

Lesson 9 | November 1, 2020

The Kingdom Advances

Study Text: Acts 1:4–8; 2:1–4,36–41; 4:9–13; 7:54 through 8:8; 10:9–23,34–44; 16:6–15; 18:1–11; 19:1–10; 28:16, 23–24,28–31

Central Truth: The Church grows through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Key Verse: Acts 9:31

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied (KJV).

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Explore the expansion of the Church, and how this expansion relates to the Acts 1:8 mandate.
- Embrace the challenge to obey and follow Christ, as exemplified by the Early Church.
- Seek out opportunities to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and experience His power to be witnesses.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: While the plan of God for redeeming the world was accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus, His relationship with most of the world was still broken. In order to come into right relationship with God, individuals must know about Jesus and accept Him as Savior. When He ascended, He left eleven leaders in a congregation of 120 on earth to pursue this seemingly daunting endeavor.

Opening Activity—A Job That’s Too Big

Ask: What tasks have you ever found to be much too big for you to tackle alone, and you found yourself needing to call someone to help you? Give students a few minutes to share their answers.

Say: Before His ascension, Jesus charged His followers with the call to spread the gospel to the world. Such an endeavor would have been too large for such a small group to do on their own. Besides that, they were still fearful of the people who had crucified their Master. But Jesus promised the power of the Holy Spirit to pursue this calling. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Book of Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus, tells the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and traces the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. As we move forward in examining the beginning of the Church, we find that the great story of the Bible continued to unfold. **Today, we continue to live the story of the expansion of the Church as we deliver the good news of Jesus to people around the world. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit continues to empower believers to do just that.**

Part 1—Believers Empowered To Witness The Spirit Is Promised and Received

Acts 1:4–8; 2:1–4

[Act 1:4-8 KJV] 4 And, being assembled together with [them], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, [saith he], ye have heard of me. 5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. 6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

[Act 2:1-4, 36-41 KJV] 1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Say: Just as the Messiah's coming had been accomplished according to the detailed plan of God, so **the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was neither haphazard nor unplanned.** Even before His crucifixion, Jesus had told His disciples about the soon-coming Advocate (NIV) or Comforter (KJV). *Read John 16:7–11 aloud.* (Share your highlights from the following text.)

[Jhn 16:7-11 KJV] 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. 8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 Of sin, because they believe not on me; 10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

During the forty days between His resurrection and ascension, Jesus taught the disciples about the kingdom of God and told them to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Luke 24:49). He assured them that this promise would be realized in a few days (Acts 1:4–8).

The disciples believed the outpouring of the Spirit would be linked to the soon restoration of Israel. However, **Jesus reminded them that times and dates are set by the Father and could not be known by them** (verse 7). This led naturally into an explanation of the purpose for the Holy Spirit among them (verse 8). Jesus had already instructed them to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. Here, Jesus was further telling them that **after they received this power, they would be witnesses for Him from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.**

The promise for which the disciples were waiting was realized on the Day of Pentecost, a festival occurring on the fiftieth day after the Passover (Acts 2:1–4). It was one of three annual pilgrimage festivals in Israel—the other two being Passover and Tabernacles. It was associated with the giving of the Law at Sinai, and was a time for remembering and recommitting to the covenant God made with Israel.

On this day, Jerusalem was filled with pious pilgrims, and God poured out the Holy Spirit upon the waiting disciples. **It is important to note that all three manifestations occurring that day—the sound of wind, a visual presence of fire, and Spirit-enabled speech—were indicative of the presence of God in the Old Testament (e.g., Ezekiel 37:9–14; Exodus 3:2–5; Numbers 11:24–29).** Holy Spirit baptism, clearly affirmed by speaking in languages unknown by the speaker, empowered believers for the task of being witnesses of the Christ to the world.

Discuss

? Why might it have been significant that Jerusalem was filled with Jewish pilgrims on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit came??

? What signs gave evidence of God's presence on that Day of Pentecost?

Believers Are Emboldened

Acts 2:36–41; 4:9–13

[Act 2:36-41 KJV] 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. **37** Now when they heard [this], they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men [and] brethren, what shall we do? **38** Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. **39** For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, [even] as many as the Lord our God shall call. **40** And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. **41** Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added [unto them] about three thousand souls.

