

# Lesson 8 | July 24, 2022

## The Evangelizing Church

**Study Text:** Acts 11:19 through 12:25

**Central Truth:** The gospel is for all people everywhere.

**Key Verse: Acts 11:18**

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (KJV).

When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. They said, “We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life” (NLT).

### Learning Objectives

- Students will learn how Gentiles came to faith in Christ through the witness of Jewish believers.
- Students will share God’s desire to reach every people group for Christ.
- Students should be encouraged to seek God for opportunities to cross cultural boundaries with the gospel.

## Introducing the Lesson

**Say:** The story of the Early Church is marked by names that every Christian recognizes—like Peter, James, John, and Paul. However, many more who are not named in Acts did great things for God, whether crossing cultural boundaries with the message of Jesus Christ, praying for a brother facing possible execution for his faith, or helping fellow believers through financial difficulties. *(V Play the video available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](http://RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult).)*

### Opening Activity—Crossing the Street

*Ask: Do you remember learning to cross the street? Do you remember who taught you? What were some of the instructions they gave you?*

**Say:** Each of us must learn to cross the street for our own protection and safety. Crossing cultural “streets” or boundaries is something we must learn for the sake of others who need the gospel but are different from us culturally. God will help us cross over to others with the love and truth of Jesus Christ. God’s act of calling His people to share the gospel worldwide went hand in hand with His promise of power. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would enable us to reach the ends of the earth—every people group—with His message.  
(Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Book of Acts begins with Jesus' command for His followers—at first, all Jews—to tell the world about Him. Major themes include the extension of the gospel to non-Jewish people and the relationship of Gentile and Jewish Christians. Today's study begins with Jewish believers, scattered by persecution, sharing their faith with Gentiles. They discovered that God's promise of power was the same for every believer, not only the apostles.

## **Part 1—Evangelizing Both Jews and Gentiles Empowered by God's Hand**

Acts 11:19–21

**[Act 11:19-21 KJV] 19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. 20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.**

**Say:** Persecution did not stop the witness of the church at Jerusalem. Persecution multiplied their witness by moving them out from the city and into other fields ripe for harvest (see John 4:35). Some of the Jerusalem believers would, as Peter did, reach out with the gospel to non-Jews and experience God's power in doing so. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

**Acts 8:4 states that the believers driven from Jerusalem by persecution preached Christ “wherever they went” (NLT). Luke then focused on Philip and his witness to Samaria. After recording Saul's conversion and Peter's ministry to Cornelius, Luke returned to the witness of those scattered, who had made it all the way to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch (11:19). The capital of Syria, Antioch would be the starting point for all three of Paul's missionary journeys.**

**The scattered believers spoke at first only to Jews. Many of these witnesses, although Jews, had been born and had spent their lives outside of Israel and been exposed to other peoples and cultures. Afterward they had been part of the church at Jerusalem, having accepted the gospel. This lifetime of preparation readied them for the next step: on arrival at Antioch, they crossed the same barrier Peter had crossed earlier and began telling Gentiles about Jesus Christ (verse 20).**

### **Resource Packet Item 1: Circles for Witnessing**

Distribute the work sheet and allow time to fill in the circles. Stop and pray that God would help each class member take the first step this week to share Christ with someone in one of their circles.

God was pleased with this outreach; “the hand of the Lord” was with the believers in their ministry (verse 21, KJV). **“The hand of the Lord” is a frequent biblical expression meaning God’s power or God’s Spirit, sometimes manifested in miracles (Ezra 7:6,8–9; Ezekiel 1:3; 3:21–28). God did not limit His power to the witness of the apostles in the Book of Acts (Acts 6:8; 8:6; 9:17–18); nor does He do so today (see John 14:12).** This display of God’s power in Antioch through ordinary disciples resulted in many committing their lives to Jesus Christ.

### ***Discuss***

? What barriers can you ask God to help you cross in your witness for Christ?

? How can the example of “ordinary” believers in Acts serve to encourage “ordinary” believers today?

? In what ways have you seen the hand of the Lord at work in your life?

