



THE
GOOD BOOK
CLUB

Participant Guide

The Good Book Club Bible Study for Luke-Acts

Introduction

We are so pleased you are participating in The Good Book Club, a joint venture between Forward Movement, Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry, and more than twenty-five organizations from around the Episcopal Church. The Good Book Club has been convened to encourage each of us to engage the Bible—the living and loving Word of God—on a daily basis. In our research with individuals, faith communities, and faith leaders, we have learned that daily Bible reading and study has the power to transform our relationship with Jesus.

Each Bible study is designed to explore a portion of the scripture readings for the week, to place them in historical and theological context, and to ask questions about what God is saying to us today. We encourage you to follow along with daily reading of Luke and Acts through Forward Day by Day (in print, on our website, as a podcast, or on our Forward Movement app). By the end of Pentecost, you will have read two complete books of the Bible!

As we endeavor to look and sound and love more like Jesus, reading the Bible becomes our greatest tool for discipleship. Thank you for joining the journey of The Good Book Club, and we look forward with joyful hearts to reading with you the stories of God in Christ and the birth of the Church as told in Luke and Acts.

We also encourage you to continue the conversation online with #goodbookclub or on The Good Book Club Facebook page.

Schedule

This schedule presumes weekly meetings, starting the week after Ash Wednesday, with breaks during Holy Week and Easter Week. Then the studies resume through Pentecost.

Week 1: Brief Introduction to Luke-Acts and Luke 1:46-56

This week, you will discuss Luke and Acts as a multi-volume work intended to be read together. You will discuss the history of salvation as told in the Old and New Testaments and set up the context for the rest of the study sessions. You will also look at some of the ways in which Luke's masterful storytelling helps us to connect Jesus to the story of Israel.

Week 2: Luke 4:16-30

This week, we will discuss what is often considered the Luke's thesis statement for Jesus' entire ministry in Galilee. We will pay special attention to the healing miracles, the spiritual aspects of these events and our understandings of wholeness. We will also pay special attention to some of the implicit anti-Jewish language and responses recorded in this section. Additionally, we'll visit the sometimes problematic idea of divine favoritism.

Week 3: Luke 10:25-37

This week, we will discuss the parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the most beloved stories Jesus shares with us. We'll take a long, hard look at the divisions between the Jews and the Samaritans, as well as taking a second look at the question of who our neighbors are and how we ought to love them.

Week 4: Luke 12:22-34

This week, we will take a look at possessions and wealth and how we manage both in light of our relationship to God. We will consider the lilies and the ravens, as well as viable strategies for living faithful lives in a consumer-driven culture.

Week 5: Luke 16:19-31 and preview of Luke 24:13-35

This week, we will take a deep dive into the realm of liberation theology. This may be a difficult concept for some folks to grasp—or at least uncomfortable to ponder—but it is an important concept for us to consider. How do we reconcile these texts from Luke with other biblical perspectives on wealth?

Week 6: Acts 1:1-11

This week, we will take a close look at Acts and the events surrounding the birth of the church. Events like the Ascension and Pentecost will come sharply into focus, and we will consider ways the Holy Spirit is still ministering to and through us today.

Week 7: Acts 6:1-7

This week, we'll spend some time discussing a major conflict in the midst of the early church. We'll unpack the push and pull of Hellenism, traditional Jewish understandings, and how this situation gives rise to the office of deacon, as well as provides for a bigger table and tent for the growing church.

Week 8: Acts 9:1-22

Participant Guide: Introduction

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This week, we will meet Paul and notice a shift in the narrative of Acts. We will discuss Paul's personality and the intensity of his character. In discussing Paul's gifts, we will also spend some time thinking about how our gifts can often cut both ways, being helpful and hurtful at times, and explore some strategies for how to use our gifts in our faith communities and in our personal lives.

Week 9: Acts 11:1-18

This week, we will take a serious and substantive look at Peter's vision and why it is tied to the conversion of Cornelius. We'll discuss the ideas of clean/unclean and why Peter's vision was such a game-changer for the church, as well as the conflict that ensued and the difficulty of implementing change.

Week 10: Acts 15:1-31

Once again, we'll look at one of the pivotal conflicts in the early church and see how far we have (or haven't come) in the intervening 2000 years. Discussion and disagreement about circumcision and kosher dietary laws as well as Greek and Roman social/cultural influences may remind us of the conflicts and conversations that we are having in our homes, faith communities, and in the wider world. We'll also take time to talk over the life-changing habit of sharing meals.