[Act 4:9-13 KJV] 9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; **10** Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, [even] by him doth this man stand here before you whole. **11** This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. **12** Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. **13** Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

Say: Just before His ascension, Jesus asserted that the Holy Spirit would empower His disciples to be His witnesses throughout the world. (Read or have a student read Acts 1:8 aloud.) **[Act 1:8 KJV] 8** But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Remember that immediately following Jesus' resurrection, the disciples had been hiding in fear of their lives. The power they demonstrated after receiving the Holy Spirit, then, gave strong evidence to show that Jesus is the Son of God and that God's promises are sure. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The empowering of the disciples to be witnesses was immediately implemented as Peter preached to the assembled crowd about the central figure in God's plan for the redemption of the world: Jesus Christ (Acts 2:36–41). As Peter completed his sermon, he boldly asserted that what had occurred—the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—testified that Jesus is Lord and Messiah (Christ).

Such a bold declaration caused the hearers to be convicted of their sins; verse 37 referred to it as being “cut to the heart” (NIV). This was an idiom that emphasized a deep reaction to Peter's message. The answer to such conviction was to “repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (verse 38, NIV). Water Baptism would be the visual sign of the sincerity of their repentance.

Repentance would then be followed by the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (verse 38), which had been received earlier that day by the followers of Jesus. The gift of the Spirit was for all who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ—those present on that day, their descendants, those far off (both geographically and ethnically), indeed, all whom God would call (verse 39). The bold, Spirit-empowered preaching of Peter resulted in the conversion of about 3,000 people.

Later, Peter and John attended the regular time of prayer at the temple and encountered a lame man who was healed in the name of Jesus (see Acts 3). Soon the number of men who believed the message grew to about 5,000 (4:4). The Jewish religious leaders took the apostles aside for interrogation, attempting to determine the power, or name, used in the healing. Luke noted that **Peter, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” answered with boldness and clarity (Acts 4:8, NIV)**. This special enablement of power flowed from the experience on the Day of Pentecost. The promise of the Spirit’s assistance when questioned by authorities, as well as the Spirit’s empowerment to witness, were exemplified in Peter’s response (see also Luke 21:12–15).

The leaders saw that Peter and John presented the truth of the gospel without equivocation (Acts 4:9–13). This caused them great astonishment because Peter and John had not been trained to their level of rabbinical theological discourse. As such, it was a great testimony to the Sanhedrin of the reality of the message they heard.

Resource Packet Item 1: The Day of Pentecost

Distribute the work sheet and assign the Scriptures to individuals or small groups, giving them a few minutes to read the passage and answer the questions. Then, as a class, discuss the final question on the sheet..

Discuss

? Jesus told His early followers that they needed the empowerment that came through baptism in the Holy Spirit. How important is it that followers of Jesus today be empowered by the Holy Spirit? Explain.

? What situations in your life call for the boldness exemplified by Peter and John in Acts 4?

Part 2—Persecuted and Growing The Church Is Scattered To Grow

Acts 7:54 through 8:8

[Act 7:54-60 KJV] 54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with [their] teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one

accord, 58 And cast [him] out of the city, and stoned [him]: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon [God], and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

[Act 8:1-8 KJV] 1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen [to his burial], and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed [them] to prison. 4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. 5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed [with them]: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.

Say: Just as trials in our personal lives can help us grow in our spiritual lives, so opposition and persecution in the Church resulted in growth. Even today, in many of the countries where the Church is experiencing great persecution, the Church is also growing rapidly. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Early Church in Jerusalem endured persecution almost from the beginning. Peter and John were commanded to no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus (see Acts 4:18). Later, the apostles were arrested, beaten, and ordered to no longer speak in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:40). **However, the persecutions served to accelerate the growth of the Church (e.g., Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:1).**

Acts 6–7 records an outbreak of persecution that caused the martyrdom of Stephen, which propelled the Church out from Jerusalem to Samaria. Stephen, one of the men placed in charge of the distribution of food to Hellenistic and Hebraic widows following a dispute (6:1–6), engaged in a great ministry among the people. He was brought before the religious leaders on the false charges of speaking against Moses, the temple, the Law, and God. In response, Stephen recounted Israel's history, noting the rebellious nature of the people. He then accused those present of having Christ crucified. This resulted in Stephen being stoned (7:54–57).

