is in the Roman Empire. The cities where they preach are fully devoted to the gods of Rome and Rome itself. Religion was a way of life for Roman Empire cities and there was great risk for NOT worshipping the gods of the Empire.

Paul and Barnabas are mistaken for gods, due to the miracle of healing (vv. 8-18). The crowd quickly turns against them, and they stone Paul (vv. 19-20). Be sure to note key verses 23 and 24. They put their trust in God for the missional work in a negative world. They keep on being missional. Resistance will not stop them.

When they get back to Antioch, they give a full report of all that God has done and, most importantly, a door for mission to the Gentiles is now open (v. 27). They remain at the Antioch HUB for a long time.

What lessons and insights are you learning from the 1st century Church for the 21st century church at Living Word?

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 27





**DAY  
1****Acts 9:32 – 10:48**

Some chapters of Acts are closely connected. Acts 9:32-43 is a transitional story that sets the stage for chapters 10 and 11. The focus has shifted back to Peter. He is traveling around Judea and Samaria. A notable miracle of healing occurs in the towns of Lydda and Sharon. Many people turn to the Lord (v. 35). Peter then moves to Joppa (also spelled Jaffa) and settles down. A major miracle of raising a woman who had died, Dorcas, takes place and many people believe (v. 42).

Now the action shifts to a MAJOR missional moment in Acts 10. The gospel will take a big step toward the ends of the earth and do it in the region of Caesarea (northwest coast of Samaria) in the family of the Roman Centurion Cornelius. Listen to the message of February 20.

Notice the heart and soul of Cornelius (vv. 1-8, 22-26). God arranges a divine contact for Cornelius and his family to be saved. Peter needs a massive mindset shift. God gives a vision and a clear instruction to shake Peter loose from his inability to conceive of “unclean” Gentiles being saved. Ritual purity is essential in the way religion is practiced in 1st century Israel.

Peter meets Cornelius, discovers his hunger to know God, and the breakthrough happens. Peter has a new understanding of God’s better mission for the world (vv. 34-35). Peter preaches Jesus (the crucified Messiah, the resurrected God, and the sovereign Lord) and forgiveness of sins in his name (v. 43).

God powerfully confirms his mission to the Gentiles with a follow-up version of Pentecost, to make it absolutely clear that these Gentiles have been welcomed into the family of faith and the Kingdom of Jesus (vv. 44-48). The Jewish disciples are astonished at what God has done. Really astonished!

This story intensifies in the next chapter. For now, ask God to give you eyes to see his greater work, especially among people you think are virtually beyond God’s grace.

**DAY  
2****Acts 11**

In Acts 11:1-3 Peter is in real trouble from a group of Jewish Christians who believe circumcision and ritual purity are essential for the Christian faith. What Peter did is inconceivable, almost immoral. Some of the hardest hearts are religious hearts who do not know the grace and love of God, and who do not love and extend grace to “outsiders.” Even Peter, with all his stature in the first church, is not exempt from these hard hearts.

Peter explains how the Spirit had to change his own mindset, and then how the Spirit came on Cornelius and his household (vv. 4-17). Read verses 17 and 18. This is the new missional mindset that Jesus taught in Acts 1:8. Then, the hard hearts are softened. The biased eyes opened. The objections answered. They see the conversion of “unclean” Gentiles as a miracle and they worship God. A spiritual seismic shift has occurred.

Now that the door to the Gentiles has been open wide, immediately other disciples go through that door and begin to travel to new cities. Some go only to the Jews, but others go to the Greeks. Always watch for summaries Luke provides. Barnabas joins in and sees much fruit. Be sure to notice how Luke the historian skillfully weaves the plot. Barnabas mentors Saul and they partner for even greater ministry. Be sure to see the new title given to the disciples (v. 25).

Through the prophet Isaiah, God told his people he would do a new thing (Isaiah 43:18-19). God’s new thing is often far outside our theological and political boxes (Isaiah 55:8-11). Acts is all about the new thing God is doing. Do not suffer from what is called “hardening of the categories” where your personal opinions about people and groups you don’t like keep you from participating in the new thing God is doing. The good news is bigger than we imagine. We were all apart from God. We all needed forgiveness (Romans 5:6-11). We are called to love and serve all people as we bring the good news of the grace of Jesus.

Pray all week for people you may view as outsiders and even as enemies. Pray for them to encounter Jesus. And most of all, see Jesus in the way you love them.

**DAY  
3****Acts 12**

The church is on a mission in the world, but sometimes the world is not only dark, it is dangerous. Not since Stephen was martyred in Acts 7 has the negative world been described like Luke describes it in Acts 12.

There are two primary enemies, and they are in partnership together against the Church. King Herod rules on behalf of the Roman Empire. He is there to keep order and keep the Jewish Zealots under control. To get the favor of the Jewish leadership, he executes James (one of the 12 disciples). He then arrests Peter, planning on killing him as well.

In verses 5-11, we read the story of Peter in a highly guarded prison and how an angel orchestrates the escape. The Church is praying hard for Peter (v. 5). Peter goes to the place where the Church is praying and they don’t believe it is him (vv. 11-16). He then gives quiet instructions and departs the city for another unnamed place. Peter will greatly diminish from this point on. James, the brother of Jesus, is now the leader of the Church in Jerusalem.

