

AUGUST 2014

TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE



I have made
you a light for
the Gentiles,
that you may
bring salvation
to the ends of
the earth.

Acts 13:47

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Mission through Church and Spirit

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TODAY IN THE Word

Notebook



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TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

Answering the Call



I have often heard it said that “Moody is missions.” Moody Bible Institute’s commitment to spreading the gospel to every nation has been central to our mission from the very beginning.

Just three years following the school’s founding in 1886, 130 former Moody students were serving as foreign missionaries. That same year, D. L. Moody helped organize the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, which drew more than 250 students from 89 colleges with a zeal for missionary service. The first formal missionary courses at Moody Bible Institute were introduced in 1904. Students came to receive Bible, theology, and ministry training with the purpose of dedicating their lives to missionary service.

Today, Moody offers six missions majors. Our Moody faculty has a combined total of some 150 years of cross-cultural living experience. They have served in Korea, Sudan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Venezuela, South Africa, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Mexico, Austria, Germany, Nepal, Albania, Romania, Japan, Bolivia, and urban America. Students train to minister both in foreign countries and within the United States—we don’t need to travel far to engage in cross-cultural ministry.

I am honored to lead an organization that has taken Jesus at His word: to “be my witnesses . . . even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Written by Luke, the book of Acts has a prominent missionary theme because it details the rapid growth of the early church and the first missionary efforts. The book begins with the ascension of Jesus into heaven (Acts 1:10), quickly followed by the empowering of the church through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2).

The early church experienced dramatic growth but also attracted horrific persecution. Acts provides a record of the time between the Gospel narratives and the apostolic letters. During these years, under the leadership of Peter, Paul, and other Apostles, the church proclaimed the gospel across cultures, expanding its reach around the world. They took the message that had begun with the Jewish people and shared it with the Gentiles. Through Peter, the church spread from Judea to Galilee to Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Through Paul, the church extended from Antioch into Rome.

Despite imprisonment and bitter opposition to the followers of Jesus, the gospel became a holy fire that could not be quenched. And these heroic missionary efforts continue today. With each student who graduates from Moody and dedicates his or her life as a witness of the gospel, we continue this journey, answering the command of Jesus to go to “the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



The Spirit and the Church

The traditional title for the book of Acts is *The Acts of the Apostles* because of its focus on the ministries of Peter and Paul and the development of the early church. It could also have been titled *The Acts of Jesus Christ*, because it describes what Jesus continued to do and teach through the church after He was “taken up to heaven” (Acts 1:2). It might also have been called *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*, since it depicts the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the church and tells how He empowered the early followers of Christ in their ministry.

The importance of the Spirit’s ministry to the church is evident from Jesus’ command to His disciples that they remain in Jerusalem and wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). The Holy Spirit is the Father’s gift to the church. He is the church’s advocate and helper (John 14:16). The Spirit enables us to understand God’s truth and empowers us for service (John 16:13; 1 John 2:27; 1 Cor. 12:7–11).

The Holy Spirit’s ministry explains the remarkable community of the early church. The Holy Spirit joins believers to Christ and to one another (Eph. 4:3). As a result the

church has become “a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). We worship and serve God “by the Spirit” (Phil. 3:3). It is by His strength that we are enabled to overcome sin, obey God, and live as witnesses to Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:2–15; Acts 1:8).

Everything that is distinctive about the church can be traced to the presence of the Holy Spirit. In addition to this corporate dimension of His ministry, God’s Spirit also exercises a very personal ministry to the individual believer. The Holy Spirit provides believers with the assurance that they have been saved through Christ. He testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children (Rom. 8:16). He also prays to the Father on our behalf (Rom. 8:26–27). This is a great comfort to us in those moments when we find it difficult to pray.

The church is the house (or household) of God. It is the bride of Christ. It is the fellowship of saints and a community of believers. When the church gathers together for worship it becomes a temple. But more than anything else, it is a community of the Spirit.

For Further Study

To learn more about the ministry of the Spirit to the church, read *The Spirit and the Church* by John Owen (Banner of Truth).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Paul Currie

Life Together as the Church



Have you ever watched a behind-the-scenes documentary about how a movie was made? The book of Acts is kind of a “behind-the-scenes” look on how the church was formed. It is the historical retelling of the origins of the church. Even in the early church, fellow believers experienced challenges in their relationships with each other.

These pioneers of our faith struggled through the early growing pains of the dynamics of a community of believers and their functions as a body. They came to realize God’s will and chose to be part of this movement to tell others about Him. They desired to embody the gospel, and share this message with everyone around them. They truly came to see, as they experienced it, the transformative power of God’s love and they wanted to live their life as Jesus lived.

How do we know how Jesus lived? How do we know God’s will for our lives together? We have to study Scripture. Jesus said the greatest commandment was to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). At *Today in the Word* we want to continually point you to God’s Word and what He has to say to you.

As part of the church, we should also desire to follow the second commandment together that Jesus gave us: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). We can only

know how to love our neighbors—each other—by how Jesus modeled it for us in Scripture. In John 13:34–35, Jesus says, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

When we love one another as Christ loves us, we reflect Him. But loving one another in that manner can be difficult. No one can love with Christ’s perfect love, but it is His example of how to love that should be our goal. It is a constant striving to reflect His example of unconditional, sacrificial love for others. It is how we should live each day of our lives for God.

And we can only live our lives for God because of what Jesus did on the cross. God displayed His grace and mercy to us through His Son’s death and resurrection. In like manner, we—the church—need to offer grace and mercy to each other. When we do that today, we reflect Him to others and the redemptive power of His message.

I encourage you to study this month’s issue and find ways you can make the greatest commandment, the second greatest commandment, and the new commandment a daily part of your life. I’m certainly not perfect, and I don’t have it all figured out, but I’m so glad that I can look in God’s Word to continue to learn how to love Him and love others.

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TODAY IN THE Word

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

The Book of Acts: Mission through Church & Spirit

Americans love to grow things bigger. Our county fairs award prizes for the largest pumpkin and largest steer. We like both wide-open spaces and some of the tallest buildings in the world.

In a country where often "bigger is better," it's worthwhile to study in Scripture the means that God used to grow His church. As we'll see this month in our study of the book of Acts, He doesn't always use the people and methods that we might choose. The two most prominent spokesmen in the early days were rough Galilean fishermen just a few years earlier. And when key political leaders like Festus and Agrippa hear the gospel, they do not respond in faith.

But as we'll see, God doesn't depend on political leaders or comfortable circumstances for growth. His Spirit empowers ordinary people to spread an extraordinary gospel of salvation through Jesus. His Spirit enables people from slave girls to wealthy businesswomen to accept this message in faith. Through the power of the Spirit, the church of God grows from Jerusalem to Samaria to spread throughout the Roman Empire.

His Spirit is still at work today, strengthening and encouraging the church around the world. His Spirit inspired the very words that we'll study together this month. We appreciate your partnership as we share the message of the Word of God with readers around the world. Thank you for your support for the ministry of *Today in the Word*!

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Preparing for the Promised Spirit

Like many good historians of antiquity, Luke (the author of Acts) offered an important prologue explaining the subject of his work. The book of Acts is the second of a two-volume work, continuing the subject of the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:1–14). The book picks up with “all that Jesus began to do and to teach” (v. 1) until His ascension, and then Luke continued to narrate Christ’s ministry through His Spirit-empowered church.

That purpose for Christ’s church is made clear in verse 8 of our text today: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jesus ascended to heaven, promising to return. The Apostles were left with a clear command to be Christ’s “witnesses” throughout the world. That theme of Spirit-filled wit-

ness will be important throughout this month’s study; look for it!

Now commissioned by the Lord, the Apostles responded with obedience, faith, and preparation. Notice their obedience in returning to Jerusalem to wait, just as Christ commanded. See also their faith as they “joined together constantly” (v. 14) in anticipation of God’s Spirit. This was no solitary moment, but a continued perseverance together in prayer! Peter’s words demonstrated faith in seeing all these events as God’s fulfillment of His promises.

You will receive
power when the
Holy Spirit comes
on you; and
you will be
my witnesses.

Acts 1:8

And finally, observe their preparation as they sought to replace Judas with a twelfth apostle. The loss of Judas required a replacement before they were to proceed to be Christ’s witnesses to the world. Obedient, faithful and prepared, the Apostles waited.

Apply the Word

Today we begin our study of the book of Acts, and we have the opportunity to reflect on the Spirit’s work in our own lives as witnesses for Christ to the world. Pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to the ways God wants you to grow in obedience and faith as you respond to His call in your life.

Pray with Us

Sherman Jules, John Kim, Gina Lee, and Juan Lemus in the IT department lend their computer expertise to all the departments at Moody. We ask you to keep them in your prayers for the Lord’s guidance and help in all their work projects.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Pastor, evangelist, and prolific author John R. W. Stott once said: “As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead.” That truth is the heart of today’s passage.