Week 11: Acts 16:16-40 and preview of Acts 28:23-31

This week, we look at another liberation story and talk about Paul's second missionary expedition. We will discuss the idea of making "good trouble" in addition to creating some strategies for studying the remainder of Acts on our own and pondering the "happy ending" of the overarching story of the emergence of the church.

Author

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The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 1: Introduction to Luke-Acts and Luke 1:46-56

Participant Notes

Bread and Butter

- This Bible study will be a journey through the life of Christ and the movement of the early church.
- What do you know about Luke and Acts? What do you expect to learn or be challenged by in this study?
- Saint Luke is ascribed authorship of Luke-Acts. Some scholars believe he was a Greek-speaking Jew, while others contend he was a Gentile. Luke has an amazing gift for relating the stories of Jesus and the disciples.
- In Luke-Acts, we are given the broadest, most complete story of God in Christ—literally from womb to tomb and beyond to the birth of the Church.
- Briefly review and skim discussion handouts.

Meat and Potatoes

- Luke and Acts is a multi-volume work, intended to be read together (Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2).
- Luke-Acts is a story of salvation history – what God began in the Old Testament God continued to do in Christ and then through the early church.
- Luke has a perspective (helpfully he sets out his agenda for us in Luke 4:16-21 and Acts 1:6-8).
- Luke's strategy in chapters 1-2 is to link clearly Israel's story to the story of Jesus.
- He tells stories that sound like Old Testament stories—stories of barren women, temple priests, and miraculous visitations.
- He tells stories using the language that *sounds* like the Old Testament. He writes in a style that mimics the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.
- Luke is a master storyteller with exceptional command of Greek and deeply aware of the Hebrew Bible (in its Greek translation) and its traditions. He uses multiple strategies early on to connect the Christ event to Israel's story. He also wants to draw attention to particular themes present Israel's story and emphasize those in his story about Jesus.

Something Sweet

- Spend some time in your group reading the *Magnificat* together. What themes do you notice? Are there portions of this prayer you might consider adding to your own prayers this week?



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 1: Readings for Group Discussion

LUKE 1:1-4

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

ACTS 1:1-2

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

Programmatic Statements: Luke's Agenda

LUKE 4:16-21

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

ACTS 1:6-8

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

THE SONGS OF HANNAH AND MARY

1 Samuel 2:1-10 (Translation from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, available here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/09-1reigns-nets.pdf>)

And she said,

“My heart was made firm in the Lord;
my horn was exalted in my God;
my mouth was made wide against my enemies;
I was glad in your deliverance,
because there is none holy like the Lord,
and there is none righteous like our God;
there is none holy besides you.

“Boast not, and speak not lofty things;
let not big talking come forth from your mouth,
because the Lord is a god of knowledge,
and a god who prepares his own ways.
The bow of the mighty has become weak,
and weak ones have girded themselves with might;
full of bread they suffered loss,
and the hungry have forsaken the land,
because a barren one has borne seven,
and she who is rich in children became weak
The Lord puts to death and brings to life;
he brings down to Hades and brings up.
The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, and he raises on high.
He raises up the needy from the ground
and lifts the poor from the dunghill,
to make them sit with the mighty of the peoples
even making them inherit a throne of glory.

“Granting the prayer to the one who prays,
he has even blessed the years of the righteous,
because not by strength is a man mighty.
The Lord will make his adversary weak;
the Lord is holy.
Let not the clever boast in his cleverness,
and let not the mighty boast in his might,
and let not the wealthy boast in his wealth,
but let him who boasts boast in this:
to understand and know the Lord
and to execute justice and righteousness
in the midst of the land.
The Lord ascended to the heavens and thundered.

He will judge earth's ends
and gives strength to our kings
and will exalt the horn of his anointed.

Luke 1:46-56

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 2: Introduction to 4:16-30

Participant Notes

Bread and Butter

- What important ideas do you remember from last week's discussion about Luke-Acts and the *Magnificat*? What themes were reinforced in this week's reading (Luke 1-4)?
- Scholars have identified today's text (Luke 4:16-30) as the thesis statement for Jesus' ministry in Galilee (Luke 4-9). As discussed briefly last week, it could even be reasonably argued that Jesus' sermon in Nazareth is a programmatic episode for the entire Gospel of Luke. There's lots of good information here to unpack.
- Briefly review and skim of discussion handouts.

