

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 19: The First Missionary Journey

Acts 13:1-52

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 13 launches the first missionary journey and contains one of Paul's great sermons. What is doctrinally at stake includes the mission of the church and the Spirit's call to send workers, Jesus as the promised Savior of David's line fulfilling the Scriptures, justification and forgiveness through Christ rather than the law of Moses, the dividing response of faith and rejection, and the relationship between God's purpose and genuine human response in salvation.

Two points need careful handling. When Paul says everyone who believes is freed from what the law could not free them from (vv. 38-39), present this as the forgiveness available through Christ alone, received by an obedient faith as taught throughout Acts, not as salvation by faith only that strips away the response of baptism Paul himself obeyed. And when Luke says as many as were appointed to eternal life believed (v. 48), handle it carefully so as not to teach Calvinistic unconditional election; God's purpose and genuine human response work together, and the gospel call is real and universal. The heaviest doctrinal weight falls on this question of God's appointment and the genuine response of faith.

Yet aim at the heart. This chapter calls students to embrace the church's mission, to treasure Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises, to rest in His forgiveness rather than their own performance, to guard against jealousy, and to be filled with joy and the Spirit even amid opposition.

Question 1

Student Question:

The Holy Spirit said, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them, and the church sent them out (vv. 1-3). What does this teach about the mission of the church and about how God calls and sends workers for the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This passage marks a deliberate, Spirit-directed launch of cross-cultural mission. The church was worshiping and fasting when the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to a specific work, and the church responded by fasting, praying, laying on hands, and sending them. Mission flowed out of worship and was directed by God.

This teaches that the church exists in part for mission. The gospel is not meant to stay where it is; it is to be carried out to those who have not heard. The Great Commission, to make disciples

of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20), is being put into action here, and the church takes deliberate steps to send workers out.

It also teaches how God calls and sends. The call came from the Holy Spirit, recognized and confirmed by the church. God still calls workers for His harvest, and He works through the church to recognize, equip, send, and support them. The whole body is involved: some go, and others send and support, but all share in the mission.

Help students see mission as central, not peripheral, to the church's purpose. A congregation that turns inward and forgets the lost has lost something essential. The Antioch church models a people whose worship overflowed into sending the gospel outward, and who gave their best for the work.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church existing in part for mission
- The Great Commission put into action (Matthew 28:19-20)
- God calling workers and the church confirming and sending
- Mission flowing out of worship and prayer
- The whole body sharing in the mission, going and sending

Discussion Prompts

- What does this teach about the church's mission?
- How does God call and send workers for the gospel?
- Why is mission central rather than peripheral to the church?

Question 2

Student Question:

The Antioch church gave up two of its finest leaders to send them into mission (vv. 1-3). What is your part in the spread of the gospel, whether going, giving, praying, or supporting? Where might God be calling you to invest more in His mission?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Sending Barnabas and Saul cost the Antioch church something real; they gave up two of their most gifted leaders for the sake of the wider mission. Mission always costs the sending church, and every believer has a part to play in it.

Invite students to consider their part. Not everyone is called to go as a missionary, but everyone is called to share in the mission. Some go; others give financially to support those who go; others pray faithfully for the work; others support and encourage workers; all witness where they are. The mission depends on the whole body playing its part.

Help students avoid two errors: assuming mission is someone else's job, and assuming that only those who go are really involved. Those who send and support share in the fruit. Paul later told the Philippians that their partnership in the gospel and their gifts made them sharers in his work (Philippians 1:5; 4:14-17).

Encourage one concrete step. Where might God be calling me to invest more in His mission, through giving, praying, supporting a worker, or considering whether He might be calling me to go? The Antioch church gave its best; what am I giving to the spread of the gospel beyond myself?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Mission costing the sending church
- Every believer's part: going, giving, praying, supporting, witnessing
- Senders and supporters sharing in the fruit (Philippians 1:5; 4:14-17)
- The mission depending on the whole body

Discussion Prompts

- What is your part in the spread of the gospel?
- Do you tend to see mission as your job or someone else's?
- Where might God be calling you to invest more in His mission?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul preached that God had brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, from David's offspring, just as He had promised, and raised Him from the dead as the Scriptures foretold (vv. 23-37). How does Paul present Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises, and why does this matter for our confidence in God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's sermon traces the long story of God's dealings with Israel and shows that it all leads to Jesus. Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised (v. 23). Jesus is the promised Son of David, the fulfillment of God's covenant and the hope of Israel.

