

Acts 29 – Week 5 – A Gentile Letter – Bible Study Helps

Title: A Gentile Letter: God's Expanding Plan in Acts

Sermon Summary: This sermon explores the pivotal transition in the early church from a primarily Jewish focus to the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan of salvation. It examines the challenges faced by the apostles and early believers as they grappled with questions of doctrine, tradition, and the extent of the Gospel. The sermon emphasizes God's sovereign plan in expanding His message to all nations, the importance of faith over works for salvation, and the ongoing mission of believers to spread the Gospel despite opposition and internal conflicts.

Key Points:

- The transition from Jewish to Gentile ministry in the early church
- The importance of faith alone for salvation, without the need for Jewish law
- The role of signs and wonders for unbelieving Jews only in confirming the Gospel transition
- The Jerusalem Church's decision regarding Gentile believers
- The reality of conflicts and disagreements among church leaders and Christians
- The ongoing mission of believers to spread the Gospel in all circumstances

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 14-15

Stories:

- Paul and Barnabas' missionary journey and the healing of the crippled man in Lystra
- The dispute between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark
- Experiences with church planting and leadership conflicts
- The story of Charlie Kirk facing opposition for speaking about faith

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Discipleship and small group guide based on the sermon transcription:

Small Group Guide: Acts 14-15 - God's Expanding Mission

Opening Prayer

Key Takeaways:

1. God is transitioning His focus from Jews to Gentiles in the early church.
2. The apostles faced opposition but persevered in preaching the gospel.
3. The Jerusalem Church addressed the question of Gentile inclusion without requiring Jewish law observance.
4. Church leaders and Christians can have conflicts, but God can use these for His purposes.

Discussion Questions:

1. What stands out to you most from the events in Acts 14-15? Why?
2. How did Paul and Barnabas respond to persecution in the cities they visited? What can we learn from their example?
3. Discuss the significance of the Jerusalem Church's decision regarding Gentile believers. How might this have impacted the spread of the gospel?
4. The sermon mentions that signs and wonders were primarily for unbelieving Jews. How does this help us understand their purpose in the early church?
5. What can we learn from the conflict between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark? How might God use disagreements among believers today?
6. The sermon compared the missionary journeys to our daily lives. In what ways can we view our regular activities as "missionary journeys"?

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Practical Applications:

1. Identify one place in your daily routine where you can intentionally share the gospel this week (e.g., workplace, gym, grocery store).
2. Reflect on a time when you faced opposition for your faith. How did you respond? How might you respond differently in the future based on what we've learned?
3. Consider someone you've had a disagreement with recently. How might God be working through that situation for His purposes?
4. Commit to praying daily this week for missionaries and the spread of the gospel worldwide.

Closing Prayer

Encourage group members to read Acts 16-17 for the next meeting to continue following Paul's missionary journeys.

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Discipleship Questions

How does the conflict between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark reflect real-life challenges in ministry, and what lessons can we draw from how they handled their disagreement?

In what ways do we see the transition from a primarily Jewish-focused ministry to a Gentile-inclusive one throughout Acts, and how might this shift apply to modern evangelism efforts?

How does the Jerusalem Church's decision regarding Gentile believers demonstrate the balance between grace and guidance in the early church, and how can we apply this principle today?

What can we learn from Paul's resilience after being stoned and left for dead in Lystra, and how might this inspire our own perseverance in the face of opposition?

How does the concept of 'missionary journeys' translate to our daily lives and interactions, and what practical steps can we take to be more intentional in sharing our faith?

In what ways do we see the Holy Spirit guiding and directing the early church's decisions and movements, and how can we cultivate similar sensitivity to the Spirit's leading?

How does the account of the Gentiles' conversion and acceptance challenge our own preconceptions about who 'belongs' in the church, and how might it inform our approach to inclusivity?

What can we learn from the early church's method of confirming and encouraging new believers, and how might we adapt these practices for our current context?

How does the dispute over circumcision and keeping the law reflect ongoing tensions between tradition and new revelation, and how do we navigate similar issues in the church today?

In what ways does the spreading of the gospel despite persecution demonstrate God's sovereignty, and how might this encourage us in our own evangelistic efforts?

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A 5-day Bible reading plan and devotional guide

Day 1: God's Plan for the Gentiles

Reading: Acts 10:34-48

Devotional: As we read about Peter's encounter with Cornelius, we see God's heart for all people. Just as the early church had to wrestle with the inclusion of Gentiles, we too must examine our hearts for any prejudices or barriers we've erected. God's love knows no bounds of ethnicity, social status, or background. Reflect on how you can be more inclusive in your faith journey and in sharing God's love with others. How can you break down walls and build bridges in your community?

Day 2: Perseverance in the Face of Opposition

Reading: Acts 14:19-23

Devotional: Paul's stoning at Lystra and his subsequent resilience demonstrate the power of faith in the midst of suffering. Despite facing intense persecution, Paul continued his mission, even returning to the very city where he was attacked. This unwavering commitment challenges us to examine our own response to adversity. When we face opposition or setbacks in our spiritual walk, do we retreat or press forward? Ask God for the strength to persevere, knowing that our trials can deepen our faith and inspire others.

Day 3: Unity in Diversity

Reading: Acts 15:1-21

Devotional: The Jerusalem Church tackled a crucial issue of doctrine and practice, highlighting the importance of unity amidst diversity. As believers, we may encounter differences in opinions and preferences, but our core faith in Christ should unite us. Reflect on how you handle disagreements within the body of Christ. Are you quick to judge or eager to find common ground? Pray for wisdom to discern essential truths while extending grace in matters of conscience, fostering a spirit of unity in your local church and beyond.

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Day 4: God's Guidance in Ministry

Reading: Acts 15:36-41

Devotional: The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark reveals that even great leaders can have conflicts. Yet, God used this separation to expand His ministry, with both teams continuing to spread the Gospel. This reminds us that God's plans often unfold in unexpected ways. When facing decisions or conflicts in your own life and ministry, seek God's guidance earnestly. Trust that He can work through our human limitations and even our disagreements to accomplish His purposes. How can you remain open to God's direction, even when it differs from your initial plans?

Day 5: The Power of God's Word

Reading: Acts 17:10-12

Devotional: The Bereans' example of eagerly receiving the word and examining the Scriptures daily is a powerful model for us. In a world full of conflicting messages, we must ground ourselves in God's truth. Make a commitment to daily Bible study, not just reading, but truly searching the Scriptures. As you do, ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate God's Word, revealing its relevance to your life. How can you cultivate a Berean-like attitude, combining eagerness to learn with diligent study? Consider starting a Bible study journal to record your insights and questions.