

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

Week 5 | Unleashed though Opposed | Acts 12:25-15:35

We now reach a significant pivot in the unfolding of the story of God. The gospel has spread out from the Jews to the Gentile country—to Samaria. Peter, in a vision, realized that God intended the Kingdom expansion to embrace the Gentiles without requiring conformity to the Jewish law. Salvation is by faith in Christ, not by obeying the Jewish law. This gospel message is offered to Gentiles as well as Jews.

His vision was confirmed by the conversion of Cornelius, a God-fearing gentile, and his household. These Gentiles believed the gospel message and received the Holy Spirit in the same way as had the Jewish believers at Pentecost. Meanwhile because of the scattering of God's people, the gospel had spread to primarily Jews outside of Israel, but Gentiles had also begun to respond to the gospel, particularly in Antioch. At the end of chapter 12, the focus shifts from Peter's ministry and leadership to Paul's, as he and Barnabas embark on their first missionary journey out of Judea and Samaria. The spread of the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles and the ends of the earth begins.

1. OPPORTUNITY AND OPPOSITION LAUNCHED: Cyprus. Read Acts 12:25-13:12

- a) What was the process through which Paul and Barnabas began their first missionary journey? (13:1-3). What evidence do you see of the faith of the Antioch church?

- b) When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Cyprus, they encountered openness to the gospel, but also powerful opposition—something that would characterize this entire journey. How did they encounter openness? (13:4-7)

How did they encounter opposition? (13:8)

What was the source of Paul's power? What was the source of the sorcerer's power? (13:9-10)

How did God demonstrate His greater power? (13:11)

How did God use this opposition for the advancement of His kingdom? (13:12)

- c) Personal Reflection: We see a lot of opposition to Christianity in the world today. How does this account give you encouragement as you observe this ongoing opposition to the gospel?

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2. OPPORTUNITY AND OPPOSITION ESCALATE: Pisidian Antioch. Read Acts 13:13-52

- a) When Paul and Barnabas came to Pisidian Antioch, Paul was invited to give a sermon in the synagogue there. His message was comprehensive and powerful. Paul began with an account of God's actions on behalf of His people Israel. List the acts of God Paul mentions. (13:17-22)

This account encompasses most of Old Testament history in a nutshell. What strikes you about this story of centuries of God's care for His people?

- b) Beginning in verse 23, Paul's teaching shifts from reviewing Israel's history to proclaiming Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. What does Paul proclaim about Jesus?
- c) At this point, Paul connects the past with the present. His message contains three core assertions. With each, he states the assertion then elaborates and explains it. Record the core assertions below.
- 13:26 –
 - 13:32-33 –
 - 13:38-39 –

Comment here on why this is such amazing news.

- d) What opposition did Paul and Barnabas encounter on the following Sabbath? (13:44-45)

What was Paul's decision after being confronted by the Jews? (13:46)

How do you know this was not an impulsive decision? (13:47)

What were the results of this change in focus? (13:48-49)

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- e) Personal Reflection: The Word of the Lord continues to spread in spite of, or even in response to, the opposition. Paul, Barnabas, and the disciples simply keep on going with the joyous news of Jesus (13:51-52). How would you evaluate your perseverance and joy in the face of resistance or opposition to the gospel from those in your sphere of influence? How does this passage inspire you to grow?

3. OPPORTUNITY AND OPPOSITION EXPLODE: Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. Read Acts 14:1-28.

- a) Moving on to Iconium, they again started in the synagogue (a pattern they will keep). Although many responded, they again encountered opposition. What did Paul and Barnabas do, and how did God overcome the opposition using these men? (14:3)

What escalation event brought about their departure? (14:5-6)

What did they do when they left? (14:7)

- b) The next city highlighted is Lystra. Paul heals a lame man in a similar way to Peter in Acts 3:2-8. The response of the crowd was to elevate Paul and Barnabas to god-status. How did Paul and Barnabas seize opportunity out of the chaos? (14:14-17)

How did the opposition escalate even more? How was it overcome? (14:19-21a)

- c) Personal Reflection: What key truth about the reality of Kingdom expansion did Paul and Barnabas communicate to the new disciples as they circled back through the places they had been and headed for home? (14:22) How do their experiences of facing and seeing God overcome opposition encourage or challenge you in what you face?

4. OPPORTUNITY AND OPPOSITION WITHIN: The Jerusalem Council. Read Acts 15:1-35.

- a) Conflict doesn't only happen "out there" among people who don't know Jesus. Conflict and disagreement happens within the community of believers. A significant issue arose within the church at Antioch. The Jewish Christians who were teaching that the Gentiles had to be circumcised had assumed that, of course, these pagan believers had to live as the Jews did. How did they proceed with resolving it? (15:2)

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b) Examine the arguments that the Jerusalem Council considered in their deliberation.