As the disciples were gathered in prayer on the Jewish Festival of Pentecost, something remarkable happened. The sound of violent wind filled the house and the promised Spirit of God filled and empowered each of the disciples. Our passage today describes the effects of the Spirit’s coming.

The promise is
for you and your
children and for
all who are far
off—for all whom
the Lord our God
will call.

Acts 2:39

First, the coming of the Spirit resulted in powerful witness to the saving work of God. In a reversal of the Tower of Babel, the Spirit brought people of all languages together in order to hear the message of Christ. Empowered by the Spirit, Peter proclaimed the first Christian sermon, offering witness to the work of God in Christ and the Spirit.

In fact, the outpouring of the Spirit and the resurrection of Christ were fulfillments of God’s earlier promises. Both were central to God’s saving work for all humanity. The resurrection was the ultimate demonstration of Christ’s identity as Lord and Messiah, and the Spirit was now available for all who would respond to that message with faith. What a powerful and far-reaching testimony on the lips of the Spirit-filled Peter: “The promise is for you and your children and for *all* who are far off” (v. 39, emphasis added).

Second, the coming of the Spirit produced unifying fellowship. The message of Christ’s resurrection bore fruit in people’s lives as thousands responded to God’s call in Christ. That newly formed, Spirit-led community joined together for teaching, prayer, table fellowship, worship, and caring for one another’s needs. In short, the Spirit produced a true community of love and worship.

Apply the Word

The role of the Holy Spirit often gets ignored in our lives. Yet Scripture reminds us that the Spirit gave the early church its powerful witness and unity, and the promise of the Spirit is for *all* who turn to Christ. Ask God today for growth in your reliance on the Holy Spirit. Then look for ways to witness and love others in His power.

Pray with Us

The skills of our IT specialists are indispensable in our digital age. Please add Pepi Manieson, Diane Rogers, and John Saucedo to your prayer list and pray that the Lord would be pleased with their lives and with their work at Moody.

Preaching in the Temple

Mother Teresa once said, “Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.” Perhaps the lame man in today’s reading could relate. Left alone daily at the temple gate, he begged for help from unnoticing strangers. Then Peter and John came along, stopped to look at the man, and gave him the great gift of healing.

Notice that the physical healing was only a prelude to spiritual healing. The lame man leaped for joy and, on his newly strengthened ankles and legs, entered the temple with the Apostles, praising and glorifying God. Such a commotion soon attracted a large crowd, and Peter used that opportunity to proclaim the gospel to spiritually lame people as well.

Peter’s first point was that the power behind the lame man’s healing came from Christ. The One who had been betrayed, crucified, and raised from the dead was the One whose power now

raised the lame man to health. There is great victory and joy in Christ’s resurrection power. But there is also great conviction: Peter repeatedly emphasized the people’s rejection of Jesus. The “Holy and Righteous One” came, and they enacted great evil upon Him. The “author of life”

arrived, and they put Him to death (vv. 14–15). The preaching of the gospel begins with bad news; spiritual healing starts with conviction of sin.

With the people’s guilt laid before them, Peter then proclaimed an even more powerful truth—the offer of forgiveness!

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (v. 19). Jesus was the promised Messiah; all that was happening then was a fulfillment of God’s plans. Now was the time to turn to God for healing, life, and restoration!

Repent, then, and
turn to God, so
that your sins may
be wiped out, that
times of refreshing
may come from
the Lord.

Acts 3:19

Apply the Word

Today’s offer of forgiveness by turning to God also came with a warning: refuse Christ and “be completely cut off from [God’s] people” (v. 23). A choice about Christ is a choice between life and death. If you have never turned to Christ in repentance for your sin and given your life to Him, make today that day! Choose life.

Pray with Us

Today your prayers will be an encouragement for Frank Leber, vice president of Information Technology at Moody, as he oversees the implementation and development of Moody’s computer network and databases.

Early Opposition

A wise man once said, “Your character is determined not only by what you do, but how you respond to what is done to you.” Sometimes our response provides the most powerful testimony to the kind of person we are.

Look at the responses we see in today’s reading. First, there was the response of the Sanhedrin. Confronted with a miraculous healing and a powerful proclamation about Jesus, the Jewish leadership arrested Peter and John and threw them into prison. Despite all the evidence before them, they refused to believe in the saving power of the resurrected Christ. More than that, they stubbornly refused to yield to God’s work through the Apostles. Their response showed them to be hardened to the Spirit of God.

Peter and John’s response was also illuminating. Despite the harsh treatment they received, they spoke to the Sanhedrin with boldness and truth. Jesus,

whom the religious leaders had crucified but whom God had raised from the dead, was the very means of God’s salvation—and no one else! When challenged and told to stop their continued preaching, the Apostles stood firm: “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges!” (v. 19). Even after being set free, they returned to the other believers and immediately prayed to God for continued strength for boldness in word and deed. Their response showed their faith in Christ and His power.

Finally, we see God’s character through His response to the believers’ prayers. He sent His Spirit to empower them to preach the resurrection of Christ. And with “God’s grace powerfully at work in them all” (v. 33), the body of Christ continued to grow in love and service to one another. God’s response showed His continued presence and provision for His people.

God’s grace was
so powerfully
at work in them
all that there were
no needy persons
among them.

Acts 4:33–34

Apply the Word

How might you respond to the apparent needs in the body of Christ? Look for ways this week to care for others. Visit an elderly shut-in or sick patient in the hospital. Call that person who just experienced a loss. Or provide something tangible for a family struggling in unemployment. Whatever you do, respond as an expression of Christ’s love this week.

Pray with Us

Christine Gorz, vice president of Marketing Communications, appreciates the prayer support of the Moody community. Today, pray for Christine’s ministry and for the many teams she leads on Moody’s Chicago campus.

Setbacks and Victories

When a child first learns to walk, there are wonderful moments of victory and progress but also inevitable stumbles along the way. The same might be said about the early church, and today's reading shows both victories and setbacks.

The first serious setback came with the actions of Ananias and Sapphira. Having sold their property, they claimed to have given the full purchase amount to the church, but in reality they had retained a portion for themselves. They desired the honor of being big donors, but lied about their real actions. As Peter reminded them, they lied not just to humans, but to the Spirit of God Himself. Their resulting deaths remind us that God takes the sin of hypocrisy seriously among His people. Unfortunately, that particular sin persists in the church today.

Nevertheless, the church continued to grow in numbers and power. That suc-

cess in teaching and miracles, however, infuriated the priestly regime, who promptly imprisoned the Apostles. But the gospel could not be stopped: freed by an angel, the Apostles continued preaching in the temple the next day. When brought to trial before the Sanhedrin, they preached the message of Christ to them as well, reminding them of His death and resurrection and the powerful gift of the Spirit.

The Sanhedrin were incensed and ready to kill them, but a Pharisee named Gamaliel wisely cautioned that "if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God . . . you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (v. 38–39). Flogged and instructed to cease from preaching, the Apostles went forth rejoicing in the privilege of suffering for Christ. What might seem like humiliation to the world was counted as victory to these faithful followers of Jesus.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Acts 5:41

Apply the Word

Persecution is something Christ's church has continued to know throughout history, and such persecution exists today, particularly in countries like Pakistan, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia. Read some current accounts of persecution at www.persecution.org and pray for strength for these communities and families suffering for the name of Christ around the world.

Pray with Us

We are grateful for the ministry of hospitality of our Event and Guest Services at Moody in Chicago—the "face" of Moody for our visitors and guests. Would you uphold in prayer Amber Rae Adames, Stacey Craelius, Lysa Ellis, and Joy Gruber?

The Church at Work

No matter how elaborate or beautiful a watch may be, if certain parts are missing or not working properly, the watch will never function the way it was designed. The church is similar, and today we see that although the number of believers was growing, problems persisted.

A complaint—a literal translation of the Greek word here is “muttering”—arose because one group was being neglected in the distribution of food to their widows. The problem was a lack of organization and administration within the community. Once aware, the Apostles quickly worked toward a solution. Notice, however, that what drives the solution was a sense of calling in the body of Christ. The Apostles understood their calling to be about leading the community in prayer and preaching the word, not “to wait on tables” (v. 2). This did not mean they looked down on the ministry of food distribution, but that they understood

their own calling and realized they needed to leave certain functions to others to perform.

In turn, once the community chose seven men specifically called to serve in the important ministry of food distribution, the Apostles “laid their hands

on them” (v. 6) authorizing them for this work. In other words, for the church to function well, *all* the necessary parts were needed—those to lead in the ministry of the word and those to lead in other ministries of service and administration. The result: grumbling and division disappeared, the word of God spread, and the community continued to grow.

Notice that one of the seven, Stephen, was called to preach in the synagogue. As an example of someone serving in accord with his calling, Stephen preached boldly, despite opposition, and carried out his ministry “full of God’s grace and power” (v. 8).

So the word of
God spread. The
number of disciples
in Jerusalem
increased rapidly.

