



Luke-Acts

Vol. 9

Luke-Acts Study Guide Volume 9

Introduction

From December 2019 through November 2020 we will be working our way through the 52 chapters of the Gospel of Luke and Books of Acts. Since I cannot cover all of the material in my sermons on Sundays, this study guide is designed to help you get the most of our Luke-Acts series. This study guide will be published every four to six weeks throughout the series.

Each week includes the reading for that week, some commentary from me, some questions for reflection and discussion, and some family activities. The study guide is primarily intended for individual and family use, but can be adapted for small groups.

I encourage you to complete these readings prior to each Sunday morning in order to help you prepare for each week's sermon. I look forward to all of you joining me on this journey through Luke-Acts.

Week 36: Leading up to Sunday, August 2

Weekly Reading: Acts 11

Acts 11:1-18 Peter Explains His Actions

The first half of Acts chapter 11 is Peter defending his actions with Cornelius in chapter 10. When the other Apostles heard Peter had visited a Gentile, they were upset. I have pointed out in several places where the Gospel crosses religious and racial barriers.

This was always a stretch for the first Jewish believers. They saw themselves as religiously superior. They were God's chosen people. They had the Law. They were moral and the Gentiles were not.

However, another part of the Jewish identity at this time was their identity as an oppressed people, politically oppressed by the Roman Empire. So, this Centurion, this Roman officer, was not just a religiously inferior Gentile, but also an oppressive Roman, which made it even worse.

They demanded Peter explain his actions in going to visit this man and baptizing him. Peter tells them about the vision he had about the unclean animals and how God taught him not to call anything unclean that God has made clean. Then he told them about his visit to Cornelius and how he had believed and was baptized. Verse 18 tells us, "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.'"

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. Can you think of a time when you or someone you know was questioned for reaching out to a "certain kind" of person?

Acts 11:19-30 The Church in Antioch

Next we see that people who had been scattered from Jerusalem due to the persecution had started a church in Antioch, among the Gentiles. The leadership in Jerusalem decided to send Barnabas to check it out.

When Barnabas arrived he saw the great things that were going on and encouraged them. Barnabas then went to Tarsus to get Saul and bring him back to Antioch where they both began to preach the gospel and spent an entire year there.

A prophet in the church in Antioch, named Agabus, predicted that there would be a severe famine. At that time, the church in Jerusalem was very poor because of the persecution, so the church and Antioch decided to take up a collection for the church in Jerusalem and send it with Barnabas and Saul.

Even though the church was growing, it was still very much connected and under the authority of the Apostles in Jerusalem. The church in Antioch was started not by “clergy” but by regular believers. Barnabas was sent to act as clergy and organize the church more fully. But the church in Antioch never saw itself either as spiritually, administratively, or financially independent of the church in Jerusalem.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. The enemy tries to destroy the church through persecution but, as we see here, all persecution did was scatter the believers and spread the faith. Can you think of another time when the faith was spread by believers being scattered?
2. Oftentimes new churches have an independent streak. How can churches continue to be creative and energetic and yet remain connected in the Body of Christ?

Week 36 Family Activities:

Red & Yellow, Black & White: Place a handful of M&Ms on a plate (try to have all the different colors represented). Ask the kids what is on the inside of each M&M. Suggest you might need to cut some open to test out their suggestion. Once you've cut some open (or all), talk about how they all look different on the outside, but they are all the same on the inside. Connect that to people, some people might have different color skin on the outside, but our hearts are all the same and we all deserve the promise of life with Jesus. It's like in the story of Peter trying to convince the other Jews that the Gentiles deserved Jesus' love just as much as they did, even if they weren't exactly the same.

Our Job: You will need plate, milk, food coloring, dish soap, Q tip. Pour some milk on the plate. This represents the world, waiting for the Good News. We (even children) have been called to share the good news of Christ. Squirt a few drops of many different colors of food coloring, spread out. Use a Q tip to represent Christians. We start to spread the Good News. Start in 1 color and spread it to the next, and then the next, mixing them slightly, but it's hard to get all the white (world) colorful and get the news to spread far. Then dip one end of the Q tip in the dish soap. The dish soap is the power of the Holy Spirit. We aren't called to spread the Good News alone; the Holy Spirit will help us. Put the Q tip with dish soap in the middle of the plate. The colors will begin to mix and move on their own. The work we do alone is nothing compared to the work we do with the Holy Spirit. The church in Antioch became very strong and led many to Christ because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the work they did with it.

Week 37: Leading up to Sunday, August 9

Weekly Reading: Acts 12

Acts 12:1-24 Peter is Arrested and Escapes

We now turn our attention back to Jerusalem and the continued persecution there. King Herod was arresting believers and putting them in prison. He even executed James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, one of the original Twelve Apostles.

When Herod saw the people approved of this, he also had Peter arrested and put in prison. However, the night before Peter was to go on trial, an angel appeared to him in the prison and helped him escape.