Paul grounds the resurrection in prophecy, citing Psalm 2 (you are my Son), Isaiah 55 (the holy and sure blessings of David), and Psalm 16 (you will not let your Holy One see corruption). David died and saw corruption, Paul argues, but Jesus did not; God raised Him, fulfilling the ancient promises. The whole Old Testament was pointing forward to this.

This matters for our confidence in God because it shows His faithfulness. God made promises across centuries, and He kept every one of them in Christ. All the promises of God find their Yes

in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20). The God who fulfilled His ancient word can be trusted to fulfill every promise that remains.

Help students treasure Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises. Jesus is not an afterthought or a backup plan but the goal toward which all of Scripture moved. And the faithfulness God showed in keeping His promises to send a Savior assures us that He will keep His promises to us, of forgiveness, of His presence, and of eternal life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the promised Savior of David's line (v. 23)
- The resurrection fulfilling prophecy (Psalm 2; 16; Isaiah 55)
- The Old Testament pointing forward to Christ
- God's faithfulness in keeping His promises (2 Corinthians 1:20)
- Christ as the goal of all Scripture

Discussion Prompts

- How does Paul present Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises?
- Why does God's faithfulness in keeping His promises matter for us?
- How does this strengthen your confidence in God?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul rooted the gospel in God's long faithfulness to His promises across centuries (vv. 16-23). How does remembering God's track record of keeping His promises help you trust Him with the promises you are still waiting to see fulfilled? Where do you need that assurance now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's sermon is, among other things, a recital of God's faithfulness across generations, choosing, delivering, sustaining, and finally sending the Savior. The God of the gospel is a God with a long, unbroken record of keeping His word.

This track record is meant to steady us when we wait on promises not yet fulfilled. We hold promises of God's presence, His provision, His working all things for good, His return, and the resurrection. In the waiting, doubt can creep in. Remembering how faithfully God has kept His promises before strengthens our trust that He will keep them still.

Invite students to recall God's faithfulness in their own lives and in Scripture. The God who kept His promises to Abraham, David, and the prophets, and supremely in sending Jesus, has also been faithful in our own stories. His past faithfulness is the ground of present trust.

Encourage students to bring a current area of waiting to this assurance. Where do I need to trust God with a promise I cannot yet see fulfilled? Remembering His track record, I can wait with hope rather than anxiety, confident that the God who has never failed His word will not begin with me.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's long track record of faithfulness as ground for trust
- Remembering God's faithfulness to steady us in waiting
- Past faithfulness as the basis of present trust
- Waiting on God's promises with hope

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's track record of keeping promises help you trust Him?
- Where are you waiting on a promise you cannot yet see fulfilled?
- How can remembering His faithfulness change the way you wait?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul declared that through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, and by Him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which they could not be freed by the law of Moses (vv. 38-39). What does this teach about the limits of the law and about the forgiveness and freedom found only in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul reaches the climax of his sermon with a stunning declaration about forgiveness and freedom. Through Jesus, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, and by Him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. The law could not do what Christ does.

This teaches the limits of the law. The law of Moses was holy and good, but it could not justify or forgive. It could reveal sin and condemn it, but it could not take it away or make a person righteous before God. As Paul writes elsewhere, by works of the law no human being will be justified (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16). The law diagnosed the disease but could not cure it.

What the law could not do, Christ does. Through Him forgiveness is proclaimed and freedom is granted, freedom from the guilt and condemnation of sin that the law could never remove. This is the good news: in Christ there is the forgiveness and justification the law could never provide.

Teach this carefully so it is not misunderstood as salvation by faith only that dispenses with obedience. When Paul says everyone who believes is freed, he speaks of the faith that responds to the gospel in the way Acts everywhere describes, the faith that repents, confesses Christ, and

is baptized into Him. Paul himself, who preached this freedom, had been told to rise and be baptized and wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). The point is not that obedience is unnecessary, but that the source of forgiveness is Christ, not law-keeping. We are freed by Him, through an obedient faith, from what no amount of law-keeping could ever free us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The law of Moses unable to justify or forgive (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16)
- The law revealing and condemning sin but not removing it
- Forgiveness and freedom found only in Christ (vv. 38-39)
- Justification through Christ, not law-keeping
- Believing as the obedient faith taught throughout Acts (Acts 22:16)

Discussion Prompts

- What could the law of Moses not do?
- What does Christ provide that the law never could?
- How do we understand believing here in light of the whole pattern of Acts?