## **Encouraged To Be Faithful**

Acts 11:22–26

**[Act 11:22-26 KJV] 22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. 23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. 24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. 25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: 26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.**

**Say:** When studying the Book of Acts, Christians most often focus on evangelism. However, those who respond in faith to the gospel require follow-up, teaching, and discipleship. God has given the Church people who are gifted in strengthening new converts toward a life of joy and usefulness in Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

**The news of fruitful evangelism in Antioch reached the church at Jerusalem. Barnabas—seen earlier in generous giving, and in helping Saul toward acceptance—was sent by the church to Antioch (Acts 11:22). He rejoiced on finding the large number of Gentiles who had recently accepted Christ (verse 23). Although we are not told the reason he was sent, Barnabas’s name, meaning “the**

**Son of Encouragement,” suggests that his fellow disciples knew he could, by the power of the Holy Spirit, help the new believers start strong in their life in Christ (verse 24). Even so, his ministry in Antioch only began with encouragement. It also resulted in a new surge of evangelism, with many more coming to Christ.**

#### **Resource Packet Item 1: Evidence for Joy**

Distribute the case study and have a volunteer read the story. Have students share their responses to the questions with the class. Ask if there are other concerns or obstacles that may get in the way of true rejoicing for others’ salvation.

**Barnabas, knowing that the many new disciples in Antioch would require teaching, went to Tarsus to locate Saul (verse 25). Saul had been commissioned by Christ to take the gospel to the Gentiles (9:15). He would thus spend an entire year with Barnabas teaching the Gentile converts in Antioch (11:26). This would serve as training for Saul’s Gentile missions, which began in Acts 13.**

Luke made note that Jesus’ followers were called “Christians” first in Antioch. This was likely an insult or pejorative coming at them from unbelievers. With time, however, “Christian” would become not a taunt, but a joyful designation that the children of God accepted for themselves (see 1 Peter 4:16).

#### ***Discuss***

? In what way can you encourage those who have recently accepted Christ as Savior?

? Why should the title “Christian” shape your behavior not only publicly but privately as well?

## **Part 2—Persecution and Deliverance**

### **James Martyred; Peter Spared**

Acts 12:1–11

**[Act 12:1-11 KJV] 1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth [his] hands to vex certain of the church. 2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 4 And when he had apprehended him, he put [him] in prison, and delivered [him] to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. 5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. 6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. 7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon [him],**

and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from [his] hands. 8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. 9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. 10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. 11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and [from] all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

**Say:** In writing the Book of Acts, Luke often recorded when the earliest Christians prayed. These were times of worship and times of pleading with God for specific needs, including rescue from the hands of unbelieving authorities. In answering their prayers, God demonstrated His power and advanced His kingdom. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

King Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, wanted to be seen as a devout Jew. He arrested some of the early disciples with the intention of mistreating them (Acts 12:1). One of those arrested—then executed by the sword—was the apostle James (verse 2). He and the apostle John, his brother, were two of Jesus’ earliest followers (Matthew 4:21–22). Called “Sons of Thunder” by Jesus for their forceful manner, they wanted to be elevated to important positions in Christ’s kingdom (Mark 3:17, NLT; 10:35–45). Jesus emphasized, however, that greatness came by service, and that James and John would join Him in the service of suffering.

Having pleased his Jewish subjects by the death of James, Herod followed up by arresting Peter during Passover week (Acts 12:3). Likely knowing about Peter’s previous escape from prison, he took no chances, placing him under the guard of four rotating squads of four soldiers each (verse 4; see 5:17–20).

The turning point of the account is Acts 12:5. Although Peter’s situation looked hopeless—especially in light of James’s martyrdom—the Church was praying “very earnestly” (NLT) or “without ceasing” (KJV) for him. The same Greek term refers to Jesus’ praying before His arrest and crucifixion (Luke 22:44).

On the eve of his trial, under heavy guard, Peter was awakened by an angel (Acts 12:6–7). Released from his bonds, Peter got dressed and followed the angel out of his cell (verses 8–9). As part of the miracle, neither the soldiers to whom he

was chained, nor those who stood guard outside his cell, were aware of his departure (verse 10).

Peter himself thought that his experience with the angel was a vision; only after the angel had led him into the city did he realize that he had, for the second time, been delivered from prison (verse 11). Those who celebrated the death of James would find that Peter had been rescued from the same destiny.