The recounting of the stoning of Stephen introduces us to Saul (who became Paul) and showed him to be a chief persecutor of the Early Church (Acts 7:58; 8:1–4), driving believers outward from Jerusalem, preaching the Word wherever they went (Acts 8:4). At this point the focus falls upon Philip, another of those chosen to oversee the distribution of food in the Jerusalem church. Philip's evangelistic ministry impacted

Samaria with the gospel, confirmed with powerful signs and wonders and resulting in great joy (verses 5–8).

The Samaritan population was the product of a policy of the Assyrians, who conquered the Northern Kingdom (Israel). They replaced much of the Jewish population with foreigners, who were despised by the Jews. The Samaritans had built a competing temple on Mt. Gerizim and reinterpreted the Law. But the gospel spread into this region with great success as the Church was scattered by persecution. (Play the video for Lesson 9, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.)

Discuss

? How should we respond to opposition? How can we help fellow believers in parts of the world

where persecution is very harsh?

? How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we obey the call to share the

gospel with those around us?

God Includes the Gentiles in the Church

Acts 10:9–23,34–44

[Act 10:9-23, 34-44 KJV] 9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: 10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15 And the voice [spake] unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, [that] call not thou common. 16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. 17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. 19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. 21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what [is] the cause wherefore ye are come? 22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. 23 Then called he them in, and lodged [them]. And on the morrow Peter

went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. ... 34 Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. 36 The word which [God] sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) 37 That word, [I say], ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: 40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; 41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, [even] to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God [to be] the Judge of quick and dead. 43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. 44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

Say: From the very beginning, the plan of God had been to make redemption available to everyone. While He chose the family of Abraham to be the ancestors of the Messiah, the good news of the gospel was not limited to the Jews, and the growth of the Early Church overcame the long-held prejudices of the culture around them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

From Samaria, the gospel continued its spread to the cities and nations of the Gentiles—a people-group considered by the Jews to be unclean. They had strict rules regarding contact with Gentiles. **Going into the house of a Gentile, especially to share a meal, was considered inappropriate. To break down such barriers, God gave Peter a vision. Peter had ministered in Lydda, a city about twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem, and in Joppa, a major port for Israel on the Mediterranean, where he was staying in the home of Simon the Tanner. News of Peter’s miraculous ministry spread through the region and many believed on Jesus (see Acts 9:35).**

North of Joppa sat Caesarea, a city named in honor of Caesar Augustus, and the product of the engineering and building prowess of Herod the Great. The city’s harbor had been deepened, a protective barrier against prevailing winds had been built, along with an amphitheater and temple, and the city had become the provincial capital. To protect all of this, a regiment of Roman soldiers was garrisoned there. It was commanded by Cornelius, a centurion. Centurions were officers in the Roman army who had proven their skill and risen through the ranks. Cornelius was a pious man, marked by generosity, devotion, and prayer. His search for God was rewarded by a vision of an angel who instructed him to send for Peter at Joppa, which he did immediately (see Acts 10:1–8).

God prepared Peter to accept the invitation through a thrice-repeated vision of a sheet filled with clean and unclean animals, a voice commanding him to eat, and a clear affirmation that what God declared clean was clean (Acts 10:9–23). Peter accepted the word from God, so he invited the Gentile emissaries from Cornelius into the house as his guests, then journeyed with them the next day to Caesarea. His sermon to the friends and relatives of Cornelius emphasized four key points: **God is not a respecter of persons, Jesus proclaimed peace with God in the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had been crucified and resurrected, and Jesus had commanded His followers to preach the message that He was the Judge of all humans (Acts 10:34–44).** Peter concluded that belief in Jesus' name was required for the forgiveness of sins. Then the Holy Spirit was poured out on those at Cornelius's house, signaling God's inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church.

Resource Packet Item 2: Church Growth: God's Way

Distribute the work sheet and have a different student look up each passage and read it aloud noting the way Jesus prepared His disciples for the experience of the Early Church. Then discuss the application questions.

Discuss

? What are some people groups we might be inclined to neglect in the preaching of the gospel?

? How can we overcome any tendency to favor one group of people over another?