Meat and Potatoes

- Read Luke 4:16-30 together (see handout). Summarize this story as a group.
- Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue on the sabbath continues Luke's theme that we saw last week: Jesus is an observant Jew and God is continuing the redemptive work that God began in the Old Testament.
- Salvation is also understood in Luke to be present and tangible. The Latin root of our English word, *salus*, refers to general health and well-being. This is the type of salvation that Jesus proclaims in the Nazareth sermon

Something Sweet

- For Luke, salvation is not just an otherworldly or heavenly hope. Salvation entails being made whole in this life. Good news comes to those who are poor, captives are released, the blind see, and so on. These are tangible evidences of God's healing power on this side of the *eschaton* (fancy word for End of Days!).
- Does God have favorites?



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 2: Readings for Group Discussion

LUKE 4:16-30

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

1 KINGS 17:8-16

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.” As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” But she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.” She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

2 KINGS 5:1-14

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel." He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

MATTHEW 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." **He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

MARK 7:24-30

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 3: Luke 10:25-37

Participant Notes

Bread and Butter

- Today we are exploring a text that is familiar to many. Curiously, nowhere in Luke is the story called a parable and nowhere does Jesus call the Samaritan good. Sometimes familiarity can work against us. Let's work to hear the text anew.
- Briefly review and skim discussion handouts.

Meat and Potatoes

- The conflict between Judeans and Samaritans is very old. It begins in the Old Testament during King Solomon's reign. In order to build his magnificent temple and palace, he conscripted slaves from the Northern Tribes of Israel. This move created tension between the North and the South. Upon his death, Solomon's son, Rehoboam, had a choice to continue exploiting the Northern Tribes or to deal more mercifully. Rehoboam chose to double down on exploitation and treated the slaves from the North even worse. Jeroboam was a leader from the North who led a rebellion (see handout). The Northern Tribes formed the Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Tribes (Judah and Benjamin) formed the Southern Kingdom, Judah. The entire Old Testament is written from the southern perspective (the only author in the Old Testament who is believed to represent the Northern Kingdom is Hosea, and he is writing against the Northern Kingdom).
- Samaritans set up a rival temple to the one in Jerusalem. Jews were an anomaly in the ancient world—they believed in one God who was worshiped in one temple. This rival temple created further conflict between Jews and Samaritans. The Jews and Samaritans would take turns raiding and desecrating the others' temple (see handout with excerpts from Josephus' *Antiquities*). Today we see similar practices such as when vandals place bacon and in Muslim places of worship.
- In spite of this long and bitter history of conflict, Luke's Jesus takes multiple opportunities to highlight the piety of Samaritans and sets them up as models for discipleship (see handout for key texts illustrating Luke's interest in Samaritans).

Something Sweet

- The story fits into Luke's larger agenda of highlighting people who are marginalized. From the perspective of Judeans, Samaritans were looked down on and disenfranchised.
- Moreover, the Samaritan as a model fulfilled the commands to love God and love people by giving freely from his abundance to help a man in need.



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 3: Readings for Group Discussion

LUKE 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

LUKE 9:51-56

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set towards Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, ‘Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’ But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

LUKE 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ When he saw them, he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, ‘Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ Then he said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.’

LUKE 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “It is said, **‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’**” When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

LUKE 11:1-4

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. **And do not bring us to the time of trial.**”

2 CHRONICLES 28:8-14

The people of Israel took captive two hundred thousand of their kin, women, sons, and daughters; they also took much booty from them and brought the booty to Samaria. But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded; he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria, and said to them, “Because the Lord, the God of your ancestors, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven. Now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. But what have you except sins against the Lord your God? Now hear me, and send back the captives whom you have taken from your kindred, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you.” Moreover, certain chiefs of the Ephraimites, Azariah son of Johanan, Berechiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war, and said to them, “You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring on us guilt against the Lord in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.” So the warriors left the captives and the booty before the officials and all the assembly. Then those who were mentioned by name got up and took the captives, and with the booty they clothed all that were naked among them; they clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them; and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kindred at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.

Addendum for Week 3

The Long Conflict between Samaritans and Judeans

1 KINGS 12:1-19

Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. And they sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you.’ He said to them, ‘Go away for three days, then come again to me.’ So the people went away.

Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, ‘How do you advise me to answer this people?’ They answered him, ‘If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants for ever.’ But he disregarded the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. He said to them, ‘What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, “Lighten the yoke that your father put on us”?’ The young men who had grown up with him said to him, ‘Thus you should say to this people who spoke to you, “Your father made our yoke heavy, but you must lighten it for us”; thus you should say to them, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins. Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”’

So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had said, ‘Come to me again on the third day.’ The king answered the people harshly. He disregarded the advice that the older men had given him and spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, ‘My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’ So the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfil his word, which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king, ‘What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David.’

So Israel went away to their tents. But Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah. When King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labour, all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam then hurriedly mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

2 KINGS 17:5-6, 24-34

Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria; for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria in place of the people of Israel; they took possession of Samaria, and settled in its cities. When they first settled there, they did not worship the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them. So the king of Assyria was told, “The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them; they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land.” Then the king of Assyria commanded, “Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there; let him go and live there, and teach them the law of the god of the land.” So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel; he taught them how they should worship the Lord. But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the shrines of the high places that the people of Samaria had made, every nation in the cities in which they lived; the people of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the people of Cuth made Nergal, the people of Hamath made Ashima; the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. They also worshiped the Lord and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. So they worshiped the Lord but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. To this day they continue to practice their former customs. **They do not worship the Lord and they do not follow the statutes or the ordinances or the law or the commandment that the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel.**

JOSEPHUS, *ANTIQUITIES* 13.74, 77-79

Now it came to pass that the Alexandrian Jews, and those Samaritans who paid their worship to the temple that was built in the days of Alexander at Mount Gerizzim, did now make a sedition one against another, and disputed about their temples before Ptolemy himself; the Jews saying that, according to the laws of Moses, the temple was to be built at Jerusalem; and the Samaritans saying that it was to be built at Gerizzim. They desired therefore the king to sit with his friends, and hear the debates about these matters, and punish those with death who were baffled. Now Sabbeus and Theodosius managed the argument for the Samaritans, and Andronicus, the son of Messalamus, for the people of Jerusalem; and they took an oath by God and the king to make their demonstrations according to the law; and they desired of Ptolemy, that whomsoever he should find that transgressed what they had sworn to, he would put him to death. Accordingly, the king took several of his friends into the council, and sat down, in order to hear what the pleaders said. Now the Jews that were at Alexandria were in great concern for those men, whose lot it was to contend for the temple at Jerusalem; for they took it very ill that any should take away the reputation of that temple, which was so ancient and so celebrated all over the habitable earth. Now when Sabbeus and Theodosius had given leave to Andronicus to speak first, he began to demonstrate out of the law, and out of the successions of the high priests, how they every one in succession from his father had received that dignity, and ruled over the temple; and how all the kings of Asia had honored that temple with their donations, and with the most splendid gifts dedicated thereto. But as for that at Gerizzim, he made no account of it, and regarded it as if it had never had a being. By this speech, and other arguments, Andronicus persuaded the king to determine that the temple at Jerusalem was built according to the laws of Moses, ¹ and to put Sabbeus and Theodosius to death. And these were the events that befell the Jews at Alexandria in the days of Ptolemy Philometor.

JOSEPHUS, *ANTIQUITIES* 18.29-30

As Coponius, who we told you was sent along with Cyrenius, was exercising his office of procurator, and governing Judea, the following accidents happened. As the Jews were celebrating the feast of unleavened bread, which we call the Passover, it was customary for the priests to open the temple-gates just after midnight. When, therefore, those gates were first opened, some of the Samaritans came privately into Jerusalem, and threw about dead men's bodies, in the cloisters; on which account the Jews afterward excluded them out of the temple, which they had not used to do at such festivals; and on other accounts also they watched the temple more carefully than they had formerly done.

JOSEPHUS, *JEWISH WAR* 2.232-237

After this there happened a fight between the Galileans and the Samaritans; it happened at a village called Geman, which is situate in the great plain of Samaria; where, as a great number of Jews were going up to Jerusalem to the feast [of tabernacles,] a certain Galilean was slain; and besides, a vast number of people ran together out of Galilee, in order to fight with the Samaritans. But the principal men among them came to Cumanus, and besought him that, before the evil became incurable, he would come into Galilee, and bring the authors of this murder to punishment; for that there was no other way to make the multitude separate without coming to blows.