Herod has the guards executed (vv. 18-19). He moves to another location where he again shows poor rulership. The chapter finishes with the death of Herod for his vanity and evil (vv. 21-23). Note the summary: The word of God is flourishing in spite of the evil rulers who would suppress it (v. 24). The Word of God is unstoppable and the work is yet unfinished. There is much more to do. The final verse hints at what is to come.

When the culture is neutral or negative about the Christian faith, opposition is to be expected. Christians in the United States live in a democracy where we have religious freedom. Much of the world does not have this freedom or security. In many nations, it is difficult and even dangerous to be a Christian.

Take a few minutes and thank God for our freedom of religion, and then pray for the struggling and persecuted Church around the world. Pray for the Church in the world of Islam.



DAY  
4

Acts 16

The second missionary journey of Paul is told in Acts 16-18. This is a longer trip, lasting over 2 years and covering a great deal of territory. Paul is moving deep into the Roman Empire. Many of the cities he visits will receive letters from him. Some of those places are mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 (the seven churches).

Acts 16 is a report on Paul's travels through the regions of Galatia and Asia. Young Timothy becomes a vital part of Paul's team (vv. 1-3). The city of Philippi is the setting for the rest of the chapter. He meets Lydia who becomes a major benefactor-leader in the Philippian church (vv. 13-15). Also read Philippians 4:2-4 about two other significant women leaders of that church.

This chapter is shaped by an exorcism of a fortune-telling slave girl that has financial loss for her owners (vv. 16-18). The owners retaliate and drag Paul and Silas to face authorities. Read how severe the situation is. Be sure to notice how Paul and Silas respond (vv. 25-27). See how God delivers them and how they use the situation to share the gospel.

The work of God is unstoppable. Beatings and prison become the occasion for a new work and more fruit (vv. 31-34). Read Philippians 1:3-8, 12-14; 4:10-13. Unstoppable is the word that comes to my mind. When God is with you, you too will be unstoppable.



DAY  
5

Acts 17

There are three main cities Paul visits in this chapter: Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. Paul follows his standard pattern of synagogue first and then going to the Gentiles. Angry Jews start trouble for him in the first two cities (vv. 1-15). This chapter has the famous passage about the more noble Berean Jews who eagerly studied the Word of God to learn more about Jesus.

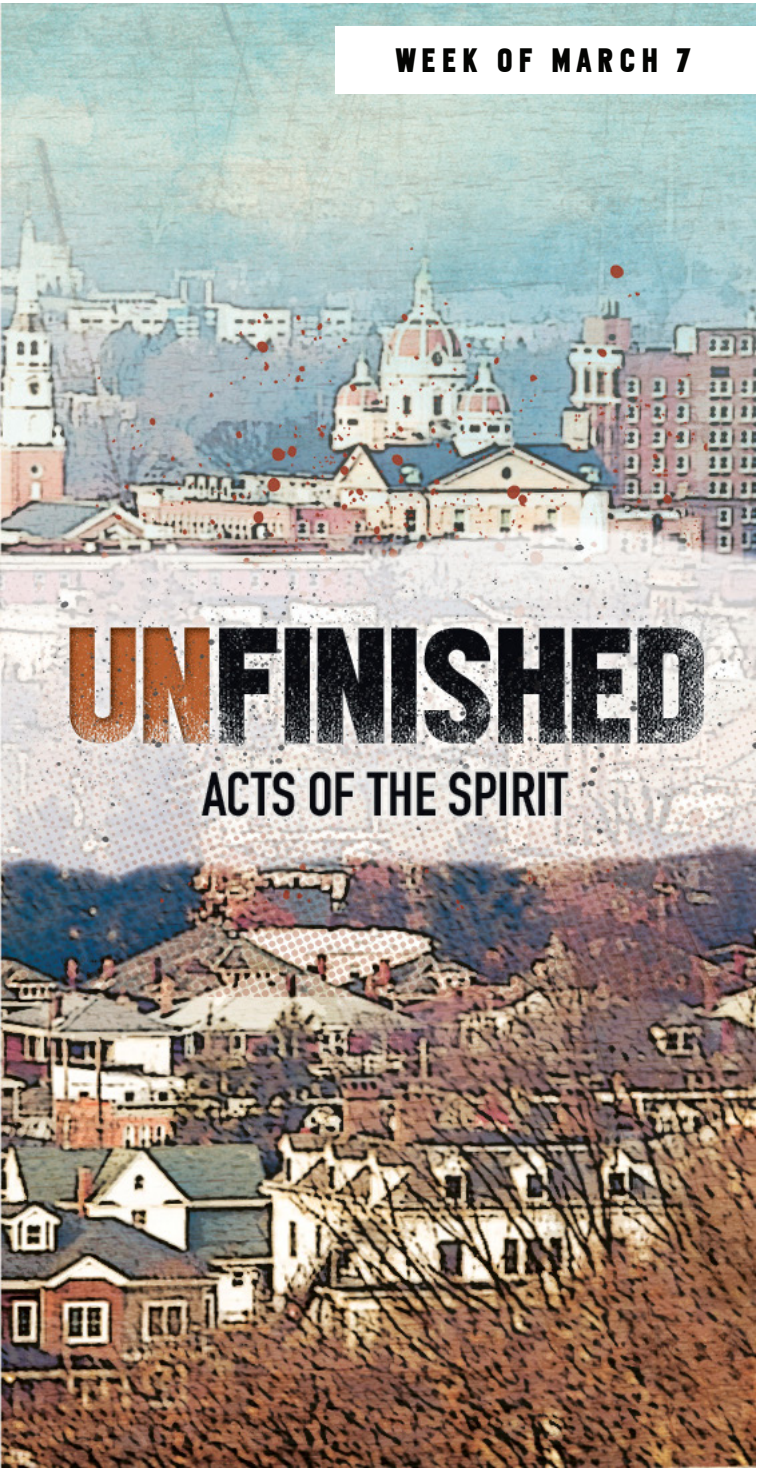
The third city is the city of Athens and we have recorded a remarkable missionary adaptation as Paul speaks to a very different audience of philosophers and followers of other religions (vv. 16-34). Paul has deeply studied the philosophies of the Roman Empire. What a great lesson for the Church today. We need to study and understand the non-Christian worldviews that dominate our culture.