After Peter escaped, he went to the house where the believers were having a prayer meeting to pray for his release. When he knocked on the door, a servant, Rhoda, answered, but she was so excited she slammed the door on him. She told everybody that Peter was outside. At first, they did not believe her, but eventually, after he kept knocking, they let him in. He told them the story of how the angel set him free.

Immediately, Peter then left town. The next morning, when Peter was not found, Herod had the guards executed.

After this, Herod went to visit Caesarea. While he was there, he gave a speech the people liked so much they said his voice was like the voice of God. Herod should have stopped right there and deflected that kind of praise, but he did not. As a result, the text says, "An angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died."

Questions for Reflection/Discussion;

1. One of the things that I find amusing about the story of Rhoda is

that, even though the people were meeting to pray for Peter's release, they seem stunned that Peter actually got released. When we pray are we really expecting God to answer? Are we ready?

Week 37 Family Activities:

God Answers: Play a game of Marco Polo. One person in the family will stand in the center and say "Marco". The rest in the group will respond with "Polo". Play as many rounds as you would like. When you are done, compare it to God answering your prayers. Just like in the game, whenever someone said, "Marco", others always responded, "Polo". Whenever we pray to God, he always answers us, even if it's not as quickly as we want or in the way we want. When Peter was in jail, the believers were going to pray for his release. When he was actually released, they didn't believe it. Always believe that God is listening to and answering your prayers!

Give God Credit: Play the ending scene of a favorite movie and let the credits roll (or watch the whole movie!). Instead of turning the movie off, let the names scroll and ask why those names are there. Those are the people who helped create the movie, costumes, music, etc. We don't see them doing the work in the movie, but they still deserve the credit. It can feel really good when you get credit for something you do. If you drew, painted, or created a beautiful picture, would you want someone else to say they made it? An author and illustrator always get their names on the books they write and create too. King Herod got praised for sounding like the voice of God. He really liked the praise and forgot to give the real credit to God. We need to remember when we get a compliment or accomplish something to always thank God too. It's because of him that we are able to do the great things we do! What things could you give God credit for helping you be able to do?

Week 38: Leading up to Sunday, August 16

Weekly Reading: Acts 13

Acts 12:25-13:12 Paul and Barnabas

In chapter 13, Paul and Barnabas begin what comes to be known as Paul's first missionary journey. (In Acts 13:9 Saul's name officially changed to Paul.) At the very beginning of this story, in fact, it is actually the very last verse of chapter 12, Barnabas and Saul had finished their trip taking the collection to Jerusalem and have returned to Antioch.

When they returned to Antioch, they were commissioned and ordained as missionaries and sent to Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea. While on Cypress, the proconsul, the Roman governor of the area, invited

them to speak to him. However, a Jewish sorcerer, named Elymas, who served the proconsul, opposed them. Paul rebuked Elymas and he was struck blind. This sign impressed the proconsul so much that he became a believer.

From Paphos, on Cyprus, Paul and his companions went to Perga in the region of Pamphylia. When they arrived there, they went to the synagogue and began teaching the Jews about Jesus.

Many Jews and God-fearers believed, but as the crowd began to grow, the Jewish leaders became jealous and began to contradict Paul. The persecution continued and eventually Paul and those with him were expelled from the city. So they shook their dust off their feet, just as Jesus said in Matthew 10:14, and left for Iconium.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. How can you know when you should keep trying to talk to someone or help someone and when it is time to “shake the dust off your feet?”

Week 38 Family Activities:

Formed By God: Ask your child(ren) if they know God has a special plan for their life? Give them a piece of play dough or create your own from scratch from many of the online recipes available. See if they can form something they think God might have planned for them (a job, where they will live, a family they may have, etc.). Just like the play dough, God continually molds us. The plans we think God might have for us can and often will change over time. Paul and Barnabas were missionaries, which means they answered God’s call to go where He led them and worked to bring Christ to others. They allowed God to form their path and their mission. In the process, through them, many lives were molded into the plan God had for them.

Week 39: Leading up to Sunday, August 23

Weekly Reading: Acts 14

Acts 14:1-28 Paul and Barnabas Continued

In Acts chapter 14, Paul moves on to Lystra, where he heals a man who was lame, repeating the pattern we have seen elsewhere in Acts of miracle, sermon, and response. However, the initial response of the people in Lystra was not what Paul and Barnabas would have expected.

The people thought Paul and Barnabas were incarnations of the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes and they were getting ready to sacrifice to them. When they realized what was going on, Paul and Barnabas put a stop to it. Contrast this with the way King Herod responded to being called a god in Acts chapter 12.

Apparently, there were some Jewish leaders who were following

Paul and Barnabas, from city to city, starting persecution. In fact, Paul ended up being stoned, but when the people left, Paul got Barnabas and went back into town.

The next day, he and Barnabas went to Derbe. After preaching the gospel there, they returned back to the towns they had visited before. Verse 23 says Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them and each Church. Paul and Barnabas were not content with just preaching the gospel and making converts. They actually wanted to organize churches with proper structures that were sustainable and could continue in the ministry. Finally, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and reported back to the church that had sent them about their successful mission.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. Can you think of a time when a leader, like Herod in chapter 12, and unlike Paul and Baranbas, did not deflect undue praise and attention? What was the result?
2. Some people read the growth of the church of Acts as an unorganized free-for-all. Based on what we have read so far, especially Acts 14:23, do you think that is true? Why or why not?