### *Discuss*

? Is it likely that the Church prayed for James, as they did for Peter? Why or why not?

? How can we remember to face our challenges—both great and small—by taking them before the Lord in prayer?

## **Rejoicing and Judgment**

Acts 12:12–23

[Act 12:12-23 KJV] 12 And when he had considered [the thing], he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. 14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. 15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. 16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened [the door], and saw him, they were astonished. 17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. 18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. 19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that [they] should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and [there] abode. 20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's [country]. 21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. 22 And the people gave a shout, [saying, It is] the voice of a god, and not of a

**man. 23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.**

**Say:** In the story of the Early Church, God performed both miracles of deliverance and miracles of judgment. Peter was rescued from jail twice and likely from death by the sword of Herod. **King Herod, however, would soon learn that God would not allow him to steal His glory for himself.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

**Peter went immediately to the home of Mary, whose son, John Mark, would later accompany Saul and Barnabas in ministry (Acts 12:12; see 13:4–5). The sister of Barnabas (see Colossians 4:10), Mary appears to have been wealthy; her house was large enough to be a meeting place for a number of believers. Further, the fact no mention is made of John Mark’s father suggests that Mary was a widow.**

**Peter’s knocking at the gate was answered by Rhoda, a servant girl (Acts 12:13). The fact she recognized Peter’s voice may indicate she was also a member of the church. Surprisingly, her joyful report was met by unbelief (verses 14–15). The disciples’ statement that Rhoda had seen Peter’s angel reflected a popular Jewish belief that each person had a guardian angel that could become visible, resembling the individual.**

**When finally admitted into the home, Peter testified of his rescue (verses 16–17). Although performed through an angel, Peter gave God the glory for his rescue. He wanted this experience to bolster the faith of the entire church and told those assembled to relate the good news to others.**

**Herod, his persecutor, had the prison guards executed for their perceived failure to hold Peter (verses 18–19). Afterward, Herod went to Caesarea. There, representatives of Tyre and Sidon sought him out to promote peaceful relations (verse 20). Although Herod was angry with these cities, there is no indication that they were at war with him. However, their large population and limited land made it necessary for Tyre and Sidon to secure food from outside.**

**On the day he met with them, Herod put on a garment that historian Josephus reported was made of silver, and reflected the sunlight in a striking manner (verse 21). His listeners responded to his speech by calling his voice the voice of a god (verse 22). Herod, although desiring to be seen as a devout Jew, ignored the truth that God will not share His glory with anyone else (Isaiah 42:8). God’s judgment on Herod was instant and complete (Acts 12:23).**

### ***Discuss***

? Mary opened her home as a meeting place for the church. What resources do you have that God can use in the work of the ministry?

? Compare Peter, glorifying God, to Herod, who readily accepted glory for himself. What happened to each?

## **Part 3—Gentile Believers Help Jewish Believers Prophesied Famine**

Acts 11:27–28

**[Act 11:27-28 KJV] 27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. 28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.**

**Say:** At times, God makes future events known to His people. He does this so they may be prepared and not taken by surprise when they occur. In this case, a prophet made a prediction that enabled one part of the church to provide loving assistance to another. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

During the year that Barnabas and Saul spent teaching the new believers in Antioch, prophets who arrived from Jerusalem joined them (Acts 11:27). **The term “prophet” throughout Scripture is used for individuals who spoke for God. Their purpose was to declare what God had revealed to them, whether regarding the future or His truth regarding the present. Prophets, along with others who equip and build up the Church, have been given to the body of Christ by Christ himself (see Ephesians 4:11–13). Prophecy itself is a spiritual gift to be exercised for the benefit of the Church as God’s Spirit empowers (see Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:7–11).**

[Eph 4:11-13 KJV] 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

**A prophet named Agabus, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foretold that a sweeping famine would affect the entire Roman world (Acts 11:28). Luke, the author of Acts, noted that this prophecy was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius Caesar (ad 41–54). The historian Josephus recorded that Judea suffered a famine during the reign of Claudius in which many died.**

### ***Discuss***

? How can a church make room for the ministry of prophecy, whether by prophets or by others in the body of Christ?

? Read 1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 John 4:1. Why is it vital to test prophecies?