Paul finds a common meeting ground with this audience. He speaks their language and reasons with them from their own starting point. It is more important than ever, in our post-Christian culture, that we do the same. We try to help you understand the dominant ideas, voices, and beliefs around us. We use illustrations, ideas, and stories from our culture to connect with our culture.

We do NOT live in a church bubble. We engage the world, dialogue with it, carefully reason with it. We do NOT condemn it from a distance. That is a flawed and foolish strategy for reaching the world God loves. Paul models the way. Some reject the message. Others believe it. Still others want to learn more.

Get to know non-Christians, build relationships, practice listening, avoid preaching, tell your story, and have loving conversations. That is the new way of evangelism. Actually, it is one of the original ways as well!

WEEK OF MARCH 7





## DAY 1

### Acts 15:1-35

We are at the halfway point of our Acts study. Chapter 15 is a pivotal chapter with a paradigm change. It may be the single most important chapter in Acts that explains the mission of God. There is a lot at stake. The gospel is at stake. What exactly is the gospel? The identity of the Church is at stake. Who are the people of God? Who is invited to be a part of the new community called Church? The way of salvation is at stake. How does one become a follower of the One True God and the Savior-Lord Jesus? What must I believe and do to be saved?

This passage is worth reading twice. It has intricate details, fast-paced action, profound biblical and theological debate, a divided Jerusalem church, and a beautiful resolution. Here are some highlights and observations.

15:1-3 is the setting. “Unauthorized” teachers (v. 24) were teaching the Gentile believers they must be circumcised to be saved. It created sharp dispute and debate. Is it true or not?

15:4-18 is the discussion on these issues by a Council. The leadership of the early Church gathers to map a way forward. The Jewish party speaks first (v. 5). Then Peter, Barnabas, and Paul give a powerful report of gospel and grace (vv. 9-11). Peter says, don’t test God in this (v. 10). James says, don’t make things difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God (v. 19).

15:19-29 is the theological and spiritual answer that guards the gospel of grace, the mission of God, and the Church of Jesus. Verses 20-21 and 28-29 are the basic encouragements for a way of life as they follow Jesus.

15:30-35 is the joyful response of the Gentile church.

## DAY 2

### Mere Christianity

How are we saved? How shall we live? Who will we be as God’s people? These core questions will be addressed by Paul and others in every letter in the New Testament. These questions are just as important today.

**Mere Christianity** is the phrase used by C. S. Lewis to explain historic and orthodox Christian faith. These are the things believed by all Christians in all times. It is the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed.

**The True Gospel** is the essential core of Christianity. Jesus is Savior, Lord, and God. We are apart from God (it is called sin). We are lost, broken, and hurting. We need to be found, renewed, and healed. This is salvation. It is by grace, the free and generous gift of God, doing for you what you could not do for yourself.

**Real Faith** is you turning from your current path, believing the gospel Good News of Jesus, and accepting and receiving Jesus as your Savior, Lord, and God. Faith is a dynamic combination of belief, conviction, acceptance, and allegiance to Jesus.

All this sets in motion a new WAY of life as one who belongs to and follows Jesus. God’s grace means you are on a new way of increasing forgiveness, freedom, healing, transformation, and empowerment. This is imparted to you by the power of the Holy Spirit. You don’t do the Christian life on your own power.

**Wide Church** means the people of God are all who call on the name of Jesus for salvation. Wide church includes every race, ethnic group, political group, gender, age, socio-economic class, occupation, and more. All the hierarchies and differences that divide humanity are overcome in JESUS. Grace makes us one with Jesus and one with each other.

Acts is the still unfinished story of these realities expanding and growing as the MISSION of God continues in the WORLD.

## DAY 3

### Acts 15:36-41

Luke is selective as a historian and he has a purpose for every story he tells. There are too many years, too much geography, and too many people for Luke to tell all their stories. Every leadership story and lesson Luke tells is significant.

