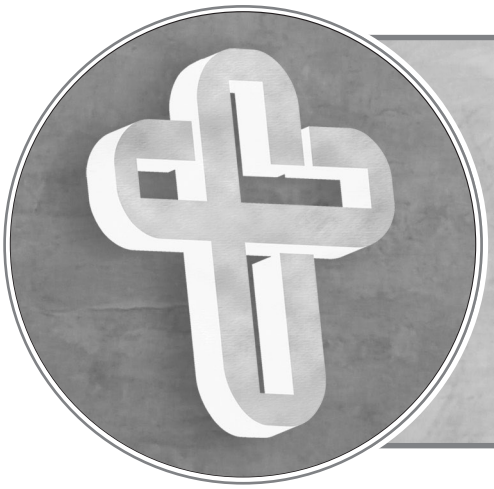


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

FEBRUARY 28 2026

the epicenter for missions

Scripture Story: Acts 11:19-26; Acts 13; Acts 14:1-26.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 16-18.
Key Text: Acts 13:38, 39.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

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

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

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

II. TARGET

The students will:

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

III. EXPLORE

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

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

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

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

do the exercise together and discuss the answers.

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

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

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

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

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

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

Out of the Story for Teachers

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

- Time and again throughout the Bible, we see how God has taken bleak circumstances and turned them around for His purpose and, yes, for His glory. Whether it's Joseph languishing in a pit on his way to Egyptian slavery and a prison cell, or Moses' exile from the palace of Pharaoh, or, as we see today, the scattering of the early believers from Jerusalem, there's a way God can turn tragedy into opportunity. Write down an example of such a change from your life, or the life of someone close to you.
- The people in Antioch who believed weren't just Jews, but also Gentiles—people for whom the God of Israel was supposedly a stranger and unapproachable without their first being circumcised and brought into the Jewish fold. But these self-appointed evangelists didn't use yardsticks; they just told the good news, and people responded. Do you see a similar opportunity around you today? Are there groups of students or coworkers you can go to and reach?
- In Antioch Saul and Barnabas spent a year teaching others before they were called to the mission field. Is there preparation you might be doing now to make yourself ready for what the Lord might have you do in a year or two?
- Throughout their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas went first to the local synagogues and spoke to those most likely to respond. Yet others were hearing and responding as well. Is there a parallel you can think of in your experience? Does your church's outreach have unintended, but pleasant, consequences?
- In Pisidian Antioch the disciples spoke so well that they were invited back for a second Sabbath's worship to discuss their ideas. Can you think of ways to express your faith that keep people asking questions?

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

Sharing Context and Background

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another irony is how Paul handled a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus (also known as Elymas) while he, Barnabas, and John Mark were on the island of Paphos. When Bar-Jesus tried to stop them from sharing the message of salvation with the governor there, Paul rebuked him and told him that he would be struck with blindness. Just as God stopped Paul from interfering in the spread of the gospel, Paul called upon God to do the same thing to Elymas. Elymas wouldn't be permanently blind, but how like God is that! The governor received salvation and perhaps later Elymas himself came around to the truth.

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

RABBI 101

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Sentence Openers

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

Teaching From the Lesson

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite students to share the Key Text *with the class if they have committed it to memory.*
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Acts of the Apostles. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

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

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

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



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

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
FEBRUARY 28 2026

STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Acts 11:19-26; Acts 13; Acts 14:1-26.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 16-18.

the epicenter for missions



Photo by Jacqui Janetzko

keytext

"Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses."

(Acts 13:38, 39, NIV)

flashlight

"'When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.' They rejoiced exceedingly that Christ recognized them as the children of God, and with grateful hearts they listened to the word preached. Those who believed were zealous in communicating the gospel message to others, and thus 'the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region'" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 173, 174).

what do you think?

Twenty-one centuries later the church still faces many of the challenges the first century faced when confronted with the Great Commission to take the gospel to the entire world.

Take some time to finish the sentences below as they relate to your reaction and personal attitudes and understanding about mission work:

1. When someone brings up the topic of missions, I . . . _____
   _____
2. The idea of witnessing to a non-Adventist/ Christian makes me . . . _____
   _____
3. For me, missions is about . . . _____
   _____

did you know?

The most densely popu-lated areas of the world have the smallest Christian presence. It is called the 10/40 window. Do you know what countries and people groups are in this area?

There are more than 230 major languages and dialects in the world. The Adventist Church is spreading the good news in 75 languages (see www.awr.org). Check out www.adventistmission.org to learn more about our church's missions.

Jesus promised that the one sure sign of His return would be that the good news of salvation would be preached to each nation and then the end would come (Matthew 24:14).

