



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

FEBRUARY 26 2022

the epicenter for missions

Scripture Story: Acts 11:19-26; Acts 13; Acts 14:1-26.

Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders)*, chapters 16-18.

Key Text: Acts 13:38, 39.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Can you imagine what a daunting task the early church may have felt to spread the gospel to the world? Well, actually, Luke doesn't tell us that they viewed it as daunting at all! What is clear is that in the midst of persecution and hardships, these early believers were full of joy—and they were unstoppable. They were so infected with the love of Christ that their enthusiasm was contagious. When we speak of mission work today, we seem to feel the weight of all that needs to be done “so that we can go home.” But that attitude does not seem to exist in these chapters of Acts as we read of the lead-up to and the first missionary journey of Paul.

The believers in Antioch were so infectious in their faith that two interesting events occurred: (1) News of their faith reached Jerusalem, and a group of elders came to check them out. (2) The people of Antioch coined the name “Christians” to describe these believers.

God picked just the right place to launch His people full throttle into missionary work. Antioch was at the crossroads of the Roman Empire. The believers there were a multicultural, international group. And they appointed two perfectly suited individuals to “go”: Barnabas, an elder filled with compassion and with the gift of encouragement; and Paul, a highly educated Pharisee and Jew who was also a Roman citizen and a Hellenist. What a team! What a community of believers!

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Explore the challenges of taking the gospel message to nonbelievers. (*Know*)
- Discover how God empowers His messengers through the Holy Spirit and through the faith community. (*Feel*)
- Ask God to reveal His purpose for their life and commit to following that call. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

The Church, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 12

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to humanity, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel (Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 19:3-7; Matt. 16:13-20; 18:18; 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38-42; 7:38; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11; 5:23-27; Col. 1:17, 18; 1 Peter 2:9).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. Ask the students whether they took time on their own to finish the sentences. If not, then

do the exercise together and discuss the answers.

Ask: “Did it surprise any of you to learn that we still have more than half the world to evangelize 21 centuries later? Explain.”

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

A little more than 100 years ago, near Detroit, Michigan, a young man had a factory that built a new-fangled invention called the “automobile,” more derisively referred to as a “horseless carriage.” The new invention allowed people to travel farther and with less concern than with a horse. The idea of driving yourself around caught on quickly—especially among the affluent.

But that wasn’t enough for Henry Ford: he wanted millions of people to be able to afford to buy his car. He refined the manufacturing process until automobiles could be assembled quickly on a production line. Using standardized parts and, initially, only one paint color, Ford’s “Model A” and subsequent “Model T” brought the price of driving within reach of those millions of people which, of course, led to the auto-dependent world in which we find ourselves today. But Ford started with a goal: that his product would have that wide reach.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Nearly 2,000 years ago, the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth set for themselves a huge challenge: to bring a new means of salvation and being right with God to a world desperately in need of both. You can live in many parts of the world without an automobile, but you can’t see God without Jesus. The disciples used themselves and their lives to bring this message to the people of their day. Now, it’s our turn to live out the Great Commission and make the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob accessible to all. What means and methods does our church have available today to see the Great Commission fulfilled in our lifetime? How has God moved upon you to participate in this great ministry?

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• Time and again throughout the Bible, we see how God has taken bleak circumstances and turned them around for His purpose and, yes, for His glory. Whether it’s Joseph languishing in a pit on his way to Egyptian slavery and a prison cell, or Moses’ exile from the palace of Pharaoh, or, as we see today, the scattering of the early believers from Jerusalem, there’s a way God can turn tragedy into opportunity. Write down an example of such a change from your life, or the life of someone close to you.

- The people in Antioch who believed weren’t just Jews, but also Gentiles—people for whom the God of Israel was supposedly a stranger and unapproachable without their first being circumcised and brought into the Jewish fold. But these self-appointed evangelists didn’t use yardsticks; they just told the good news, and people responded. Do you see a similar opportunity around you today? Are there groups of students or coworkers you can go to and reach?
- In Antioch Saul and Barnabas spent a year teaching others before they were called to the mission field. Is there preparation you might be doing now to make yourself ready for what the Lord might have you do in a year or two?
- Throughout their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas went first to the local synagogues and spoke to those most likely to respond. Yet others were hearing and responding as well. Is there a parallel you can think of in your experience? Does your church’s outreach have unintended, but pleasant, consequences?
- In Pisidian Antioch the disciples spoke so well that they were invited back for a second Sabbath’s worship to discuss their ideas. Can you think of ways to express your faith that keep people asking questions?