Luke focuses on some leaders and completely ignores others. Peter, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, and Paul receive a great deal of focus. There are another dozen or so who are mentioned, and we can only wonder about their bigger story. In every city, there are prominent women and men who are well-to-do and who open their homes, provide funds, and lead new churches.

There are apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, elders, shepherds, and benefactors—all used by God to advance the mission and build the Church. There are teams of leaders. They work together. Acts 12:25–13:3 describes one of these early leadership teams. The church of Antioch is loaded with talent and diversity. Barnabas is a Levite from Cyprus. Simeon is a black African. Lucius is from North Africa. Manaen is related to King Herod! And Saul is a former Pharisee with Greek-shaped insights from a city (Tarsus) renowned for its philosophy. What a team!

They are all Christlike leaders, Spirit-filled leaders, Church-forming leaders, wise in the Word of God and strong in prayer leaders, and always, missional leaders. They are also human. They make mistakes. Parts of their personality are still rough and prone to error. They can disagree and have falling outs. That is what happens to two of the greatest leaders in the closing paragraph of Acts 15.

Life together with others is beautiful and difficult. We are all still broken. We are finite, frail, and foolish. Leaders are in the same situation. They simply have more responsibility and there are more repercussions when they fall short.

In this challenging and disruptive season of our times, your prayers for the leadership team of Living Word (staff, board, and ministry partners) is vital. Please pray often for us as we build the church and advance the mission of Jesus.



DAY  
4

Acts 20

Acts 20 has three sections, with Paul’s farewell to the leaders of the Ephesian churches being the longest section.

Acts shows us a thoroughly religious world. All of life was religious. Every aspect of life was shaped by religion. There was no separation of religion and social or political life; they were enmeshed. It is also a pre-Christian world. While Christianity was rapidly spreading and growing, it was still a small religious minority. It was also an “at risk” religious minority.

The Greek and Roman world was a world of polytheism or many gods. You know the names of these gods in both Greek and Latin: Jupiter-Zeus, Mars-Ares, Mercury-Apollo, etc. In Ephesus, Artemis was the “great goddess” (Acts 19:26-27). It was a time of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. “Powers” were everywhere. The gospel challenged all that (Acts 19:11-20).

It was also an exciting time of new philosophical traditions developing. Most of these philosophies were quite religious. The Stoics and Epicureans were two of the widespread philosophies (see Acts 17:16-34; Colossians 2:1-23).

To be a religion in the Roman Empire required official permission. The Jewish religion had Roman sanction and certain exemptions for their faith, so a Jew did not have to participate in many of the cultural events that involved religion and worship. For the Jew, that would be idolatry.

At first, the Christian movement was seen as a sect or sub-group within the Jewish faith. Therefore, Christians had some protection and room to worship Jesus and not participate in the daily cultural-religious ceremonies. As the tension between Jews and Christians grew, Jews and Greeks said, “They are not Jews and they have no official sanction. They are an illegal religion! And they are against Rome, Caesar, and our gods (Acts 18:12-17; 19:23-41).” This is the pre-Christian world where the Church lived! This may be the post-Christian world in which we live!

DAY  
5

Acts 21:1-14

In this part of Acts 21 the mission is over and Paul is headed to Jerusalem. Through the Holy Spirit he is warned of the dangers of going there. Some would think, “Wonderful, a word from God to keep Paul out of danger.” Paul has a better understanding of God’s will for him (see Acts 9:15-16; Philippians 1:12; Colossians 1:24). When you hear from God, careful interpretation and discernment is needed.