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 4: Luke 12:22-34

Participant Notes

Bread and Butter

- Is it possible to own things without having the things own you?
- Briefly review handouts.

Meat and Potatoes

- Read Luke 12:22-34 together (see handout). Is this good news or bad news?
- The context of this saying in Luke is important here. The passage immediately preceding is about a man who decided to build extra barns to store surplus and died that very same night. Immediately following the passage, Jesus speaks of harsh masters who expect slaves to be ready (Luke 12:35-48) and how Jesus came to bring fire and a sword (Luke 12:49-53).
- God's good pleasure is to *give* the kingdom. This is not something earned but something that God gives through grace. God is aware of our limits and how we participate in systems and structures that are beyond our control.

Something Sweet

- How would Jesus and Luke answer our opening question?
- What *is* the good news in today's text?



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 4: Readings for Group Discussion

LUKE 12:22-34

He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

LEVITICUS 11:13-18

These you shall regard as detestable among the birds. They shall not be eaten; they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the buzzard, the kite of any kind; **every raven of any kind**; the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk of any kind; the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl, the water hen, the desert owl, the carrion vulture, the stork, the heron of any kind, the hoopoe, and the bat.

DEUTERONOMY 14:11-18

You may eat any clean birds. But these are the ones that you shall not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the buzzard, the kite, of any kind; **every raven of any kind**; the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk, of any kind; the little owl and the great owl, the water hen and the desert owl, the carrion vulture and the cormorant, the stork, the heron, of any kind; the hoopoe and the bat.

EXCERPT FROM MARY DORIA RUSSELL, *THE SPARROW*

At the end of the book, some priests are discussing the tragedy that had befallen one of their own. The conversation takes the following turn:

“There's an old Jewish story that says in the beginning God was everywhere and everything, a totality. But to make creation, God had to remove Himself from some part of the universe, so something besides Himself could exist. So He breathed in, and in the places where God withdrew, there creation exists.”

“So God just leaves? Abandons creation? You're on your own, apes. Good luck!”

“No. He watches. He rejoices. He weeps. He observes the moral drama of human life and gives meaning to it by caring passionately about us, and remembering.”

“Matthew ten, verse twenty-nine: Not one sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it.”

“But the sparrow still falls.”



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 5: Introduction to Luke 16:19-31 and Preview of Luke 24:13-35

Participant Notes

Bread and Butter

- Briefly review and skim the discussion handouts.
- Consider, discuss, and come to a group consensus about the meanings of the following ideas:
 - “Preferential option”—God has favorites. If two sides disagree, God will favor one side over the other. A helpful analogy may be parents and their children. Yes, parents love their kids dearly and would often do everything they can for their benefit. Sometimes (often?), parents tend to take one child’s side over another. This does not change their love and commitment to the other child.
 - “Poor”—The key here is that “poor” in theologies of liberation does not refer to strictly economic concerns. “Poor” here can be summarized simply as more likely to die because of marginalization or disenfranchisement. To be sure, if you are economically poor you are more likely to die from hunger, illness, abuse, etc. But with this definition of poor, we also include people who are vulnerable on account of race, gender, sexuality, and so on. (This can be controversial. We are not moralizing; rather we are merely out real and measurable vulnerability.)

Meat and Potatoes

- Read Luke 16:19-31 together (see handout).
- Why, according to the text, does the rich man go to hell? Why does Lazarus go to heaven?
- The Bible shares many perspectives on wealth. Most clearly in the Old Testament wealth is often a sign of God’s blessing. Even in Luke and Acts, there are multiple perspectives. Wealthy women support Jesus in his ministry (Luke 8:1-3), Zacchaeus is saved (Luke 19:1-10), and in Acts many wealthy believers support the church and host meetings in their homes.

Something Sweet

- Based on today's study, would Luke agree with the statement, "God has a preferential option for those who are poor"?
- We are probably more like the rich man than Lazarus. What does this mean for us? What are we to do with our privilege and wealth?
- Easter preview, finishing up Luke



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 5: Readings for Group Discussion

THESIS FOR THEOLOGIES OF LIBERATION

“God has a preferential option for those who are poor.”