Part 3—Into All the World

Paul Follows the Spirit's Leading

Acts 16:9–10; 18:1,9–11

[Act 16:6-15 KJV] 6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, 7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. 8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. 10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. 11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next [day] to Neapolis; 12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, [and] a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. 13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted [thither]. 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard [us]: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought [us], saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide [there]. And she constrained us.

[Act 18:1-11 KJV] 1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; 2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. 3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. 5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews [that] Jesus [was] Christ. 6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook [his] raiment, and said unto them, Your blood [be] upon your own heads; I [am] clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. 7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain [man's] house, named Justus, [one] that worshipped God,

whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. 9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. 11 And he continued [there] a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Say: The apostle Paul was committed to following the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, he became a major figure in the continuing expansion of the gospel message. As he and his traveling party traveled, opposition and persecution often came, even from those to whom he preached. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 1:8 describes the model for the growth of the Early Church: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles were evangelized by Spirit-empowered followers of Christ. The mission to the “ends of the earth” began as Paul and Barnabas embarked on a great missionary journey. The Spirit was active, guiding and empowering for miraculous signs and wonders. As Paul set out on a second missionary journey (Acts 15), this time with Silas, he received a word from the Spirit about the direction of the journey (Acts 16:9–10).

After moving westward across Galatia and Phrygia in Asia (what is today the region of Turkey), and being prevented by the Spirit from preaching in that region, Paul received the vision of a Macedonian man inviting him to go there. Paul and Silas obeyed this clear direction from the Spirit, and the gospel was heard in new territory. Great success, though not without opposition and rejection, was seen in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens.

The Spirit-empowered spread of the gospel culminated on this journey at Corinth, a major metropolitan and trading center of the ancient world. Despite the opposition there, Paul ministered for a year and a half because the Lord had banished his fear. Paul knew that the Lord was at work in Corinth (Acts 18:1,9–11).

Discuss

? How can we become more sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit?

? How should we react when the Lord closes the door to an opportunity for ministry that seemed good to us?

The Message Moves Forward

Acts 19:1–6; 28:28–31

[Act 19:1-10 KJV] 1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, 2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. 3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5 When they heard [this], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. 7 And all the men were about twelve. 8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. 9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. 10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

[Act 28:16, 23-24, 28-31 KJV] 16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. ... 23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into [his] lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and [out of] the prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. ... 28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and [that] they will hear it. 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. 30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Say: The plan of God continued to move forward to the ends of the earth throughout the Book of Acts—and on into our world today. God is still moving to bring redemption to the lost. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

During his third missionary journey (beginning in Acts 18), Paul met twelve men at Ephesus who participated in John the Baptist's baptism of repentance (19:1–6). Paul taught them that the next step in their walk with God was the baptism in the Holy Spirit—which they received as he laid his hands on them. Paul continued to share the gospel at Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece, Troas, and back to Jerusalem. After his arrest, assassination plot, imprisonment at Caesarea, and a perilous sea-journey, Paul took the gospel to the “ends of the earth” for that day: Rome (Acts 28:28–31). Though a prisoner there, Paul was allowed to live in a rented house, where he continued to proclaim the

gospel. Acts ends with Paul in Rome, teaching about Jesus (verse 31). This open-ended conclusion to Acts reminds us that the story was not—and is not—finished..

Resource Packet Item 3: Journeys of Paul

Distribute the map to your class as a take-home resource. Suggest that they note the cities and regions from the lesson and find them on the map..

Discuss

? What are some challenges confronting the spread of the gospel today, both in your community and around the world?

? How is God calling you to take part in spreading the gospel in your world?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Opposition and persecution can lead to growth, both in our churches and individually, but we must remain sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We cannot, in ourselves, take the gospel to the ends of the earth. But through the Holy Spirit, we can take part in that great mission.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray for God to give you direction on how you can help lead others into His kingdom.
- Be alert to look for “divine appointments,” those times when God puts someone in your path to whom you can minister.
- Ask your pastor what you can do to contribute to the growth of your church.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

A Holy People.

Deuteronomy 26:16–19

Tuesday:

God Strengthens His People.

Psalms 68:32–35

Wednesday:

Power To Evangelize Gentiles.

Isaiah 49:1–7

Thursday:

Jesus Promises Power To Witness.

Luke 24:44–49

Friday:

Jesus Promises New Worship.

John 4:19–24

Saturday:

Many Samaritans Believe.

John 4:39–42