Acts 6:7

Apply the Word

The church cannot be led by pastors alone; the whole body of Christ is called to serve in a variety of ways. What service in the church might God be calling you to? This week, ask a leader in your church if certain tasks or roles need to be filled; then prayerfully consider whether God might be calling you to respond to that need.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Event and Guest Services, please mention Nathaniel Jacobs, Julie Smith, Brenda McCord, Carmel Swift, and Sonya Valeff during your time with the Lord today. May they show Christ’s love to everyone God brings to Moody.

Stephen's Sermon

Several American universities have adopted an annual tradition of choosing a seasoned professor to give a hypothetical “last lecture.” The purpose is to have the professor speak in answer to the question: “What wisdom would you impart to your audience if you had only one final lecture to give?”

Stephen may not have known that this was his last speech, but his words stand as a model of a wise “last sermon.” What wisdom did he impart? First, Stephen recounted biblical history, emphasizing the theme of

God’s faithfulness despite uncertainty and adversity. Abraham was called to follow God despite the uncertainty about land and descendants. As Stephen observed, God fulfilled His promises by giving Abraham both land and a multitude of descendants in the Israelites. Likewise, Joseph faced great adversity from his brothers, but God used that to provide for His people during a famine.

Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.

Acts 7:33

Enslaved to the Egyptians, the Israelites experienced God’s faithfulness too. God called Moses and proclaimed, “I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free” (v. 34). Life’s difficulties may tempt us to think God is absent, when in fact He is right there

all along. Moses never realized he was walking on holy ground until God revealed Himself!

Stephen’s sermon also carried a wise warning: God’s people often yield to unfaithfulness. The Israelites grumbled in the wilderness,

worshiped a golden calf at Sinai, and later in the Promised Land they worshiped foreign gods. This unfaithfulness culminated in their rejection of Christ, God’s promised “Righteous One” (v. 52). Uncertainty and adversity may tempt us to turn away from God, but today we are reminded to remain true to the One who is always faithful, despite the circumstances.

Apply the Word

God is faithful no matter the adversity or uncertainty, and we often—like Moses—don’t recognize God’s presence in our lives. As a physical reminder of God’s faithful presence despite our circumstances, try removing your shoes each time you pray for some difficult situation this week. Then ask God to help you see His presence in all of your struggles.

Pray with Us

Join us in prayer for Collin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, remembering his leadership before God today. As you pray, would you also thank the Lord for all the lives that have been touched by Moody’s radio ministry?

Persecution Intensifies

The word *martyr* literally means “witness.” Those who died for their faith in Christ were witnesses to the power of God in Christ. And as the third-century writer Tertullian said, “The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.” Today’s reading about Stephen, the first Christian martyr, exemplifies the point.

Notice how Stephen’s death at the hands of the Sanhedrin, and especially his final words, were a witness to a life united to Christ. His first sentence proclaimed a vision of the glory of God. Earlier Stephen had proclaimed Christ; now, full of the Holy Spirit, he was blessed to behold Christ “standing at the right hand of God” (7:56).

His next two sentences revealed his deep identity with Christ’s death. First, he committed his spirit to Christ, much like Christ committed His spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46). And then, while being stoned, Stephen prayed for their

forgiveness, much like Christ prayed for the forgiveness of His killers (Luke 23:34). Stephen’s martyrdom (his “witness”) spoke powerfully of an intimate link with the life, death, and glory of Christ.

In contrast, a young man named Saul was also there, approving the death of Stephen. And from that day, with Saul at the helm, “a great persecution broke out against the church” (8:1). Going from home to home, Saul sought to destroy the church, dragging Christian men and women to prison. Notice

Persecution
broke out against
the church in
Jerusalem, and
all except the
apostles were
scattered.

Acts 8:1

also the positive effect: in fulfillment of Christ’s commission in Acts 1:8, believers in Jesus began to scatter “throughout Judea and Samaria” (8:1). Christ’s church suffered persecution, but that persecution also spread Christ’s church throughout the world. In His providence, God used the terrible martyrdom of Stephen to advance the gospel mission of the church.

Apply the Word

Stephen had a vision of the glory of Jesus that sustained his faith and propelled his testimony, even when facing persecution. How do we see Jesus? Is He a nice figure who bails us out of trouble, or a benign teacher who reminds us to be good? Or is He the majestic Savior who intercedes in heaven for us, worthy of our faithfulness in life and in death?

Pray with Us

Join us in thanking God for the ministry of Radio Moody, our Spanish-language station. Pray for the dedicated work of its staff—Elsa Mazón, Gerson García, and Cindy García-Rojas—and for the growth of their outreach to the Spanish-speaking community in Chicago and across the U.S.

The Preaching of Philip

Ask almost any first-century Jew about the Samaritans and you would receive an answer filled with negative impressions. Samaritans were considered half-breeds, not true Jews; they worshiped incorrectly and held wrong beliefs. In short, they were definitely *not* God's people.

That prevailing attitude is important background to today's reading, because it reveals Philip's great boldness in taking the message of Jesus the Messiah to the Samaritans! In turn, the people were so impressed with Philip's preaching and miracles that they quickly responded with faith and baptism. Even Simon the Sorcerer seemed to have believed and was baptized.

This was something new indeed! Could it be true? Peter and John traveled from Jerusalem to investigate. Finding genuine faith among the Samaritans, the Apostles prayed for these new believers and the Holy Spirit came upon them, verifying the spread of the gos-

pel to non-Jews. Simon the Sorcerer's initial response to the Spirit is a good reminder for us: the movement of the Spirit is not something we can manipulate. God's kingdom will spread as He likes, as His gift to the world.

Christ's salvation would next spread to even more non-Jews. Responding to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, Philip found himself in an encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch returning to his African home. He was reading a passage in Isaiah 53 and was confused about

its meaning. Philip took the occasion to use that text as the basis for a personal message about the good news of Jesus Christ. As a result, the eunuch responded with faith and was baptized by Philip. Scripture does not tell us explicitly, but it would be fair to assume that the eunuch brought the message of Christ to others in Ethiopia. The gospel was finally spreading "from Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth" (1:8)!

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

Acts 8:5

Apply the Word

The spread of the gospel is God's gift, but it also requires our faithfulness and courage to share it. Will you take the message of Christ this week to those who need it? Look for opportunities and listen for the Spirit's prompting to witness even to those you might think least likely to accept it, whether co-workers, family members, or neighbors.

Pray with Us

Will you give your prayer support today to the ministry of Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media at Moody? Pray that Greg would always follow God's leading in all the decisions he makes in the workplace.

Saul's Conversion

Imagine some of the most radical changes you can think of: an atheist becoming a Christian; a bankrupt man finding his bank account brimming; a mentally disabled child suddenly able to do calculus; a ruthless dictator becoming a gentle, benevolent philanthropist!

Such was the scale of change we find in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. When the chapter opens, Saul was “still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (v. 1). He had secured permission from the high priests to travel to Damascus, arrest followers of Jesus, and drag them back to prison in Jerusalem. Everything about Saul was opposed to Christ and His church. He was nothing less than a devastating enemy of Christians.

Yet all that would change. He would not only become a believer in Christ as Messiah and receive baptism, he also quickly became the greatest advocate for Christ.

He preached in synagogues, confounding the Jewish leadership. He escaped death threats for his faith. He even returned to Jerusalem where he debated with Hellenistic Jews about the identity of Jesus as Messiah. So great was this change that the church “enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened, [and] . . . increased

in numbers” (v. 31). That peace also enabled Peter to travel about the country, where he preached the gospel in Lydda and Joppa, and healed many like Aeneas and Tabitha.

What can account for such a change? Only the grace of God, in a direct encounter with the living Jesus. In

that sudden moment of light, Saul’s hard heart was softened by Jesus, who asked: “Why do you persecute me?” (v. 4). That encounter with Christ forever changed Saul from an enemy of the church to an “apostle to the Gentiles.” Only the power of God could produce such a change!

He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Acts 9:4

Apply the Word

Our experiences may not be as dramatic as Saul’s, but Jesus calls each of us to a personal encounter with Him. Until we repent of our selfish will set against Christ, we are as hard and lost as Saul. Take a few moments today to reflect on the time when Christ called you. He knows you by name. He offers new life and purpose. Thank Him today for His salvation in your life!

Pray with Us

Moody Publishers has spread God’s truth and love around the world. Please pray for its employees from the Finance department—Harrison Gunter, Susan Malnati, Richard Peterson, Thinkh Pham, Jeffrey Reynolds, and Edgar Santiago.

The Conversion of Cornelius

First-century Jews disliked Samaritans, but their hostility was even stronger toward Gentiles. Jewish people would not enter the home of a Gentile (whom they considered “unclean dogs”), let alone share a meal with them. In the mind of most faithful Jews, God’s love was for Jews, not Gentiles.

That makes today’s chapter all the more remarkable, as the lives of Peter the Jew and Cornelius the Gentile became intertwined. The God-fearing centurion Cornelius received a divine message to send for Peter. Meanwhile, Peter received a vision, which was repeated three times, about clean and unclean animals. In that vision, Peter was commanded to eat the unclean food. Despite Peter’s refusal, God insisted: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (v. 15). What did Peter’s vision about food have to do with Cornelius? The rest of the chapter unfolds the meaning.