Question 6

Student Question:

The law could never free people from the burden of their sin, but Christ does (vv. 38-39). Do you ever fall into trying to earn God's acceptance by your performance, your rule-keeping, your religious effort? How would resting in Christ's forgiveness change the way you relate to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's contrast between the law and Christ exposes a tendency in every religious heart: the impulse to earn God's acceptance by our own performance. We slip into treating our standing with God as something we must achieve through rule-keeping, religious effort, and moral striving.

Invite honest reflection. Do I relate to God as though His acceptance of me depends on my performance? Do I feel close to Him when I have done well and distant when I have failed? Do I carry a quiet burden of never quite measuring up? This is the bondage the law could not remove, and the very thing Christ frees us from.

The gospel offers a different basis for our standing with God: not our performance, but Christ's forgiveness. We are accepted not because we have earned it but because Christ has provided it. This does not make obedience unimportant, but it means our obedience flows from acceptance already given, not from the desperate effort to earn it.

Encourage students to rest in Christ's forgiveness. To relate to God on the basis of grace rather than performance transforms everything: it replaces anxiety with peace, striving with gratitude,

and fear with love. We obey not to earn His acceptance but because we are already His beloved children, freed from what the law could never free us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The impulse to earn God's acceptance by performance
- The bondage of relating to God through our own measuring up
- Standing with God based on Christ's forgiveness, not our performance
- Obedience flowing from acceptance, not earning it

Discussion Prompts

- Do you try to earn God's acceptance by your performance?
- How does that show up in the way you relate to God?
- How would resting in Christ's forgiveness change things?

Question 7

Student Question:

When Paul preached, the Gentiles rejoiced and glorified the word, while the jealous leaders contradicted and reviled him (vv. 44-48). What does this dividing response teach about the gospel, and how did jealousy harden the hearts of those who rejected it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The gospel always divides. The same message that brought joy to the Gentiles provoked fury in the jealous leaders. Some received the word gladly; others contradicted and reviled. This is the recurring pattern: the gospel is a fragrance of life to some and of death to others (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

Notice what drove the rejection: when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy (v. 45). It was not that they had refuted Paul's message; they were threatened by his success and the Gentiles' inclusion. Jealousy, not honest disagreement, hardened their hearts against the truth.

This teaches how sin can blind us to the gospel. The leaders did not reject Christ because the evidence was against Him, but because their hearts were gripped by envy and self-interest. When our hearts are set on protecting our status, our comfort, or our pride, we can find ourselves opposing the very truth that could save us.

Help students see both realities. The gospel will divide, and we should not be surprised when it provokes opposition. And we should examine our own hearts, for the sins that hardened these leaders, jealousy, pride, self-interest, can harden us too. The honest, humble heart receives the word with joy; the jealous, self-protective heart contradicts and reviles.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel dividing those who hear it (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)
- Jealousy, not honest disagreement, hardening the leaders' hearts (v. 45)
- Sin blinding people to the truth of the gospel
- The humble heart receiving the word, the self-protective heart rejecting it

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the gospel provoke such different responses?
- How did jealousy harden the hearts of those who rejected it?
- What sins can blind us to truth we would otherwise receive?

Question 8

Student Question:

The leaders rejected the gospel because they were filled with jealousy at others' success and inclusion (v. 45). Where does jealousy or envy stir in your own heart, and how can it quietly harden you against God's work in others? How do you guard against it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The jealousy that hardened the leaders is a sin we all know. We feel it when others succeed, when they receive attention or blessing we wanted, when someone we look down on is included or honored. Envy is one of the most corrosive and common of sins, and it often hides beneath respectable surfaces.

Invite honest reflection. Where does jealousy stir in me? Do I resent others' success, gifts, recognition, or blessings? Do I feel diminished when someone else is honored? Am I threatened by God's work in people I would not have chosen? Jealousy can quietly turn us against the very things God is doing.

Envy is dangerous because it distorts our perception and hardens our hearts. The leaders could not rejoice in the Gentiles' salvation because envy blinded them to its beauty. Likewise, jealousy can make us critical, resentful, and resistant to God's work when it blesses others instead of us.

Encourage students to guard against envy. The antidotes are gratitude for what God has given us, genuine rejoicing in others' good (Romans 12:15), contentment in God's provision, and humility about our own place. When we learn to celebrate God's work in others rather than resent it, jealousy loses its grip, and our hearts stay soft toward what God is doing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jealousy and envy as corrosive, common sins
- Envy distorting perception and hardening the heart

- Rejoicing with those who rejoice as the antidote (Romans 12:15)
- Gratitude, contentment, and humility guarding against envy

Discussion Prompts

- Where does jealousy or envy stir in your heart?
- How can envy harden you against God's work in others?
- What helps you guard against it and rejoice in others' good?