INTO THE STORY

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

"News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

"Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."

"In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'. . .

"The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. . . . They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. . . .

"From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. . . . From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.'. . .

"As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. . . .

"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. . . .

"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored

the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

"The word of the Lord spread through the whole region."

(Acts 11:19-26; selected texts from Acts 13, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Antioch, and not Jerusalem, was the epicenter for missionary outreach. Can you list some of the reasons this might have been the case?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Why do you think the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch?

_____
_____
_____

How did the "followers of the Way" come to be called "Christians"? What does this say about their characteristics?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What pattern did you see from the Scripture lesson for how the church prepared for missionary work? List the strategies used for moving out of the "community of believers" and into the world.

_____
_____
_____
_____

What was the strategy of Barnabas and Paul as they entered each new region to spread the good news about Jesus?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" **(Acts 11:25, 26, NIV).**

"Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses" **(Acts 13:38, 39, NIV).**

"After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak'" **(Acts 13:15, NIV).**

"The word of the Lord spread through the whole region" **(Acts 13:49, NIV).**

further insight

"The ordained ministers alone are not equal to the task of warning the great cities. God is calling not only upon ministers, but . . . consecrated laymen of varied talent who have a knowledge of the word of God and who know the power of His grace, to consider the needs of the unwarned cities. Time is rapidly passing, and there is much to be done."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles,* pp. 158, 159

Sabbath

Read Acts 13:38.

In the *What Do You Think?* section you shared your reactions to and attitudes about missions. Why did you answer the way you did? What can you do to fulfill your concept of mission?

_____

_____

Sunday

Read Acts 11:25, 26.

Look back through the *Into the Story* and Out of the Story sections. Notice that while Barnabas and Paul launch out on the "first missionary journey," they did not act alone. Both men were called. Yet we don't see Paul moving full steam ahead with that call until the Lord confirms and commissions him through the ministry of fellow believers and elders of the church. Even in the mission field, Paul and Barnabas counted on the blessing and prayers of the believers back at their home base in Antioch, and on the spiritual support and encouragement of the new converts in the towns where they took the gospel.

What does this teach us about the role of the church in helping us to define and act upon the call God gives us? What does it say about the personal role we each have regardless of whether we are full-time church workers or members of the body of Christ?

_____

_____

Monday

Read Acts 13:38, 39.

"Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses" (NIV). These words that Paul preached to encourage the devout people in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch were the theme of his ministry and preaching. This is because no matter what cultural background we are from or what language or mind-set we have, one common thread all humans share is the need for hope!

Missionaries cannot enter many places today due to political, religious, and geographic barriers. We still have to work at how we can contextualize the message for people of other cultures and ethnicities.

Whether you live in a city where you share the same or similar cultural backgrounds, or whether you live in the midst of a melting pot of ethnicities and cultures, how can you share this hope with your neighbors?

_____

_____

Tuesday

Read Galatians 4:18.

In the *Flashlight* section we see an explosive impact—in a good way—of what happens when this message of hope and forgiveness is shared with individuals and within communities. While it is natural for us to cling together as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ—building each other up and growing in our faith—what is also clear from this reading by Ellen White is that we don't just keep to ourselves. Healthy Christians and Christian communities are thrilled about the new hope and joy they have received in Christ, and they are zealous in spreading that joy to others. Look up the word "zealous." Do you think of yourself or your church as being zealous in publishing the word throughout your community? What are some ways that you and/or your church express that zealousness for the Lord?

_____

_____

Wednesday

Read Acts 13:15, 49.

Here we get a glimpse of how the early church worked—at first, it was comprised of Jewish believers in Jesus, many of whom were dispersed from Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen, some of whom ended up in Antioch, a crossroads of the Roman Empire which turns out to be the launching point for missionary outreach. What Paul and Barnabas preached in another Antioch (Pisidian) was so dynamic that much of the whole town turned out the next Sabbath to hear them! So it has been throughout the history of the church, right down to today: What we say, and how we say it, can interest others in the message—and in the Savior!

Thursday

Read Isaiah 60:1.

What are some of the ways you can reach out to your world with the gospel? How can you share the good news with someone at school or at work? Is there a place in which God is calling you to go and labor? Could teaching English overseas, for example, be a way to enter a new culture, make friends, and share Jesus?

Friday

Read 1 Peter 2:9.

One of the key challenges in the Bible is that we are asked to do something with what we have learned and experienced in the Word: these are not mere stories for our entertainment, but rather they are examples for us to follow: "Go and do likewise," Jesus said (Luke 10:37, NIV). What are the things you've learned this week that can be picked up and used in your life?

_____

_____

this week's reading*

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

* Unlikely Leaders is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.