God does not
show favoritism
but accepts from
every nation the
one who fears him
and does what
is right.

Acts 10:34–35

When Cornelius’s men arrived, Peter received them even though they were “unclean” Gentiles. The next day, he went with them to the Cornelius’s house, already beginning to understand God’s acceptance of Gentiles. Peter not only entered their house, but explained: “God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure

or unclean” (v. 28). Then, in his sermon Peter noted, “God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (vv. 34–35). “Everyone,” said Peter, “who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins” (v. 43).

The message of Christ was not just for Jews, but for the whole world, Gentiles included. As Peter proclaimed the truth of God’s unbiased love, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his believing household, giving further evidence of God’s acceptance of all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike.

Apply the Word

Whom do we consider too “unclean” to know God’s love? People of other religions, other ethnicities, or other lifestyles? Make an honest list of the people you have subtly excluded in your mind from Christ’s redemption. Now ask God’s forgiveness for limiting the great scope of His saving work, and pray that even these people would come to faith in Christ.

Pray with Us

Today and tomorrow, join us in praying for the professors at Moody Theological Seminary in Chicago. Today, ask the father to bless the teaching ministry of Jayanthi Benjamin, James Coakley, Ryan Cook, and Daniel Green.

The Gospel Spreads to the Gentiles

A rock thrown into a pond has a noticeable rippling effect of concentric circles. First the circles are small, near the rock's entry point. Then the ripples move outward, wider and wider until they reach the edge. We see the spiritual equivalent of this rippling effect in the early church as the gospel spread first in Judea, then Samaria, and now out to the Gentiles.

Not everyone, however, was comfortable with this new movement. Some members of the Jerusalem church, concerned with social taboos, criticized Peter for eating with Gentiles. So Peter recounted the whole story. Notice that the spread of the gospel to Gentiles is so important that we are told the story twice, once as narrated in chapter 10 and again by Peter in chapter 11. Christ's salvation brought to the world—this is the central theme of the book of Acts!

Who was I
to think that I
could stand in
God's way?

Acts 11:17

Notice also the emphasis Peter placed upon the role of the Holy Spirit. The decisive moment was when the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles just as the Spirit came upon the Apostles at Pentecost. As Peter explained: "If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" (v. 17). The Spirit was at work, Gentiles came to faith, and the church was convinced.

Finally, as the church spread to other Gentile regions, observe the connection between Jewish and Gentile churches. First the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas (later joined by Saul) to teach the faith to the Christians in Antioch. But likewise, the Christians in Antioch then committed themselves to support the Judean churches during a famine. Although separated by geography and ethnicity, the early church remained united.

Apply the Word

One way to combat isolation and division is through partnerships with churches in different cultural contexts. If your church does not have such a partnership, ask your pastor or leadership team if your congregation might find another church for mutual prayer and encouragement.

Pray with Us

Please add these MTS–Chicago professors to your prayer list: Sajan Mathews, Andrew Pflederer, William Thrasher, Julius Wong Loi Sing, and David Woodall. Ask for God's blessing on their training of future leaders in the church.

A Contrast of Power

King Herod (Agrippa I) was the grandson of Herod the Great. Given much power and a large kingdom by the Roman emperors, Agrippa I ruled over the region of Judea. In order to placate his Roman benefactors, he was interested in maintaining stability, so he worked to gain the favor of the Jews especially by attacking Christians.

That destructive earthly power of Herod is contrasted today with God's greater power to save. Herod had already executed James; now he imprisoned Peter with similar intentions. Peter's situation was dire—not only was he arrested, he was in double chains, flanked by two soldiers, and his prison door was guarded by sentries. What could a small minority of Christians possibly do against such a powerful force like Herod and the Roman guards?

But that is just the point. We are given such a clear picture of the world's power so that we might see more clearly God's power. The church did the only

thing they could: pray! With earnest, unrelenting, into-the-night prayers, that small group of believers poured forth their petitions to God. And remarkably—even to the praying Christians!—Peter was delivered from prison by an angel. None of Herod's attempts at security worked. The chains fell off, the guards slept on, and locked gates opened. Reunited with his brothers and sisters, Peter understood what happened: "the Lord had brought him out of prison" (v. 17).

Finally, God's power was displayed once more upon Herod. As he reveled in human praise in Caesarea, God struck him dead. Herod, the symbol of earthly power, was nothing against the power of God. Scripture's words near the end of this chapter summarize it well: "But the word of God continued to spread and flourish" (v. 24). The contrast is complete and the point is clear: God's power is always greater than the world's.

The word of
God continued to
spread and flourish.

Acts 12:24

Apply the Word

If God can deliver His people in such a great thing, how much more is He able to save in small things? Perhaps you know someone today who is struggling with difficulties in life. Take time to write a personal note or make a phone call to encourage them with the message of today's reading. The obstacles may be high, but God's power is greater than all.

Pray with Us

As Bruce Everhart, VP of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, develops new outreaches to Moody partners, we pray for God's help and guidance in his ministry. Also, please include in your prayers the teams serving under Bruce's leadership.

The Spirit-led Church

One of Charles Wesley's hymns emphasizes the role of the Spirit: "Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire, let us thine influence prove." A later stanza continues: "Come, Holy Ghost (for moved by thee the prophets wrote and spoke), unlock the truth, thyself the key, unseal the sacred book."

Like Wesley's hymn, today's reading emphasizes the work of the Spirit in the early church and its mission to the world. The scene opens in Antioch, where the believers gathered in worship and fasting. In response, the Holy Spirit spoke, calling Saul and Barnabas to be set apart for a special work. The community responded in continued prayer and fasting, and sent them off.

Led again "by the Holy Spirit" (v. 4), they headed for Cyprus and embarked on an island tour, ending in Paphos. There they met Elymas, a sorcerer who tried to prevent the conversion of the pro-

consul. Saul, "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 9), boldly rebuked the sorcerer, declaring him a "child of the devil" (v. 14) in contrast to his name Bar-Jesus, which literally means "child of salvation." In response to the remarkable power of the Spirit in Saul, the proconsul came to faith. He was the first Gentile convert without any connection to a synagogue.

What God
promised our
ancestors he has
fulfilled for us, their
children, by raising
up Jesus.

Acts 13:32–33

Finally, Saul and Barnabas traveled north to Asia Minor and the region of Galatia. As before, they went first to the Jewish synagogues and proclaimed the message that "what God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus" (vv. 32–33). Notice that emphasis on resurrection (repeated four separate times). Christ's death on the cross is meaningless if there is no resurrection. Only through Christ's death *and* resurrection is there forgiveness of sin and deliverance from its power. That Spirit-inspired message is the heart of the gospel.

Apply the Word

The Holy Spirit was central to the life of the early church as it worshiped, prayed, fasted, and went forth in mission. Find Wesley's hymn ("Come Holy Ghost, Our Hearts Inspire") online or in a hymnal, and meditate on the importance of the Spirit in your Christian walk as you sing praise to God and call for the Spirit to fill and lead you.

Pray with Us

Today, please mention while you pray the ministry of Calvin Robinson in Sponsorship and Underwriting on Moody's Chicago campus, as he does research and seeks new partners for Moody Radio programs.

Question and Answer

By Dr. David Rim, Professor of Theology



If God loves the world and wants each person to be saved, then why doesn't He make

this happen? For example, I have a friend who seems to sincerely search for God, yet he says that there just isn't enough convincing evidence out there for him to make a choice for God. Why didn't God provide more evidence? He certainly could have, if He wanted, right?



This question touches upon one of the most difficult issues in religious discussions today. Some atheists argue that the presence of unpersuaded genuine seekers of God is itself evidence that either God does not possess the power to make Himself more evident or that God does not truly desire the salvation of all. The common analogy used is of a child playing hide-and-seek with his mother. Somehow the child gets lost in the woods behind the backyard. He figures that sooner or later his mother will come searching for him out there. But after hours of wandering, his mother is nowhere in sight. When he cries out "Mom!" there is no response. Nighttime comes and still no evidence of Mom.

The parallels are obvious. God is the mom who desires to reach out and save those who are lost. While a human mom may have had a heart attack or gotten entangled in another part of the woods, a divine Father would certainly have the power to bring about a reunion. What

are we to think of a Father who has the ability but does not seem to expend the energy necessary? Could it be that He doesn't even exist?

Christian scholars have offered a number of responses to this argument. Some say that if the seeker was truly genuine and sincere, God would have revealed Himself to them. After all, Jeremiah promises that the one who seeks God with all his heart will find him (29:13). James seems to affirm this promise in the New Testament: "Come near to God and he will come near to you" (4:8). When someone wants to find God and know God, and not merely experience the benefits, then surely he will find God. Other scholars argue that if God reveals Himself without constraint, the individual would be so overwhelmed by His presence that his freedom to enter into a relationship with God would be negated.