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Acts 7; Acts 8:1-3; Acts 9; Acts 18:1-10; Romans 15:14-22; Ephesians 3:7-13; 1 Thesalonians 2:1-12.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

It is interesting to see how God works as we see Saul of Tarsus come to be chosen to team up with Barnabas to launch the first missionary journey. First



Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Sentence Openers

A great way to warm the students up to discussing the topics at hand without having them feel like you're pressing them to participate is to prepare a few sentence openers before class. Then when you are ready to open up a discussion time, start with your sentence opener, but don't finish the sentence. Ask the students to complete the sentence. This should help get the group buzzing in no time.

RABBI 101

of all, the persecution of Stephen is mentioned as a reason why the believers had fled Judea and scattered throughout the region. Remember, Saul was a ringleader in persecuting the early church, and history reveals that he stood holding the tunics of those who stoned Stephen to death. While Saul was headed off to chase down the believers as they fled Jerusalem and Judea, God found him, blinded him, and later told him that he would take the message of salvation to the Gentiles.

Paul was uniquely qualified for the task; first, because God had called him, and second, because he was a Pharisee and leader among the Jews, but also a Roman citizen. He was a Hellenist. He didn't live in the confines of a Jewish-only community, but was raised a Jew among the "heathen." He was both religious and worldly in his outlook. He spoke Greek and Hebrew.

It is also noteworthy that God launched the missionary work from Antioch. This community of believers was international and multicultural in their makeup.

Both the body of believers and the individuals within that body were united in their joy to spread the word throughout the whole region, not being intimidated or put off by cultural or ethnic differences. Christ had come to them, and their joy was such that they wanted to take Him to others without any barriers in their mind about the "heathen."

Another irony is how Paul handled a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus (also known as Elymas) while he, Barnabas, and John Mark were on the island of Paphos. When Bar-Jesus tried to stop

them from sharing the message of salvation with the governor there, Paul rebuked him and told him that he would be struck with blindness. Just as God stopped Paul from interfering in the spread of the gospel, Paul called upon God to do the same thing to Elymas. Elymas wouldn't be permanently blind, but how like God is that! The governor received salvation and perhaps later Elymas himself came around to the truth.

God certainly has a highly developed sense of irony, and He uses all our experiences to strengthen our faith when we are heavily tried and bombarded by Satan. When He calls us, He equips us to serve Him, and this strengthens our faith and our joy in our relationship with Him.

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Teaching From the Lesson

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**

Invite students to share the Key Text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

- **Further Insight**

Ask them how the quote in Further Insight conveys the point of the story in this lesson.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Distribute paper and pencils to the students. Ask them to think about the people they come in contact with outside of their church family. As individuals come to mind, ask them to write their names down. Then ask them to write down anything they have done to express their faith with this person(s). Ask: "Do you make it a habit to pray for them? Do you share Christ openly and verbally? Or do you witness by example?" Encourage the students to intentionally commit themselves to witnessing to the nonbelievers in their lives.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The first-century believers were so infected with the love of Jesus that they couldn't keep quiet. Their joy spilled out into their community and into the regions beyond. In each city where Barnabas and Paul established a group of believers, whatever obstacles this group encountered, they remained firm in their faith. They were marked by their joy and by the encouragement and support they offered to Paul and Barnabas. In each place, Acts records that their numbers increased, and Paul and Barnabas appointed elders and deacons to care for the believers there. Each of these new churches offered comfort to the apostles, and they collected offerings for the believers in Jerusalem who were struggling. These acts were evidence of their newfound faith in Christ. Persecution didn't stop them, but only strengthened their ties to God and to each other. That's what the church at any age should look like.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 16-18.