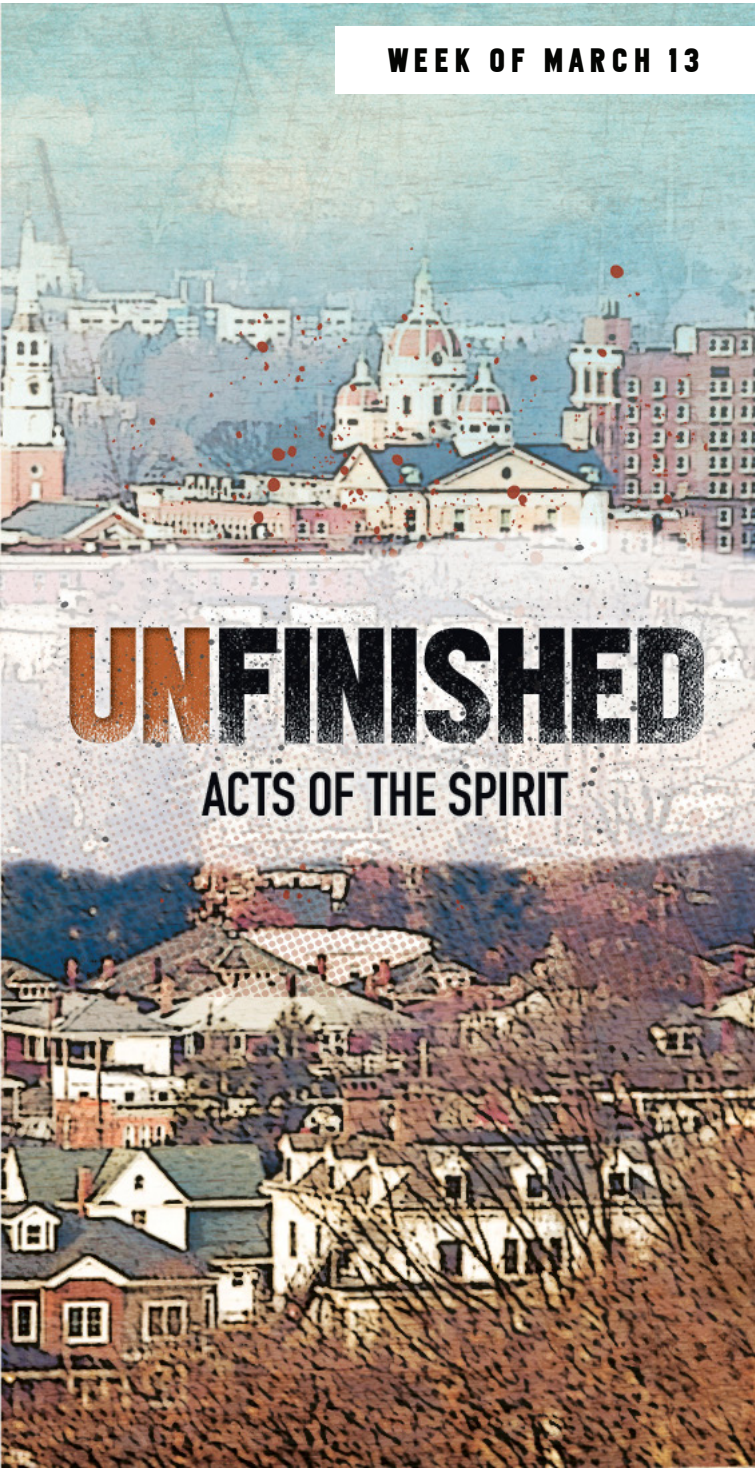
Pastor Paul loves the Church and Teacher Paul nurtures faith and builds the Church through his Jesus-centered teaching of the scriptures.

Paul was always on the move. Even if he stayed at a place for 2 or 3 years, he would move on. But the churches he had pastored remained dear to him. So, Pastor-Teacher Paul wrote letters to his Church. Over the years he would have written many letters. We have 13 of them. Four were to individuals and nine were to churches. Paul wrote to one church while working at another church. Here is a chart of Paul’s location in Acts, the approximate years, and the letters he wrote. The letters to Timothy and Titus were written after Acts.

Acts 14-15 From Antioch	AD 48-49	Galatians letter
Acts 17-18 From Corinth	AD 51-53	1 & 2 Thessalonians
Acts 18-19 From Ephesus From Macedonia	AD 54-55 AD 55-56	1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians
Acts 19-20 From Macedonia	AD 56-57	Romans letter
Acts 28 In Roman prison	AD 61-63	Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon

You will understand Acts and Paul’s letters when you see their connection.

WEEK OF MARCH 13





DAY  
1

# A Guide to This Week's Reading and Reflection

The Book of Acts covers a period of 33 years and the entire Mediterranean world. Acts 1:8 is the model Luke uses to create his missional history of the birth and growth of the Church. Acts 13 is the hinge chapter where the Gentile mission (to the ends of the earth) begins. Luke provides three main sections of that mission.

- Paul's first missionary journey: Acts 13-14 (from AD 45-46)
- The Jerusalem Council: Acts 15:1-35 (in AD 49 or 50)
- The second missionary journey: Acts 15:36-18:22 (AD 50-53)
- The third missionary journey: Acts 19:1-21:14 (AD 55-58)

Last week's devotional guide covered most of the second missionary journey. This week will conclude the second and cover the third journey. That journey concludes with Paul going to Jerusalem and his experience of being on trial for his faith.

This week's readings will not have explanations about the details of the chapters. As you read each chapter, discover what Luke continues to teach about the Word-Gospel, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Church on a Mission in the World.

The daily reflections are on Paul, his context, his ministry, and his heart for the Church.



DAY  
2

# Acts 18

As you read Acts 18 be sure to notice the introduction of important new people who will become leaders and teachers in the church. A wife and husband team of Priscilla and Aquilla, and then a Jew named Apollos who they train for ministry.

Paul had many roles. He was an apostle and missionary. While he always started with the Hellenistic Jews and the synagogue, he knew he was an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 13:47; Galatians 2:2, 8; Romans 15:16). He was a teacher and preacher, as well as an evangelist and disciple-maker. And Paul was a pastor-shepherd.

Paul's mission was to preach and teach, evangelize and disciple, AND start and grow the Church. The Church was the new community God was creating. The Church—made up of Jews and Greeks, slave and free, rich and poor, women and men—would be the people of God from all nations.

Paul loved the Church of Jesus and Paul would do anything for the sake of the Church. That meant Paul would suffer greatly for the Church. You can read how much he suffered in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33. As you read Acts, you will see the story of some of those times of suffering.

Because he loved the Church, Paul had great concern for the health and maturity of the church (see 2 Corinthians 11:28-29).