## **Relief Provided**

Acts 11:29–30; 12:24–25

**[Act 11:29-30 KJV] 29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: 30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.**

**[Act 12:24-25 KJV] 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled [their] ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.**

**Say:** The Gentile Christians at Antioch had received the gospel—a spiritual blessing—from Jewish Christians who had traveled there from Jerusalem. It was fitting, then, that they would be eager to help them with an offering—a material blessing—in a time of great need. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

**The believers in Antioch took little time in their response to the message delivered through Agabus. The record of their giving, “every man according to his ability” (Acts 11:29, KJV), illustrates an important principle taught by Jesus himself. In comparing the giving of the rich to the giving of a poor widow—as observed one day by Him and His disciples—Jesus said that the widow had given more than all of the rich together (Luke 21:1–4). In the same way, God sees the giving of each believer and is alone qualified to judge the level of sacrifice each has made for Him.**

**Acts 11:30 records that the Christians of Antioch relayed their gifts to their fellow believers by sending them with Barnabas and Saul to the elders of the church in Jerusalem. The involvement of mature Christian leadership in this act of benevolence helped ensure the integrity of their ministry of giving (see 2 Corinthians 8:20–21).**

### **Resource Packet Item 3: Principles for Giving**

Distribute the information sheet and allow students time to read. Ask how these biblical principles should affect believers’ attitudes as they give, and how they free us from a performance mentality to one of joyful service in giving to the Lord and others.

**Luke recorded that after the death of Herod—who failed to give God the glory when others called his voice “the voice of a god, not of a man” (Acts 12:22)—the word of the true God “continued to spread, and there were many new believers” (verse 24, NLT). The love of God spread as well, displayed in the generous giving of the Christians in Antioch toward those in Judea. Having delivered the gift**

**entrusted to them, Saul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, with Barnabas's nephew, John Mark (verse 25).**

### ***Discuss***

? If God alone can judge the level of your giving, how should knowing that affect how you give?

? What can happen if money is handled in a church in a way that lacks purity and integrity?

? How can believers and churches helping one another materially serve as a witness to the world?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** Believers who want to grow deep in their faith in Christ cannot ignore His mandate to share the saving message of His life, death, and resurrection with the entire world. Each person who has accepted Christ was reached by someone who obeyed Jesus' command to reach every creature for Him (see Mark 16:15). At times this involves moving beyond culture—and even prejudice—to reach others unlike us. Believers must face the reasons they avoid extending the love and truth of Jesus Christ across cultural boundaries, and ask God to help them move beyond these obstacles for Him. Those who yield to God in this way will find that the One who empowers them will work with them for the gospel every step of the way.

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Examine your heart for discomfort around others that may indicate poor attitudes or prejudices and trust God to help you overcome them.
- Pray that God would empower you to witness to whomever you encounter in your daily life this week.
- Look for opportunities to cross cultural boundaries with the love and truth of Jesus Christ.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

### **Monday:**

All Nations Blessed Through Abraham.  
Genesis 12:1–3

**[Gen 12:1-3 KJV] 1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.**

### **Tuesday:**

The Messiah, Savior of Gentiles.  
Isaiah 42:1–7

**[Isa 42:1-7 KJV] 1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, [in whom] my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. 2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. 3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. 4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law. 5 Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: 6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; 7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, [and] them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.**

**Wednesday:**

Jonah, Evangelist to Gentiles.  
Jonah 3:1–10

**[Jon 3:1-10 KJV] 1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, 2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. 3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. 4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. 5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. 6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered [him] with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused [it] to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that [is] in their hands. 9 Who can tell [if] God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? 10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did [it] not.**

**Thursday:**

Teaching All Nations.  
Matthew 28:16–20

**[Mat 28:16-20 KJV] 16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17 And when they saw him,**

they worshipped him: but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen.

**Friday:**

Gentiles Justified by Faith.  
Galatians 3:6–9

**[Gal 3:6-9 KJV] 6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. 7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, [saying], In thee shall all nations be blessed. 9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.**

**Saturday:**

Gentiles in God's Family.  
Ephesians 2:11–20

**[Eph 2:11-20 KJV] 11 Wherefore remember, that ye [being] in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [between us]; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace; 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: 17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner [stone];**