While there may be something to both of these responses, there is another possibility. Evidence can come in several forms: arguments for God such as the complexity and specificity of life pointing to a designer; a miracle such as a resurrection or a healing; divine presence as in a dream or a visionary experience. But there is one more kind of evidence: divine presence in the church. What if the church is to show God to the world? The way the church lives out its own gospel would determine how much evidence there is for God's existence. Jesus Himself said that if you love one another as I have loved

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

you, the world will know that I have sent you (John 13:34–35; 17:23).



I have an atheist friend who believes that selfless acts of kindness can be explained by the evolutionary process. But that seems counterintuitive. Can you help me out?



This is a common response offered by atheists who want to provide some kind of naturalistic grounding for altruistic acts. Both the Christian and the atheist affirm the existence of selfless acts of kindness. Peter Singer wants Americans to give up Starbucks coffee and bottled water in order to feed the hungry children of the world. This is noble. But as an ardent atheist, how does Singer and others like him frame these suggestions so that they are not the mere opinion of an individual but an imperative with a moral force? If it is merely a suggestion, then it would be nice if Americans endured personal sacrifice for the needs of the world. But if it is a moral imperative, then there is a sense of “oughtness” that should leave the comfortable uncomfortable.

Many atheists turn to biological altruism as their source. We often hear stories of vampire bats who will regurgitate blood and donate it to members of their group who failed to feed that night, or individual Vervet monkeys who signal alarm at the presence of a prey to enhance the survival of the rest of

the group while decreasing their own chances. Atheists say that such altruistic behavior is built into our genetic past. Members of a species will sacrifice their personal wellbeing to increase the survival of those who share their genes, as in a parent for a child (kinship altruism). Interspecies altruism is also found when there is mutual benefit (reciprocal altruism).

There is a problem, however. Both of these categories are ultimately selfish in nature. A cost/benefit analysis forms the basis for judging the worth of these actions (whether consciously or not). But the kind of selfless kindness that we deem moral functions in the reverse. The less benefit received, the more praiseworthy the act. Sacrificing your life for your child is one thing; for your enemy—that’s a whole new story.

Something or some event must transform biological altruism with its selfish aims into a moral altruism that is selfless. Atheist proponents of this view point to the rise of consciousness in our evolutionary history. A conscious, thinking being can choose to perform altruistic acts without considering the ultimate benefits to one’s self or to those who are close. But as soon as one proposes such an event, we are back to the original question. What is the basis by which a conscious being can proclaim a selfless kind of altruism as being morally superior to a biological form of altruism? Ultimately, evolutionary theories alone cannot explain human capacity for selfless acts of kindness.

Continued Missionary Efforts

The nineteenth-century English pastor J. H. Jowett reportedly said, “I once saw the track of a bleeding hare across the snow. That was Paul’s track across Europe.” Indeed, the ministry of Paul and Barnabas met with great difficulty and opposition.

Many hearers in the synagogues resisted the message. “Filled with jealousy” (13:45), they not only contradicted Paul’s message but also stirred up the crowds against Paul and Barnabas. In Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were forced out of the region. In Iconium, a plot emerged to “mistreat them and stone them” (14:5). And in Lystra, the Jews “stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead” (14:19). As the Apostles recognized, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (14:22).

Yet that rejection ultimately led Paul to a more intentional ministry to Gentiles.

They gathered the church together and reported ... how [God] had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Acts 14:27

The word of God would go forth into new places. Paul realized that the coming of the Messiah always had in mind the salvation of the whole world, and he cited Isaiah 49:6 as proof. But not all Gentiles responded well either. In Lystra, the citizens mistook Paul and Barnabas for gods and attempted to offer them sacrifices! Only with great difficulty were the Apostles able to stop this misplaced worship.

Despite these challenges and physical suffering, the underlying good news was that many people did come to faith in Jesus. In Pisidian Antioch many Gentiles believed, and “the word of the Lord spread through the whole region” (13:49). In Iconium, “a great number of Jews and Greeks believed” (14:1). And in Derbe, their preaching “won a large number of disciples” (14:21). The challenges were real, but the exciting news was that people were coming to faith. As Paul reported in Antioch, it was God who had opened the doors.

Apply the Word

Where is the gospel needed in the world? Check with your local church for more information about missionary organizations that might need your support. Even if God does not call you to full-time missionary service, the work of the gospel still needs the support of prayer, financial giving, and encouragement. Plug in to the work of God in the world!

Pray with Us

Today, we would like to give our prayer support to the ministry of Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of education. We are grateful for his commitment and dedication in leading Moody’s education branch.

The Jerusalem Council

No close relationships are without some conflict. The test of a strong relationship is not whether there is conflict but how that conflict is handled. The same is true for the early church, and in today's reading we see an example of how they handled a serious conflict.

Scripture tells us that "certain people" came down from Judea to Antioch with a message: faith in Jesus is good, but Gentiles must also be circumcised in order to be saved. This was no minor issue; at stake was the question of salvation! Must Gentiles add law-keeping to their faith or not? Paul and Barnabas, of course, sharply disputed this teaching. So the believers in Antioch sent them to Jerusalem for what is known as the first council of the church.

Apostles and elders gathered together to discuss the issue. In the end, they would decide that Gentiles did not

need to submit to circumcision in order to become part of the people of God. Notice the reasons for that Spirit-led decision. First, Peter spoke of his experience with Cornelius. God had granted the Holy Spirit even to Gentiles on the basis of their faith alone. Why require Gentiles to be circumcised if God Him-

self did not require it for them to receive the Spirit? As Peter summarized: the means of salvation is the same for Jews and Gentiles—the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 11).

Then Paul and Barnabas also spoke of the work of the Spirit among the Gentiles through signs and wonders. And finally, James corroborated these experiences with Scripture: "The words of the prophets are in agreement with this" (v. 15), citing Amos 9:11–12. That message was then delivered by a united church back to the Gentiles: faith alone in Jesus marks you as a child of God.

We believe it is
through the grace
of our Lord Jesus
that we are saved,
just as they are.

Acts 15:11

Apply the Word

Today's message is at the heart of the gospel: our faith, not our obedience to the law, brings us into relationship with God. No actions, however pious or religious, earn God's saving love. Remind yourself of that truth today by writing out Acts 15:11 on a notecard and then committing to memorize that verse over the next week.

Pray with Us

Nancy Hastings, executive director of the Moody Alumni Association, requests the prayers of the Moody family for the Alumni Association's work of keeping our former students connected to their alma mater.

Paul's Second Missionary Effort: Greece

The Holy Spirit has always been at work in missions. David Livingstone had wanted to go to China but a war broke out, diverting him to Africa instead. William Carey originally intended to minister in the South Pacific, but God steered him to India. The Spirit of God will spread the gospel wherever He wills.

The same was true for the early church. After a disagreement with Barnabas, Paul and Silas decided to revisit earlier church plants for pastoral oversight. At first, they went to southern Galatia.

Then intending to travel into northern Asia Minor, Mysia, and Bythinia, “the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (v. 7). Think of the likely confusion and uncertainty they must have felt about where God wanted them!

Then the clear call came to go to Macedonia, they obeyed, and doors were opened. The main focus in today's reading is on the evangelistic efforts in Philippi, and Scripture re-

counts the great success God brought about through Paul and Silas. First, a businesswoman named Lydia came to believe in Jesus, and she and her household were baptized. Her home would become Paul's missionary headquarters in Philippi.

Come over to
Macedonia and
help us.

Acts 16:9

Next, having exorcized a slave girl possessed by a spirit, Paul and Silas were dragged before magistrates, beaten severely, and thrown into prison. Yet, God produced an earthquake that released them from their chains and cells. The jailer, de-

spairing of his own life, listened to Paul's words of salvation, and the jailer and his household came to faith and were baptized.

Even the challenge of opposition led Paul to preach the gospel in new contexts. Paul's obedience to the Spirit's change in travel plans allowed the gospel to take root in the lives of Lydia and the Philippian jailer.

Apply the Word

Scripture recounts a number of cities and regions in today's reading! To grasp the extent of the Spirit's leading, find a map of Paul's second missionary journey online or in a study Bible. Then note on a larger map that the gospel has now spread to every continent on the globe! Praise God for His ongoing missionary work in the world.

Pray with Us

Moody's sport facility, the Solheim Center, frequently serves as an outreach venue for the urban sports ministry in the neighboring Chicago communities. Your prayer will be an encouragement for the Solheim staff—Troy Fichter and Josie Scott.

Preaching in Thessalonica and Berea

It has become popular among many academics to speak of a divide between the “Jesus of history” and the “Christ of faith.” According to this thinking, the Jesus of history was simply a great rabbi or prophetic figure, while the picture of Christ in Scripture is the later church’s projection of their own beliefs about Jesus. But according to Paul’s preaching, nothing could be further from the truth.

Having arrived in Thessalonica, Paul went straight to the synagogue and began “reasoning,” “explaining,” and “proving”

the message that Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s messianic promises. As Paul summarized, “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah” (v. 3). The Jesus of history was in fact the very same Christ long awaited by God’s people. As a result of this preaching, many came to faith—Jews, God-fearing Gentiles, and several prominent women.