Paul was a spiritual father and mother for the Church (Thessalonians 2:7-11). Some of his churches were a source of great joy, like the church in Thessalonica. Other churches were a source of great heartache, like the church in Corinth.

Acts 19 shows how powerful and fruitful Paul's ministry was in Ephesus. Acts 20 describes the deep affection and love Paul and that church had for each other. As you work through Acts this week, see the heart and ministry of Pastor Paul. Pray that the same love and affection would be strong at our church.

DAY  
3

# Acts 19

Acts 19 shows the fruit of Paul's ministry as God does great things through him. There is amazing victory over spiritual evil and a great confrontation with the local religious culture.

There is a strategic question in every chapter of Acts. How does the gospel and Church relate to the world? In Acts, there are four worlds that interact. Paul lives in each of those worlds.

First, there is the Jewish world. Paul is Jewish. He is rooted in the teaching of the Old Testament. Paul has deep insight into the scriptures and religious ways of his faith. He lives diligently according to that way (see Philippians 3:4-6).

Second, there is the Hellenistic world, or Greek culture, that is the dominant culture of the Mediterranean region. Paul grew up as a Hellenistic Jew, in the city of Tarsus. Tarsus was a city known for its Greek philosophical schools. Paul knew the language, culture, customs, religions, and philosophies of that world.

Third, there is the Roman world. That world is an Empire. Through war and conquest, Rome now ruled one of the greatest empires of history. The legal system of Rome was everywhere. Peace was enforced by Roman armies. Regions were governed by Roman officials. Everyone paid taxes. And Rome required everyone to worship Caesar and to worship Rome itself. The Jewish religion was an official religion in the Roman Empire and had some protection and freedom to follow their own religion. Still, Rome required obedience, conformity, loyalty, and worship. To say "Jesus is Lord" is spiritual and political!

Finally, there is the Christian world where Jesus is Lord. That world was the new communities that would be known as the Church. People from all social groups became Christians and joined churches. How would the Church relate to the other three worlds in which they lived? Sometimes it became explosive, as Acts 19 shows. Sometimes it feels explosive for us today! How will we live in a world like that?



DAY  
4

## Acts 22:30-23:22

### Phase Three

The Roman commander knows this problem is outside his area of expertise. The commander summons a meeting of the Sanhedrin (the same group that persecuted Peter and John in the early chapters of Acts).



Paul goes on the offensive, then he backtracks, and finally he stirs up an internal debate to get the focus off his mission to the Gentiles and on to an in-house debate on theology. The tactic works and one part of the leadership sides with Paul. Now they have a violent dispute between the various Jewish groups. The commander intervenes again, to protect Paul.

The Sanhedrin devise a plot to kill Paul. The plot is discovered, and the commander acts to protect Paul, since Paul is a Roman

citizen with all the rights and protection of the Roman armies to guard their citizens.

Paul will be bold at times. Other times he will be careful. He is strategic and tactical in how he does ministry. He has long years of painful experience in dealing with crowds of all types.

While facing his enemies, Paul can be harmless as a dove and as shrewd as a snake (Matthew 10:16).

Read Philippians 1:12-30 to see how Paul lives and carries on his mission in the face of opposition and danger.

This mindset will be necessary for our post-Christian times.

DAY  
5

## Acts 23:23-24:27

### Phase Four

The Roman commander realizes this severe problem is not only outside his expertise, it is above his pay grade. He does the sensible thing and “kicks the problem upstairs” to someone with more authority.

In case you didn’t already realize how serious this problem is and how volatile the situation is, look at the size guard the commander gathers to escort Paul to Caesarea to meet with Governor Felix (vv. 23-24).

The governor is the highest Roman authority from outside a region appointed to rule a region. Pontius Pilate, who ordered Jesus crucified, was a governor.

This is the first major trial. Luke records a good amount of detail that shows how attuned he was to the legalities and the procedures. Notice the charge against Paul in 24:5-9. There is a good deal of misinformation and slander.