LUKE 16:19-31

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

LUKE 1:46-55

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

LUKE 6:20-25

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. “Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

LUKE 12:32-34

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

LUKE 18:18-25

A certain ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.’” He replied, “I have kept all these since my youth.” When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

LUKE 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 6: A Brief Refresher and Acts 1:1-11 **Participant Guide**

Bread and Butter

- What are some of the most interesting and important things you learned from reading through Luke?
- What do you anticipate learning in Acts based on what you've learned from Luke?
- Recall that in the first study we looked at how Luke uses the ancient historiographical term, translated “orderly account” in Luke 1:3, to describe his work. That is to say, Luke conceives of what he is writing as history. But it is not just any history; it is a history written to encourage faith.
- Review discussion handouts.

Meat and Potatoes

- Read Acts 1:1-11 together (see handout).
- Looking at Luke 24:44-53, what differences and similarities do you notice between the ending of Luke and the beginning of Acts?
- The idea of "already-and-not-yet" will continue to be developed in the ongoing story of the Church and in our lives.

Something Sweet:

- Do you see the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of Pentecost in the world?
- What's taking Jesus so long to come back?
- Jesus promises that the apostles will be filled with power. As you read this week's texts (Acts 1-4) what sort of power did the apostles receive? What do we make of these manifestations of God's power? Was it just a temporary thing to jump start the church? Is it just an ancient way of telling stories and conceiving of the world? Do you expect God to act in similar ways today? Why or why not?



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 6: Readings for Group Discussion

ACTS 1:1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This’, he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’

So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’

LUKE 24:44-53

Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 7: Acts 6:1-7 **Participant Guide**

Bread and Butter

- How do you feel about your community's main worship service?
- Does it make you feel in good company to know that the Christians in Acts had some conflicts to sort through?
- Briefly review discussion handouts.

Meat and Potatoes

- Read Acts 6:1-7 together.
- Our story is starting to shift from the community in Jerusalem to the ones forming in Judea and Samaria. We will begin to see conflicts regarding language, cultural identity, ethnic identity, and a whole host of other issues that the early church must find a way to reconcile.
- The role of deacon becomes a vital one to the life of the church.

Something Sweet

- What works of service are needed in your community? Where do you feel service is being neglected? How will you step in to proclaim God's word in deed?



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 7: Readings for Group Discussion

ACTS 6:1-7

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

ACTS 2:43-47 (SUMMARY AFTER PENTECOST)

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

ACTS 4:32-37 (SUMMARY AFTER PERSECUTION)

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

ACTS 5:12-16 (SUMMARY AFTER THE DEATH OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA)

Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

JAMES 1:27

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

(MISATTRIBUTED) QUOTE FROM ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 8: Acts 9:1-22 **Participant Guide**

Bread and Butter

- Briefly review discussion handouts.
- What do you know about the Apostle Paul? What do you think of him? Is he a hero or a villain? Do you remember him from Stephen's stoning?

Meat and Potatoes

- Read Acts 9:1-22 together.
- Luke introduces Paul as “Saul,” a name Paul never uses for himself. This may be part of Luke’s larger narrative agenda to show the movement from Judea and Samaria to “the ends of the earth” (recall Acts 1:6-8)—Saul is a Palestinian name and Paul is a Hellenistic one. In any case, as we will see in Acts 13:9, the Saul and Paul are one and the same.
- Paul, both before and after his call, is a pretty intense character. In some ways, Paul does not change a whole lot. He goes from persecuting intensely to proclaiming intensely. Intensity seems to be a general trait for him. That single-mindedness both hurt and helped his mission (poor Barnabas... see Acts 15:36-41). What gifts do you have that cut both ways? How do you manage those traits?
- In other ways, Paul changes a great deal (see Philippians 3 on the handout). He is a model of God’s gracious forgiveness and empowerment. What do you make of this transformation? Is it inspiring to you? Is it problematic that God’s grace can extend to someone so murderous?

Something Sweet

- Paul often wrote of the extravagant grace of God and the power that comes from the Holy Spirit. Reflect on your own about an area where you would like God’s grace and transformative power.



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 8: Readings for Group Discussion

ACTS 7:54-8:3

When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died. And Saul approved of their killing him.

That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.

ACTS 9:1-22

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is

an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’ All who heard him were amazed and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?’ Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

GALATIANS 1:11-24

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him for fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord’s brother. In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, ‘The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.’ And they glorified God because of me.