Others, however, opposed this message, stirring up a riotous mob looking

for Paul. Notice the accusation: “They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus” (v. 7). The message of the gospel has a political edge to it! Our allegiance to Jesus should be above any other earthly ruler. The Thessalonians understood the claim; they just rejected its truth.

This Jesus I am
proclaiming to you
is the Messiah.

Acts 17:3

Paul next escaped to Berea, where once again he entered the Jewish synagogue. Here, Scripture tells us, the Bereans demonstrated great earnestness for the truth: they “examined the Scriptures every

day to see if what Paul said was true” (v. 11). Notice the daily—not just weekly—consideration of Paul’s message! The Greek verb translated here as “examine” carries a judicial tone, denoting a serious, impartial investigation into the matter. Once again, not all accepted the gospel, and Paul would have to flee once more. But many did believe: Jews, Gentiles, and a number of prominent women.

Apply the Word

These unnamed “prominent women” likely acted as hosts for Christian assemblies, spread the gospel to their neighbors, and served in other ways. Learn more about the way Christian women have served Christ throughout history in the book, *Great Women in Christian History: 37 Women Who Changed Their World*, by A. Kenneth Curtis and Dan Graves.

Pray with Us

Fiscal integrity is part of Moody’s legacy, which we’ve maintained for more than 125 years. We are thankful for the service of Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, whose team plays a crucial role in Moody’s financial operations.

Preaching in Athens

In the ancient world, Athens was famous as the philosophical center of the empire. With a long lineage of thinkers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, the city of Athens was *the* place to go for intellectual stimulation. It was also a city of vast religious plurality.

What can we learn from Paul's response to such an environment like Athens—full of ideas and spirituality opposed to the Christian faith? First, notice that Paul took time to observe his surroundings. He saw, with much distress, that the city was “full of idols” (v. 16). Yet, rather than rejecting the city, Paul took this as another occasion for preaching Christ, both in the synagogue and in the marketplace. Soon, he had attracted the attention of some philosophers and was asked to explain his teaching.

Next, he began by finding a point of contact with his pagan audience, call-

ing them “very religious” (v. 22) and even noting one of their altars “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” (v. 23). Paul found something good in them (the impulse to worship), and attempted to correct their error (worshiping the wrong thing). That became the springboard for his sermon: “you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you” (v. 23).

You are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

Acts 17:23

Beginning with creation, Paul proclaimed God's lordship over all things, His invisibility, and even His desire for relationship with His “offspring”—which is what we all are (v. 28). Notice that Paul quoted

from the Athenians' own poets and philosophers to find even further common ground. But Paul then turned that general message about God into a specific proclamation of the resurrected Christ who will one day judge the world. Paul's attempts at finding common ground ultimately led him to the message of Christ.

Apply the Word

How often do you look for common ground with your unbelieving neighbors, co-workers, or family? Think today about the unbelievers you interact with most, and find shared points of contact with them. As you build your relationship with them, ask God for wisdom to turn those points of common ground into opportunities to share the message of Christ.

Pray with Us

Ben Chelladurai, Gregory Gaertner, Daniel Hassler, Norma Malave, Paul Perrin, and Camille Ward from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness ensure high quality of Moody education through research, accreditation, and surveys.

Encouragement in Unexpected Places

Finding faithful followers of God in a sin-filled city is about as expected as finding an oasis in the Arabian desert. Yet that is what we find in today's reading. The city of Corinth had a well-earned reputation as a thoroughly immoral city, and opposition to Paul's preaching would be expected.

At first, there was opposition. In the synagogue, the Jews abusively rejected Paul to the point that he left them to begin preaching to the Gentiles. Later in the same chapter, they dragged Paul before the proconsul Gallio, who simply dismissed the case and provided no protection for Sosthenes when the crowd attacked.

Yet despite this obvious opposition, God reminded Paul to find encouragement and carry on his work: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent . . . because I have many people in this city" (vv. 9–10). How true that was! And Paul did find comfort and encour-

agement in other (perhaps unexpected) places. Aquila and Priscilla, recently arrived from Rome, shared their craft of tentmaking with Paul. Silas and Timothy soon joined Paul from Macedonia and supported his full-time preaching ministry. And although rejected in the synagogue, we later learn that Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his household became believers. It seems that Sosthenes, the next synagogue leader, may also have converted to Christ (see 1 Cor. 1:1).

Then there was Titius Justus, a Gentile who welcomed Paul into his home and opened the way for him to continue preaching to the Gentiles. Even the proconsul Gallio, though certainly no Christian sympathizer, opened up legal precedent for Paul's preaching by not allowing the Jews to prosecute Paul as a criminal. In the end, God had engineered such favorable conditions that Paul stayed in Corinth a year and a half!

Do not be
afraid; keep on
speaking, do not be
silent . . . because I
have many people
in this city.

Acts 18:9–10

Apply the Word

Scripture shows us that God's encouragement can come in unexpected places, and reminds us that we can be that encouragement to others! How can you be an encouragement to someone? What kind word, encouraging note, meaningful hug, or helping hand can you offer? Look for those opportunities today and be that unexpected encouragement to someone else.

Pray with Us

Please lift up in prayer the ministry of Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer at Moody. Pray for godly wisdom and insight as he coordinates the activities of various Moody departments for greater efficiency and productivity.

Paul's Third Missionary Effort: Ephesus and Beyond

Have you ever observed a spreading vine? What starts out small and contained soon spreads in new directions, shooting off new growth and covering other plants. The early church was something like a spreading vine. As today's passage makes clear, what began in Jerusalem had now spread throughout the Mediterranean world, and new leadership emerged along the way.

While Paul traveled from Corinth back to Antioch, Priscilla and Aquila took on new leadership in Ephesus. While there, another man, Apollos, was trained, and sent on his way to minister in Achaia. As the leadership grew beyond the Apostles, the church spread into new areas. Meanwhile, Paul finished his visit to Jerusalem and Antioch and then circled back to Ephesus. Notice the spread of the gospel despite opposition and apparent setbacks. Upon arriving in Ephesus, Paul met a dozen individuals who seemed to know the message and baptism of John but were ignorant of

Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. After Paul's proclamation to them, they responded with faith and baptism and experienced the Spirit's filling.

Later, Paul preached in the Ephesus synagogue for three months, but because of opposition he began lecturing in the hall of Tyrannus. This was no flash evangelism. Paul spent two years there, preaching, arguing, and debating daily about Christ. The results were striking—God's word spread throughout Asia and extraordinary miracles of healing took place

through Paul.

Some false teachers tried to reproduce Paul's healing in Jesus' name. In the end, their lack of relationship with Jesus was exposed, but God used that incident to highlight the glory of Christ. Many even came forward to confess their previous life of sorcery and burned their books in response. As Scripture summarizes: "the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (v. 20).

In this way the
word of the
Lord spread
widely and grew
in power.

Acts 19:20

Apply the Word

Have you grown discouraged by the rejection of the gospel by friends, family, or co-workers? God's word is powerful enough to spread even to places that seem impossible. Continue praying for the unbelievers in your life, asking God to spread His word to them, demonstrate His power among them, and raise up new leadership to bring them to Christ.

Pray with Us

We invite you to pray for our undergraduate and seminary students as they arrive on campus anticipating the beginning of the new semester. Ask God for His blessing on their studies and future ministry.

Riot in Ephesus

Along with the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Statue of Zeus at Olympia, the grand Temple of Artemis at Ephesus was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This massive structure was over six million cubic feet in size, and contained 127 columns! Quite literally, the worship of Artemis was the central facet of Ephesian life.

The Temple of Artemis was also central to the economic life of Ephesus, and the growing presence of Christianity was troubling to some. The silversmith Demetrius roused the ire of the tradesmen by reminding them of Paul's message: "gods made by human hands are no gods at all" (v. 26). In other words, the entire practice and economy of the worship of Artemis (including the production of silver shrines) was being undermined by the Christian message. Demetrius very tactfully presented the case as one concerning the reputation of the temple and the "divine majesty" of the goddess herself, but the

underlying truth was that Christianity was a threat to their financial profits!

The reaction to this apparent threat was swift and strong: the craftsmen were "furious and began shouting: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" (v. 28). Soon a mob developed and

"the whole city was in an uproar" (v. 29). Scripture tells us that some of Paul's companions were seized and thrust into the theater. For hours, confusion and chaos reigned. As is often the case with mobs, some did not even know why they were there.

Gods made by
human hands are
no gods at all.

Acts 19:26

One Jewish man, Alexander, tried to speak, only to be shouted down for two hours by the frenzied crowd. Finally, the city clerk calmed them, urging them to use the legal courts rather than risk charges of rioting. What a telling picture of the violent reaction we have when the idols in our life are threatened by the lordship of Christ!

Apply the Word

Idols come in many forms, from cherished physical objects to intangible longings for power, money, and honor. What idols in your life need to be overthrown by Christ's claim of lordship? Think about the allegiances and pursuits in your life, make a list of your own personal idols, and then ask God to remove them and replace them with Himself.