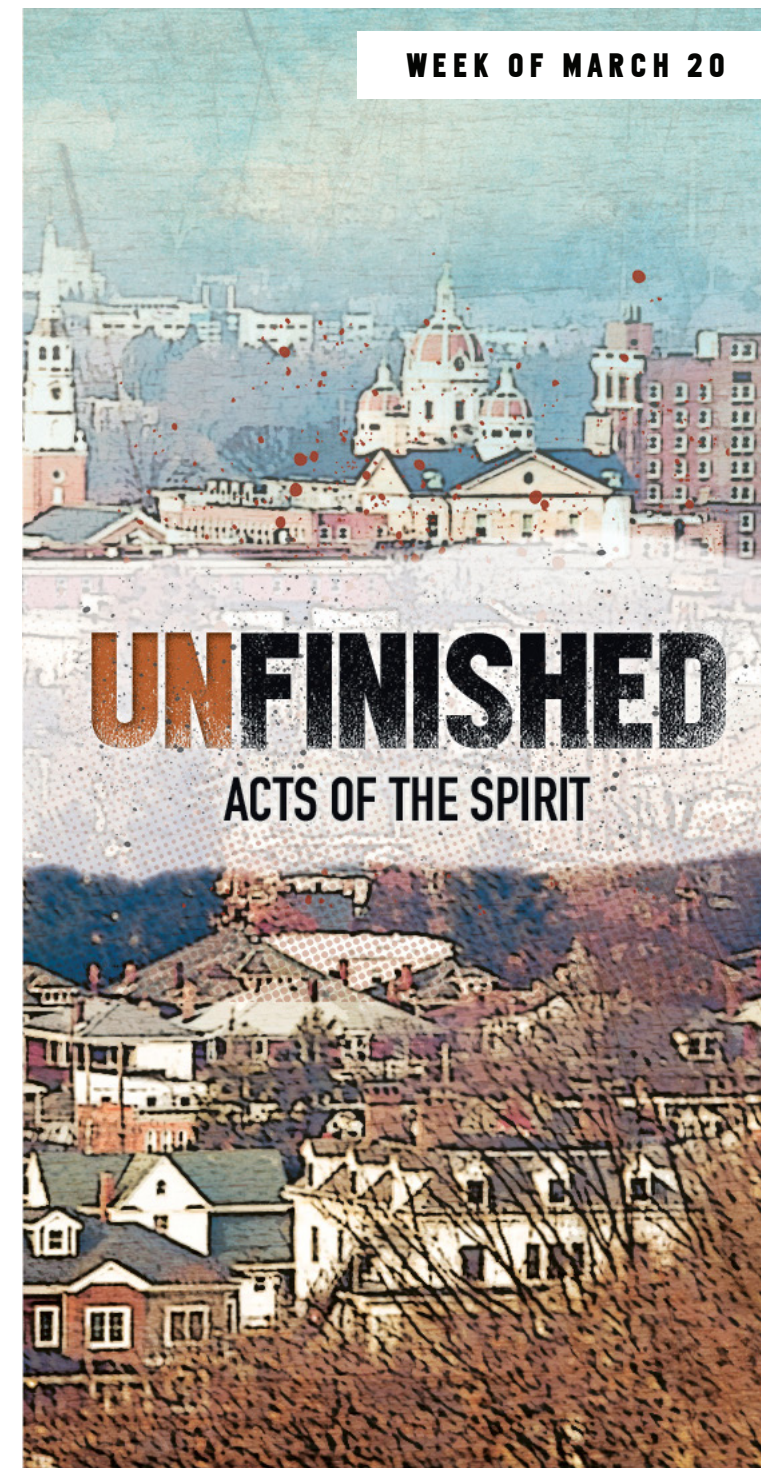
Now Governor Felix speaks and is favorably disposed toward Paul. He is so favorable that, for a bribe, he would have let Paul go. Meanwhile, Paul is given some freedom and time with friends.

Things stall out and for TWO YEARS Paul is in a mild kind of protective custody, limited but safe. Paul has conversations with the governor. Verses 24-25 show the great evangelist, pastor, and teacher at work. Paul is witnessing to the “kings of the earth” and their representatives.

In a pre-Christian world with totalitarian rulers, Paul (and Peter) had a very respectful and careful relationship with the political authorities. They both counseled their churches to do the same. Read Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:11-17 to see their advice.

Living in a democracy gives Christians in the United States an unparalleled opportunity to interact with political powers. Even so, we must do so with a respectful and responsible attitude.

WEEK OF MARCH 20



**DAY  
1**

## A Guide to This Week's Reading and Reflection

You are in Week 7 of your devotional work through the Book of Acts. So far you have covered 20 chapters and about 27 years of time! You have moved from Jerusalem through Judea, past Samaria and through the entire Mediterranean world. For the last few weeks, you have followed Paul on his three missionary trips to preach about Jesus and advance the Church.

Acts 1-7 focused on Jerusalem and lasted about 1 ½ years.

Acts 21-26 will focus on Jerusalem again and last about 1 ½ years! The time is AD 58-59 for these chapters.

Luke is a historian with a purpose. Acts 1:8 is the map of his purpose unfolding through the Book of Acts. The Gospel of Jesus goes to the ends of the earth, and that will mean Rome itself, the great capital of the massive Empire of Rome.

Acts 9:15 is a core verse for Luke as well. Paul is the chosen instrument for God to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. And Paul will proclaim the name of Jesus to the people of Israel and to kings of the earth. That is what happens in Acts 21-28.

This week you will work through Acts 21-24. Once Paul arrives in Jerusalem, there are six or seven phases of witness, each phase before an increasingly prominent and powerful ruler. This week you will explore the first four phases of Paul's witness. In some ways, the final chapters are a summary of all that Paul experienced and taught since his conversion. Twice he will recall his Damascus Road experience of salvation and transformation (Acts 9). You will also see a strong Christ-centered message.

There will be some explanation of the events taking place. Pay close attention to how Paul describes Jesus and his mission on behalf of Christ.

The daily reflections will provide core teachings from the letters of Paul about how to be missional in a challenging world.

**DAY  
2**

## Acts 21:15-36 Phase One

Notice that James and the elders of the Church in Jerusalem know that Paul's visit is going to be "dicey, tricky, problematic, rough going..." And they come up with a plan to placate the Jews and soften their reaction.