PHILIPPIANS 3:4-11

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

ACTS 2:16-21

No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 9: Acts 11:1-18

Participant Guide

Bread and Butter

- Recall that the author of Acts uses dreams and visions to mark significant shifts in the narrative. He sees this as a fulfillment of Joel 3:1-5 (cited in Acts 2:16-21; see handout) and the Christ event has marked the beginning of God's final redemption of the world.
- Briefly review discussion handouts.
- We will focus on Acts 11:1-18, but these verses are the conclusion of the longest single story in the entire book (Acts 10:1-11:18). Here, 66 verses are devoted to the story of Cornelius and the aftermath. The next longest story is Paul's journey to Rome, which comprises 60 verses (Acts 27:1-28:16).
- Before we get to the text, a question: Have you ever gotten into trouble for hanging out with the wrong people? Share stories.

Meat and Potatoes

- Read Acts 11:1-18.
- Do you notice more than one conversion story happening here?
- Peter is not some normal *schmoe* in the community. He the most prominent apostle in the narrative thus far.
- The narrative of Acts begins to pivot in a new direction.

Something Sweet

- Who or what is viewed as unclean/unwelcome/other in your community? Peter needed a spectacular revelation to be convinced to welcome outsiders. And he still paid a price for that. What inspiration do we need to act on God's call to us?



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 9: Readings for Group Discussion

ACTS 2:16-21

No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

ACTS 11:1-18

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

GALATIANS 3:2-5

The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing? —if it really was for nothing. Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

ACTS 10:9-16

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, **he fell into a trance**. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of **four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air**. Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

ACTS 11:5-10

Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and **in a trance I saw a vision**.

There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. **As I looked at it closely** I saw **four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air**. I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ But a second time the voice **answered from heaven**, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven.

GALATIANS 3:26-29

[F]or in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 10: Acts 15:1-31

Participant Notes

Bread and Butter

- What important ideas have emerged from our study these past weeks? What have you found yourself reflecting on between our meetings? Which passages have you found inspiring/fascinating/troubling as you read them during your personal time?
- How do you feel about conflict generally? What is your initial reaction to it? How do you process it? What about difference in belief or faith?
- Briefly review discussion handouts.

Meat and Potatoes

- Read Acts 15:1-31.
- We have moved from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and now to "the ends of the earth." This movement has created some problems.
- Jesus and his first followers were good, observant Jews. Jesus could be easily understood as a Jewish reformer. As the gospel spread into the Roman Empire became less Jewish, both ethnically and religiously, how to deal with Mosaic Law became a question—and a divisive one at that.
- Some compromises are reached, and as with every compromise, no one gets everything they want.
- What does it mean to share a meal?

Something Sweet

- Do you see the contemporary church having similar conflicts to the ones in Acts? Where do you see moves toward compromise or reconciliation being made?



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 10: Readings for Group Discussion

ACTS 15:1-31

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, “My brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord— even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago.’ Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.”

Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” So they were sent off and went down to Antioch. When they gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation.

GALATIANS 2:1-14

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. But because of false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us— we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you. And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) —those leaders contributed nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 11: Acts 16:16-40 and preview of Acts 28:23-31

Participant Notes

Bread and Butter

- What from this last week's reading (Acts 13-16) grabbed your attention? Where were you surprised? Where were you troubled? What left you with questions?
- Have you ever been in a situation when what you knew was right would create problems for others? How did you navigate that tension? What did you learn from the experience?
- Briefly review discussion handouts.

Meat and Potatoes

- Read Acts 16:16-40.
- We are squarely in the final section of the book of Acts and watching Paul as a witness to the gospel "to the ends of the earth."
- Paul encounters a slave girl who is possessed and uses a spirit of divination to proclaim oracles. Her oracles make money for her master. When Paul exorcises the spirit, the girl can no longer make money for her master. This gets Paul into "good trouble."

Something Sweet

- What important learning that has happened through our study of Luke-Acts? Write down three key ideas, approaches, or facts that have been impactful to you.

PREVIEW OF ACTS 28:23-31

- Read Acts 28:23-31 (see handout).
- This is how the book ends! Use this to guide your reading of the next 12 chapters of Acts. Look for hints and clues as to why Acts ends this way. Is this a happy ending?



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 11: Readings for Group Discussion

ACTS 16:16-40

One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

When morning came, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.” And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, “The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace.” But Paul replied, “They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us

in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves.” The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. After leaving the prison they went to Lydia’s home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.

ACTS 16:6-10

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

THREE KEY THINGS

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

ACTS 28:23-31

After they had set a day to meet with him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, ‘Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.’ Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.