Pray with Us

Dr. Larry Davidhizar, VP and dean of the Undergraduate School, and his staff are getting ready for the new school year. Pray for the fruitful and fulfilling year of training students for global ministry, across cultures and generations.

Paul's Pastoral Heart

The word *pastor* comes from the Latin word for "shepherd." Christian ministers are shepherds of Christ's church, and today's reading gives us Paul as an example of pastoral oversight.

As Paul headed back to Jerusalem, he visited his earlier church plants, "speaking many words of encouragement to the people" (v. 2). Observe also that Paul's ministry was a true partnership of leaders throughout the region. They came from Berea, Thessalonica, Philippi, Derbe, Lystra, Asia, and Ephesus, showing that Paul was not a one-man show but part of a bigger body, serving the church along with others. We see this fuller picture of leadership again when Paul met with the Ephesian leaders one final time. His work was done there, but he had appointed elders to continue the pastoral care of the church in Ephesus.

What do we learn about Paul's pastoral heart from his exhortation to these

leaders? First, he reminded them of his own leadership while with them and his willingness to suffer hardship in obedience to God's calling. A godly pastor should be a model of humble obedience to God's will.

Second, his central exhortation is for them to be true shepherds themselves. They must "keep watch" (v. 28) and "be on your guard" (v. 31) both for themselves and for Christ's flock. They must watch out for false teachers ("savage wolves") who might infiltrate the church.

But above all, Paul reminds them of God's own love for and oversight of the church. Pastors must always remember that the church is precious because it was "bought with his own blood" (v. 28). In the end Paul committed the church "to God and to the word of his grace" (v. 32), knowing that Christ alone is the true Shepherd of His people (see 1 Peter 2:25).

He is our God
and we are the
people of his
pasture, the flock
under his care.

Psalm 95:7

Apply the Word

The work of Christian pastors is not an easy one. The responsibilities are high, the challenges are great, and the appreciation is often small. Pray for your own pastors and leaders today, that God would strengthen them to continue in humble service, to be on guard against false teaching, and always to remember the true Shepherd's love and care for the flock.

Pray with Us

Dr. Davidhizar would appreciate your prayers for his colleagues in the Dean's Office: Claudia Beguin, Julie Henshaw, Linda Pankratz, and Paula Siebold. Ask for God's guidance and wisdom in their daily decisions serving the students.

Paul's Journey to Jerusalem

One writer described the gift of hospitality this way: "Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. . . . It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines."

As Paul began his journey to Jerusalem, he was repeatedly offered acts of hospitality by the body of Christ. In Tyre, he found disciples who welcomed him for seven days. In Ptolemais he stayed another day with Christians. In Caesarea, Paul and company lodged with Philip and his seven daughters. And later, he stayed with Mnason, a man known to the Christians in Caesarea. In some of these places, Paul did not know his hosts before he arrived; yet the body of Christ extended hospitality to Paul as to a member of their own household.

When we arrived
at Jerusalem,
the brothers and
sisters received
us warmly.

Acts 21:17

Notice as well their deep concern for Paul. In Tyre, they urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, and in Caesarea the prophetic message of Agabus caused the Christians to plead with Paul not to go. Despite these concerns, Paul was prepared to suffer for Christ; their hospitality allowed Paul the freedom to go where he felt called.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he was met again with hospitality, but there were concerns about Paul's stance toward the Law. Notice, however, the efforts toward respect on both sides. The Jerusalem believers welcomed Paul

and praised God for his missionary work. In turn, Paul agreed to join in Jewish purification rites so as not to undermine Jewish cultural practices. While affirming the underlying gospel of Christ, each side extended gracious hospitality to the other. Their differences did not create enemies, but mutual respect in the body of Christ.

Apply the Word

Scripture models for us a hospitality that also allows for differences. As you worship this Sunday, what acts of hospitality might you extend, even to those with whom you disagree? Decide now to offer a warm hug, a smile, an encouraging compliment, or even an invitation to a meal to someone with whom you might not normally see eye to eye.

Pray with Us

Scott Pinnow in Records Management uses his IT expertise to process and classify students' documentation efficiently. Thank the Lord today in prayer for his behind-the-scenes, but valuable, service.

Paul's Arrest and Defense

An apology is often understood as an admission of guilt and regret for having done something wrong. But in its origins, the word *apology* referred to a formal argument offered in defense of something. As we will see, these next three days will reveal Paul's repeated apology for the Christian faith and his call as an apostle.

While in Jerusalem, Paul had to face another mob stirred up against him. Their accusations were leveled in the broadest terms, often with unverified assumptions: "This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place" (21:28). Not only were their accusations ill-founded, they didn't allow Paul to defend himself. Instead, they quickly dragged Paul from the temple intending to kill him.

Fortunately for Paul, the Roman tribune heard of the commotion and inter-

vened, dragging Paul from the crowd toward the barracks. At this point, most people would simply be glad to escape the crowd. Not Paul! He convinced the tribune to give him permission to speak to the crowd publicly, to give his Christian apology.

Be prepared to
give an answer to
everyone who
asks you to give
the reason for the
hope that
you have.

1 Peter 3:15

With the crowd silenced, Paul launched into a defense of his message and calling, not by some erudite philosophical argument, but by a simple appeal to his own journey. Rehearsing his fine Jewish pedigree (born in Tarsus, trained by Gamaliel, and zealous for God), Paul explained that

his life's direction changed abruptly when he came face to face with the risen Christ on the Damascus road. That was the central piece of Paul's apology—recounting his personal encounter with Jesus. Everything else about his message and mission stemmed directly from that encounter. Such is the life-changing presence of Christ.

Apply the Word

We sometimes think that defending the faith requires academic degrees and impeccable logic. The use of the intellect certainly has its place, but notice Paul's argument: telling the story of his encounter with the life-giving Jesus. Our own faith story is a powerful witness. Be prepared to use yours this week if the opportunity arises.

Pray with Us

Moody's fall semester begins today! Let's use this opportunity to pray for our president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, who ushers in the new semester as he greets the students, faculty, and guests at Convocation.

Paul Before the Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish court in Jerusalem. Comprised of members of the priestly class of Sadducees and the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin had wide-ranging authority in matters of Jewish law. In cases of capital offense, the Romans could carry out the Sanhedrin's verdict.

Wanting to learn more about why Paul was being accused, the Roman tribune brought the case before the Jewish Sanhedrin. But what was intended as a procedure to gain clarity produced only further complications. They disagreed with Paul's statement: "I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (23:6).

Because the Sadducees denied the possibility of resurrection and the Pharisees affirmed it, Paul's proclamation may have been an attempt to stall the proceedings with internal debate. But on another level, Paul had identified the central claim of the Christian

message: the resurrection of the crucified Messiah was the foundation of the Christian faith (see 1 Cor. 15:17).

Nevertheless, the rupture of chaos required that Paul be taken back to the barracks for his own safety. And that night, God delivered a brief but profound message: "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (23:11). In other words, despite the surrounding chaos, the endangerment of Paul's life, and the vulnerability he experienced at the hands of Jews and Romans alike, God had a plan for him—

to testify in Rome.

What followed—the plot against his life, the discovery of the plot, the tribune's transfer of Paul to the governor Felix—all played a role in God's providential leading of Paul to Rome. The circumstances seemed perilous and confusing, but God's word to Paul would be his anchor.

Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.

Acts 23:11

Apply the Word

Paul's experience has application to our own lives. We may not have a direct message from God, but His promise of presence and purpose in our lives is true for each of us, despite the surrounding chaos and uncertainty. Share that lesson with someone you know today who needs to be reminded of God's providential care in all our circumstances.

Pray with Us

Please pray today for Communications professors in the Undergraduate School. Ask the Lord for effective ministry among students for Angela Brown, Rosalie de Rosset, David Fetzer, Bob Gustafson, and Karyn Hecht.

Paul Before Felix in Caesarea

Anyone who follows the news around the world knows that justice does not always prevail in the courts. Corrupt judges and dishonest witnesses can all lead to a miscarriage of justice. The same was true in Paul's day.

Now in Caesarea, Paul stood trial before Felix as his accusers presented their case. First, Paul was accused of being a riotous troublemaker. This was a political accusation, and a serious charge in the eyes of the Romans. Second, Paul was accused of being "a ring-leader of the Nazarene sect" (v. 5), a social charge of being a separatist in an empire that valued order. Third, Paul was charged with attempting to desecrate the temple, a weighty religious charge for which the Romans gave the Jews authority to prosecute.

Paul quickly pointed out the lack of evidence for these accusations. First, Paul denied the charges of being a troublemaker. His desire to worship

God stirred up no crowds and created no disturbance. Second, he was no separatist. Admittedly, he was "a follower of the Way" (v. 14), but as a faithful Jew who adhered to the law and prophets. In following Christ, he was in fact following God's promises in Scripture.

For the LORD is a
God of justice.
Blessed are all
who wait for him!