The first phase was to gently enter the charged atmosphere, gain some credibility, and find common ground for Paul to be in Jerusalem. It does not work.

Notice that many of the Jews who are upset are believers in Christ who have been misinformed about what Paul believes. The misinformation revolves around issues of Jewish identity—circumcision, the Law of Moses, and how much of the Jewish customs and practices the Church needs to observe. These are obviously issues of great sensitivity. Be sure to notice the intense energy and emotions of this scene. It is a violent crowd.

Galatians was the earliest letter of Paul dealing with many of these issues. Read Galatians 2 to see how Paul dealt with these issues then and how he will continue to deal with them in the trials that are ahead of him. Grace is a dominant word in this passage.

Christ is the one who justifies us, by grace through faith. We now live in Christ and Christ lives in us.

**DAY  
3**

## Acts 21:37-22:29 Phase Two

The crowd is about to kill Paul when a Roman commander of troops intervenes and saves Paul. Paul is arrested and bound (guilty until proven innocent). A pre-trial or hearing takes place to find out if there is a real case to be tried.

Paul clarifies who he is and that he is NOT a terrorist. Paul walks through his credentials as a Pharisee and then his conversion on the Damascus Road. He talks about Jesus quite clearly and with no opposition up through Acts 22:20. At verse 21 he describes God sending him to the Gentiles and that is when the crowd begins to riot once more.

Notice the issue is not about Jesus. It is about Gentiles finding Jesus and being incorporated into the people of God! It is about Gentile Christians not following specific religious practices a good Jew would practice.

The commander orders Paul to be flogged and interrogated. That is when Paul plays his trump card and announces he is a natural born Roman citizen. That is an impressive status and that changes everything. As a citizen, Paul is protected by Roman law.

Extremism is always bad. Religious extremism is among the worst of its kind. That is on display in this section of Acts. Apparently, as the years have gone by, anti-Gentile fervor has become very intense. There is no reasoning with extremists—then or today.

Read Romans 15:5-22 to see how Paul advanced the good news of Jesus to the Gentile world.



DAY  
4

## Acts 28:11-31

Acts chapter one opened with Jesus teaching about the kingdom of God for 40 days. It finishes with Paul talking about the kingdom of God for 2 years. The irony is that Paul talks about the Lord Jesus in the power center of the Roman Empire. Paul does this while protected by Rome, as he awaits his trial before Caesar.

Rome was the city that received his great letter, Romans. In that letter, Paul builds a profound biblically grounded case that God is not yet done with the Jewish people. In Jerusalem, Paul had to deal with Jews who didn't want Gentiles included in God's plan for the nations. In Rome, Paul has to make sure the Gentiles know they have not replaced Israel. God is creating a new people out of both groups.

As is his pattern, Paul reasons with the Jews in the synagogue who have some interest and openness to him, while others will not believe. As the Jews debate, Paul speaks words of judgment against any who have hard hearts and reminds them that God loves the Gentiles as well.

Luke has accomplished his purpose. Acts 1:8 has been realized. First Jerusalem, then Judea, next Samaria, and then on to the ends of the earth. Rome, so distant from Jerusalem, represents the ends of the earth. By the way, Paul knows the land continues westward and north. He wants to go still further. But for Luke, the mission is accomplished.

Do you remember the six main themes of the Book of Acts? We need to add one more theme—the Kingdom of God.

The **CHURCH** of **JESUS** is empowered by the **SPIRIT** of God, shaped by the **WORD** of God, and sent by God on a **MISSION** to the **WORLD** that is loved by God, so the **KINGDOM OF GOD** may come on earth as it is in heaven.

This is what every church of Jesus must be committed to. This is what every follower of Jesus must be a part of.

DAY  
5

## After Acts: Unfinished and Unstoppable

You started your devotional study and reading 2 months ago. You have worked your way through one of the major books of the New Testament. We hope you understand this book better than ever.

The Church has had powerful obstacles and enemies, but they could not stop the mission of God to redeem the world.

The Church has had amazing leadership, but by themselves, these men and women are not the reason the Church has grown. The Church has grown because it is the Church. The Church is the people of God who love Jesus, study the Word, are full of the Spirit, and engage the World.

A growing church grows because of the PEOPLE in the church.

Living Word is the church we are because of people like you. Your love for Jesus, your commitment to Living Word, your own life of prayer and study, your own desire to make a difference in our community, your generosity, and so much more are the reasons why Living Word is the church it is.

The work is still unfinished! In the 21st century, especially in western culture, the Church is struggling. Other places in the world, the Church is growing like crazy. In our place and time, it is much harder.

But God is the same God. The Word is the same Word. The Spirit is the same Spirit. The Mission is the same Mission, even when we have to find new creative ways to “do mission.” The Church is just as central to the plans of God as ever. Leaders are still needed. A faithful people are needed even more.

God's plan is still unstoppable. Like every chapter in Acts, we must trust in God, remain faithful, and be willing to carry our cross while living in the hope of the resurrection.

Jesus is **STILL** the **LORD JESUS CHRIST**. To him be the glory forever and ever.

WEEK OF MARCH 27