- What evidence did Peter give? (15:7-9)
- What logical reason did Peter point out? (15:10)
- What belief assertion did Peter make that addressed the controversy? (15:11)
- How had God confirmed the Gentiles' freedom from the law through the experiences of Paul and Barnabas? (15:12)
- The final comments came from James. What was the essence and source of his input into the discussion? (15:15-18)

c) What decision was reached? (15:19)

What activities were to be avoided in order to eliminate unnecessary disunity among Jewish and Gentile believers? (15:20-21)

The careful decision of the Council was communicated via written correspondence and personal representatives, clear and personal. The church of Antioch received it gladly. The truth of the gospel was maintained, and the unity of the body preserved.

d) Personal Reflection: Quite noteworthy in a proceeding of this importance for the church is the fact that no direct, audible revelation from God is given. They didn't "hear" from God. They diligently and humbly sought God's perspective and looked to God's Word as their ultimate authority. How does that instruct you in evaluating life decisions?

5. Final Reflection: This week we've seen that the gospel powerfully advances against all opposition. Nothing can stand against it. In fact, God is able to use even the deceitful, schemes of evil men to ultimately serve His good purposes. That compelling truth should certainly rejuvenate our confidence in God and His message and reshape how we approach our lives each day. Take some time to ask God do so in your life.

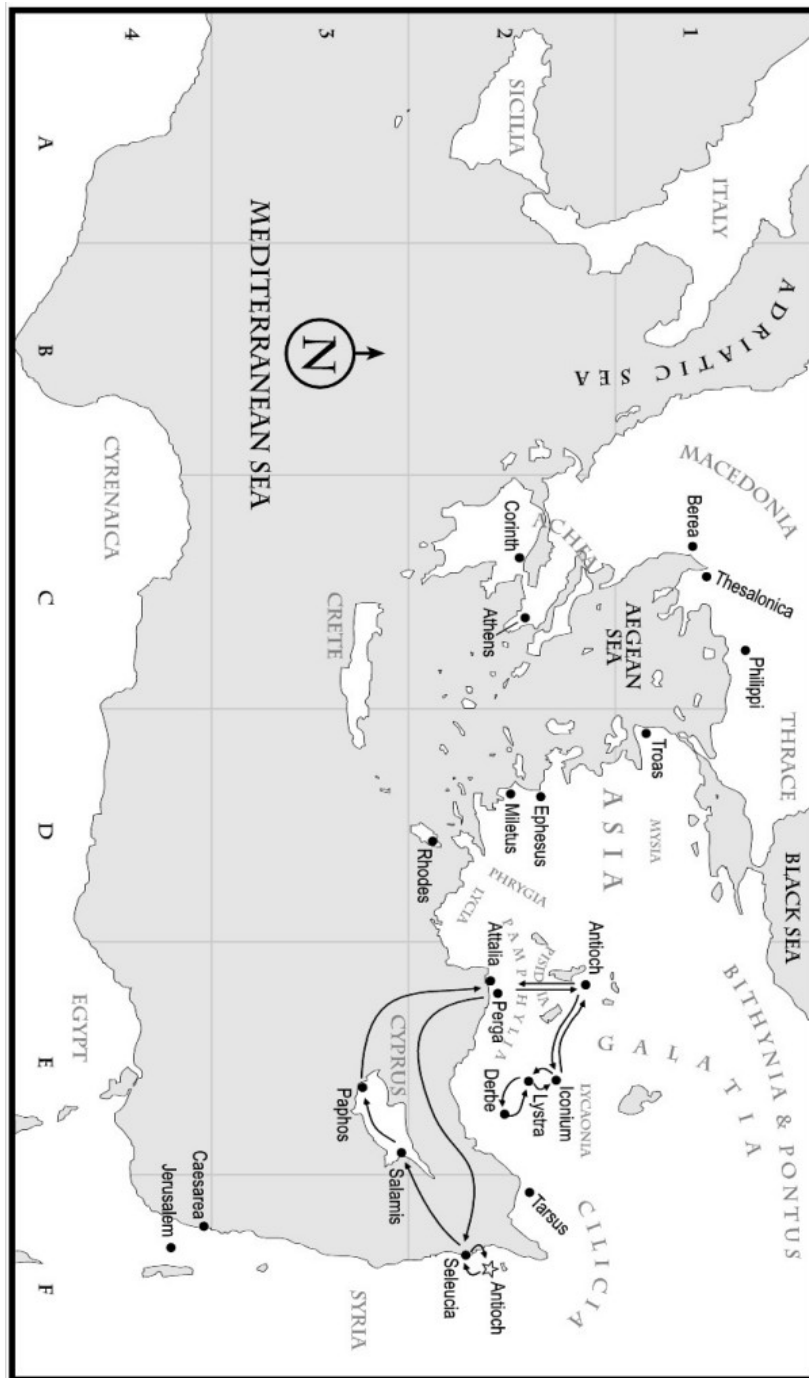
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