Week 39 Family Activity:

Stronger Together: Have several pieces of paper. Give someone one sheet of paper and ask them to rip it. Was it hard? Give them 2 pieces of paper and ask them to rip them. Was it as easy as one? Give them several sheets of paper and ask them to rip all of them at the same time? Could they do it? Paul and Barnabus were working hard to bring people to Jesus, but they didn't want to quit after giving that message. They wanted to be sure the churches were strong. When we work alone, things can be hard, but just like 1 sheet of paper is weak, many sheets of paper are strong. We want to surround ourselves with a big church family because we make each other strong. When someone is having a hard time, someone else can build them up and vice versa. God wants us to be in a community with other believers because it helps us to be stronger.

Week 40: Leading up to Sunday, August 30

Weekly Reading: Acts 15

Acts 15:1-35 The Council of Jerusalem

In Acts chapter 15 another conflict emerges in the church and, you guessed it, the conflict has to do with the racial and religious divide between

Jews and Gentiles. Some false teachers came from Jerusalem to Antioch and began to teach the believers there that they basically had to become Jewish. They had to be circumcised and observe all the Jewish Law in order to be Christians.

This is very upsetting to the church and Antioch, because Paul and Barnabas had been teaching them just the opposite. So, the church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to figure this out. When they got there, all of the Apostles and elders and all the leaders of the church gathered together in what is now known as the Council of Jerusalem.

Throughout history, the Church has solved complex theological disagreements in councils. You may have heard of the Council of Nicea, where the Nicene Creed was written. You may have also heard about the Council of Trent, which was held by the Roman Catholic Church in the aftermath of the Reformation. You also may have heard of Vatican II, the most recent Council of the Roman Catholic Church, which took place in the 1960s.

The Council of Jerusalem decided that no, the Gentile Christians did not have to observe the Jewish ceremonial laws. In fact, beyond putting their faith in Jesus for salvation, the Council determined that all the Gentile Christians would be required to do would be: abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from eating blood.

All of the sexual regulations of the Old Testament are kept in place for New Testament believers, that makes sense to us. Also, it is obvious enough to us why Christians would not eat meat sacrificed to pagan idols. However, this issue about strangled animals and blood is a bit difficult for us to understand. We know that strangulation is a horribly inhumane way to slaughter an animal and we know that consuming bloody, undercooked meat could be bad for our health, but beyond that, there is something else at play here.

In Deuteronomy 12:23-24, it says, “But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat. You must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water.” In the Jewish mind, the blood was sacred. Blood was for sacrifice. Blood belonged to God. We see that symbolized for us in the Lord's Supper. So, all the blood had to be drained from a food animal and you could not do that if the animal had been strangled.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. While we are not required to keep all of the Jewish ceremonial law as Christians, what are the moral laws that we are still required to obey?

Acts 15:36-41 Paul and Barnabas Separate

Chapter 15 picks up as Paul and Barnabas are about to go back out

for their second missionary journey. Barnabas wants to take his cousin, John Mark, the man who would eventually write the Gospel of Mark, with them. Paul, however, does not want to take Mark because the last time they took him, he got homesick and returned home.

They disagreed so much about this that, eventually, Paul and Barnabas parted company. Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus. Meanwhile, Paul took Silas with him and went through Syria.

There is no doubt that this conflict was unfortunate and distressing for all parties at the time. However, it did work out for the best in that there were now two missions, rather than just one, and the gospel spread even further.

If we look back to church history, we can see the same thing being played out again and again as churches and denominations separate for one reason or another. It is difficult at the time but, looking back, we see that the ministry was able to grow even more.

By the way, Paul and Mark eventually made up. In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul tells Timothy to bring Mark with him when he comes to meet him, because Paul said that Mark would be helpful in his ministry.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. Can you think of a time (or maybe you can research one) when a separation in the church resulted in overall growth?

Week 40 Family Activities

A Path Made Clear: Blindfold a member of your family. Then tell them to complete a task (brush their teeth, get a glass of water, go get the mail, etc.). Once they have tried ask them what would have made it easier for them to complete the task you gave them. (Not having the blindfold) God gives us instructions for how to live our lives. When we ignore them, it's like wearing a blindfold. It can get us in a lot of trouble! God gives us the Bible to give us important instructions about how to live our life. We need to read it and follow what it says, not turn a blind eye.

Link Up: Make some paper chain links. Put one person in the family's name on the link. Then, using the last letter of that name, think of someone else the family knows with a name that starts with that letter (ex: if the name was Mark, a new name might be Katie). Continue until you have a good size chain. Even though Paul and Barnabus split up, they continued to share the message of salvation to others. One person at a time, people were saved and also linked together in God's family. We can do the same thing, like with the names in our chain. We can share the Good News with one person at a time and grow the chain of God's Kingdom.



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