Question 9

Student Question:

Luke writes that when the Gentiles heard the gospel, they rejoiced and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed (v. 48). How should we understand this statement about being appointed to eternal life, in light of the genuine, universal gospel call and the real human response God requires?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, because verse 48 is sometimes used to teach Calvinistic unconditional election, the idea that God, before creation and apart from any human response, unconditionally selected certain individuals for salvation and passed over the rest, and that only those secretly predestined can or will believe. We must handle this verse carefully, in light of the whole of Scripture, and show that it does not teach that doctrine.

First, consider the immediate context. In the very same passage, Paul holds the Jews responsible for their unbelief: since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles (v. 46). Their rejection was their own doing, a genuine choice for which they were accountable. If their unbelief was their own responsibility, then the gospel call was real and resistible, not a matter of secret decrees. This rules out the idea that people are simply programmed to believe or disbelieve.

Second, consider the whole teaching of Scripture, which the boundaries of sound doctrine require us to honor. God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Christ died for all (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 John 2:2). The gospel invitation is universal: whoever will may come (Revelation 22:17), and whoever believes will be saved (John 3:16; Mark 16:16). A doctrine that says God unconditionally predestined most of humanity to be lost, with no genuine chance to respond, contradicts these plain teachings and the very heart of God revealed at the cross.

So how do we read appointed to eternal life? The word describes those who were disposed, set in order, or ranged toward eternal life. In contrast to the Jews who judged themselves unworthy and thrust the word aside, these Gentiles were rightly disposed toward the message, they

received it gladly and believed. Their believing was a genuine response, not a coerced outcome. God's purpose and their faith met; those who were appointed, that is, those who responded rightly and were thereby placed by God among the heirs of eternal life, believed. The verse affirms God's sovereign role in salvation without denying the real, accountable response of faith that the whole book of Acts requires.

Help students hold the biblical balance. Salvation is entirely of God's grace; no one earns it or boasts in it. God has a sovereign purpose, and He appoints to eternal life all who come to Christ through faith. But the gospel call is genuine and universal, human beings are truly able to respond or resist, and God holds people responsible for their choice, just as Paul held the unbelieving Jews responsible here. This is the consistent teaching of Scripture, and it guards us from the error of Calvinistic unconditional election while preserving the glorious truth that our salvation rests on God's grace and purpose, not our merit.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unbelieving Jews held responsible for thrusting the word aside (v. 46)
- The genuine, resistible, and universal gospel call
- God's desire for all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9)
- Christ's death for all (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 John 2:2)
- Appointed describing those rightly disposed who responded in faith
- God's sovereign purpose joined with genuine human response
- The rejection of Calvinistic unconditional election

Discussion Prompts

- How does verse 46, holding the unbelievers responsible, shape how we read verse 48?
- What does the rest of Scripture teach about God's desire and the universal gospel call?
- How can we affirm God's sovereign grace without denying genuine human response?

Question 10

Student Question:

Despite fierce opposition that drove them from the city, the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (vv. 50-52). Looking back over this whole chapter, name one specific way the Lord is calling you to grow, in mission, in resting in His forgiveness, or in joyful faithfulness, and what is one step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone draws the lesson to a personal response, anchored in the disciples' remarkable joy. Driven out and persecuted, they were nonetheless filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Their joy did not depend on circumstances but on the Lord and His work.

Invite each person to name one concrete step. Perhaps it is to invest more in the church's mission, to treasure Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises, to rest in His forgiveness rather than their own performance, to guard against jealousy, or to pursue joy and faithfulness amid difficulty.

Keep the focus on Spirit-given joy. The chapter shows that this joy is possible even under opposition, because it flows from the Lord and from sharing in His mission. Transformation looks like a life increasingly marked by such joy and faithfulness.

Close by reminding students that the same Spirit who called and sent Barnabas and Saul, opened hearts to the gospel, and filled persecuted disciples with joy is at work in them, drawing them into His mission and forming them into joyful, faithful servants.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spirit-given joy independent of circumstances (v. 52)
- Personal response to the call to mission, forgiveness, and faithfulness
- Joy flowing from the Lord and from sharing His mission
- Faithfulness sustained under opposition

Discussion Prompts

- What most challenged or moved you in this chapter?
- What specific step toward mission, resting in forgiveness, or joyful faithfulness will you take?
- How can this group encourage and pray for you?