Isaiah 30:18

Third, Paul denied desecrating the temple. He went to the temple ceremonially clean, and came to Jerusalem only to worship and to present an offering to the poor. In fact, none of their accusations had

any evidence, and the real accusers (certain Asian Jews) were not even there!

The case was clear, but instead of acquitting Paul, Felix kept him under house arrest for two years—he hoped for a bribe and wanted to curry favor with the Jews. A miscarriage of justice, to be sure, but as we will see, God's plans were not to be thwarted.

Apply the Word

In our fallen world, there is much injustice, and it is easy to become discouraged in the face of such unfairness. If you struggle with this, make a list of the injustices you see in your life and the world and then give those to God in prayer. Be reminded that despite the wrongs done, God will ultimately bring about justice for those who wait for Him (Isa. 30:18).

Pray with Us

Please continue in prayer for the undergraduate Communications professors on Moody's Chicago campus—Brian Kammerzelt, Maria Mocuta, Jill White, and Kelli Worrall—as they impart the wisdom of God's Word to their students.

Paul Before Festus

When the governor Felix was called to Rome to defend his handling of certain matters in Caesarea, he was replaced by Porcius Festus. Although Festus was a more moderate ruler, his inexperience also made him a fickle and indecisive governor, as today's passage reveals.

With Festus visiting Jerusalem, the Jews once again petitioned to have Paul on trial before the Sanhedrin. At first, Festus stood firm and required them to come to Caesarea to present their case. Once in Caesarea, the Jewish accusers "brought many serious charges against [Paul], but they could not prove them" (v. 7). Paul's defense was the same as before—he had done nothing wrong against law, the temple, or Caesar. And here we begin to see Festus's indecisiveness.

Instead of declaring Paul's innocence, he first tried to shift his responsibility by moving the trial to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Paul quickly exercised his

right as a Roman citizen and appealed his case to Caesar. Even then, Festus had to consult others before agreeing to the appeal. Then, perhaps still uncertain of how to proceed, Festus consulted with the visiting Agrippa and Bernice. He again revealed his inexperience and his ignorance of the Jews by summarizing the situation as a case "about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive" (v. 19).

Festus tried to paint a favorable picture of his handling of the case, but his own words betray his inexperience: "I was at a loss how to investigate such matters" (v. 20). Under the pretext of trying to discern the charges against Paul, Festus arranged a formal hearing before Agrippa and Bernice. Once again, the world's leadership was less than admirable, but God's earlier promise to take Paul to Rome was slowly being fulfilled.

The One
enthroned in
heaven laughs . . .
saying, "I have
installed my king
on Zion, my holy
mountain."

Psalm 2:4–6

Apply the Word

It is easy to focus on our earthly leaders as the only hope for righteousness and justice in the land and miss the bigger truth that God is ultimately in control. Psalm 2 speaks especially well to these themes. Read and meditate on that Scripture, and give thanks to God that our hope does not rest on earthly kings and governors but on His righteous rule.

Pray with Us

Would you commit to prayer the ministry of Stephen Brasel, Gayla Gates, and Holly Porter in Counseling Services? We praise God for the godly advice, encouragement, and prayer they give to hurting students.

Paul Before Agrippa

The family of Agrippa II had an infamous notoriety among Jews and Christians. His lineage included Herod the Great who tried to kill the infant Jesus, Herod who beheaded John the Baptist and Herod Agrippa who killed James the son of Zebedee. Now Agrippa II himself presided over Paul's trial.

Paul did not back down from his proclamation of God's work of salvation. Much of Paul's message has been recorded in his earlier speeches, but two important themes emerge from today's reading. First, notice Paul's affirmation of the connection between Christ and God's earlier promises to Israel. The hope of a Messiah and of the resurrection (the hope for which Paul now stood on trial) was fulfilled in Jesus. There is no contradiction between the Christian gospel and God's word in the Old Testament, for as Paul said: "I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen" (v. 22).

I am saying
nothing beyond
what the prophets
and Moses said
would happen.

Acts 26:22

Second, Paul's speech highlighted the purpose of God—salvation for the whole world. The reason for sending Christ, and calling Paul as apostle, was "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light . . . so that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (v. 18).

God's salvation in Christ was always designed for the world, not just Jews, and as Paul asserted, he was being a faithful Jew in proclaiming God's rescue of both Jews and Gentiles alike.

In the end, not all who heard Paul responded favorably. Festus found his message absurd, and Agrippa chastised Paul for trying to convert him. Paul responded correctly: he desired nothing more than the salvation of all who heard and preached faithfully. The rest must be left to the Spirit to work upon the hearts of those who hear.

Apply the Word

Sometimes we lose sight of the big picture of God's saving work—that salvation in Christ is organically connected to all that God has done beforehand. Moody Publishers offers resources to help with further study, including a series by pastor Colin Smith, *Unlocking the Bible Story*, four volumes that trace the story of the Bible and how Christ redeems a fallen world.

Pray with Us

Please join us in praying for the Student Services department on our campus in Spokane, WA. Tina Armagost, Brian Jaworski, and Daniel Ward rely on the prayer support of the Moody family as they help students grow spiritually.

Voyage to Rome

Most action films have a climactic moment of potential peril, great suspense, and heroic efforts. As we come near the end of the book of Acts, this account is so accurate and detailed that the peril, suspense, and heroic efforts in the scenes nearly jump off the page.

Paul had appealed to Caesar and was now ordered to sail to Rome in a prison ship under the centurion Julius. Notice: Paul, the great apostle of the early church and author of over half the New Testament writings, was now just one prisoner among many, an ordinary man subject to hunger, danger, and shipwreck. But as we will see, Paul was also a man emboldened by the presence of God and His promises.

Trouble soon struck as the ship quickly ran into a terrible storm. Normal seafaring actions were taken—they raised the lifeboat, secured the hull, and threw overboard unnecessary

cargo. Nevertheless, things looked so grim that “we finally gave up all hope of being saved” (v. 20). In that desperate situation, Paul the prisoner spoke to encourage his fellow passengers of the hope of safety.

Paul’s words of encouragement were not empty wishful thinking, but grounded on God’s direct promise to Paul in the previous night. God wanted Paul in Rome, and He would bring all passengers there safely as well. Paul’s bold proclamation to the crew was evidence of his faith in God’s word.

Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Finally, after fourteen days of storm and no food, they came close to land. Some tried to sneak away in lifeboats, but Paul again warned that everyone must stay on board to be saved. Once again, relying on the promise of God, Paul encouraged them to eat. And when daylight came, “everyone reached land safely” (v. 44), just as God had promised.

Apply the Word

The setting of today’s reading is danger, but the theme is one of encouragement. Paul repeatedly encouraged his fellow travelers. Use the promises and encouragements of God’s Word today to encourage those you know who may feel despair in the face of difficult circumstances. God does not promise an easy life, but He does promise His presence.

Pray with Us

Please include in your prayers the staff of the Telecommunications department: Scott Schaeffer and Daniel Schombert. Their day-to-day managing of our phone systems is an important contribution to the smooth running of Moody’s operations on our Chicago campus.

Arrival at Rome: The Message Continues

Aidan was a seventh-century missionary in Scotland. He established a monastery on Lindisfarne island off the east coast of northern England, and he was well-known for his diligence in spreading the gospel, his kindness and patience with others, and his zeal in establishing churches and schools throughout the region. Because of his efforts, Aidan came to be known as “the apostle of the English.”

Like Aidan in his missionary zeal, Paul came to be known as the “apostle to the Gentiles” as he worked ceaselessly to spread the gospel wherever he went. Shipwrecked on Malta, Paul and the others received great kindness and hospitality from the islanders. But Paul also spent the next three months ministering to the sick and preaching the gospel.

Soon after, God finally brought Paul and company to Rome where they were greeted and encouraged by many Christians who came to welcome

them. Again, Paul used the opportunity to preach Christ. Calling together the Jewish leaders, he explained himself and his message about “the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus” (v. 23).

He proclaimed
the kingdom of
God and taught
about the Lord
Jesus Christ—with
all boldness and
without hindrance!

Acts 28:31

Unfortunately, as in the past, not all who heard the message believed. There was great division and even animosity among the Jews toward the message. Over time, Paul applied the stinging passage of Isaiah 6 to them: because of the hardness of their hearts, they would be hearers

who did not understand and those who saw but did not perceive.

Yet despite the opposition, Paul turned to the Gentiles, and the book of Acts ends on a positive note: Paul “proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (v. 31).

Apply the Word

This month’s study in Acts has been a breathtaking glimpse at the spread of the gospel in the world through the Spirit’s work in the church. Despite repeated opposition, many came to faith as the message of Christ carried forth. Reflect on the lessons God has taught you this month, and give Him praise for the continual spread of the gospel throughout the world.

Pray with Us

Concluding our Bible study this month, let’s praise God for His eternal Word and for His church. As you go to church this Sunday, thank Him for leading you to your local congregation and for making you part of the *koinonia* of all the believers through the ages.

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