

INVESTIGATING GOD'S WORD...

ACTS 15-28
YEAR SIX | SPRING QUARTER



SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM
FOR OLDER ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

SS06SP-E

LESSON SEQUENCE

SPRING QUARTER

The Lesson Sequence gives the teacher an overview of the entire quarter. The central goal of the *Investigating God's Word...* curriculum is to enable children the opportunity to read and study the entire Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—by the time they “graduate” from 6th grade.

LESSON ONE	Acts 15
LESSON TWO	Acts 16
LESSON THREE	Acts 17
LESSON FOUR	Acts 18
LESSON FIVE	Acts 19
LESSON SIX	Acts 20
LESSON SEVEN	Acts 21:1–36
LESSON EIGHT	Acts 21:37–22:29
LESSON NINE	Acts 22:30–23:35
LESSON TEN	Acts 24:1–25:12
LESSON ELEVEN	Acts 25:13–26:32
LESSON TWELVE	Acts 27
LESSON THIRTEEN	Acts 28

SUMMER QUARTER Epistles [Part One]

SUGGESTED SCHEDULE

WELCOME

Psalm 134
2–3 mins.

DRILL TIME

Saul's conversion
5 mins.

W.O.W!

Gentile
5 mins.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Timeline
2–3 mins.

BIBLE INVESTIGATION

Acts 15
20–30 mins.

LESSON-AT-HOME

Acts 15:11
2–3 mins.

OVERVIEW

We begin this quarter's studies in the middle of the Book of Acts. As the church begins to grow and spread among the Gentiles, the "circumcision party" makes its presence known. They believed that all Gentiles must become circumcised and obey the Mosaic law in order to be saved. In other words, Gentiles had to become Jews in order to become Christians! This caused quite a stir, as Paul and Barnabas disputed this teaching. The issue created the need for the first church council in Jerusalem.

At this historic council, Peter spoke first that the Gentiles are saved by grace alone. He warned the apostles and elders against putting extra burdens upon these new Christians. Paul and Barnabas gave personal testimonies about what miraculous things God was doing among the Gentiles. If God is giving them the Holy Spirit, how can anyone stand in God's way? Finally, James ruled that no circumcision restriction should be made. Yet the council did agree to instruct the Gentiles to abstain from particular sinful practices. The council sent Paul and Barnabas, as well as Judas and Silas, to deliver the letter to the churches. The letter was received with joy.

Acts 15 ends with Paul and Barnabas disagreeing over whether or not John Mark should go on their next missionary journey. This disagreement produces a split: Paul takes Silas, Barnabas takes John Mark.

PREPARATION

Read through and meditate on Acts 15 this week. **It would be helpful to have a map of Paul's missionary journeys available.**

TEACHING ENCOURAGEMENT

One common misunderstanding of the way God works is that He has one plan for Israel and another plan for Christians. The Jews are somehow saved by following the Mosaic law, and Christians are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Wrong! It is grace alone by faith alone through Christ alone that has always saved God's people and will continue to save God's people. It is not by the addition of works that we are saved. It is faith alone, which is true faith when accompanied by works. Teach these truths today!

THE WELCOME SERVES AS BOTH AN OPPORTUNITY TO GREET THE CHILDREN AS WELL AS AN EFFORT TO HELP THEM GET FOCUSED. EACH WEEK, YOU WILL BEGIN WITH QUESTIONS OR AN ACTIVITY THAT WILL ENGAGE THE CHILDREN AND HELP THEM THINK ABOUT GOD AND HIS WORD.

DRILL TIME GIVES THE CHILDREN THE OPPORTUNITY TO RECALL AND REHEARSE WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN TAUGHT IN THE PAST—AT HOME, SCHOOL AND/OR CHURCH.

THIS ELEMENT ALLOWS THE INVESTIGATING GOD'S WORD... CURRICULUM TO COVER MUCH MORE BIBLICAL "GROUND," SINCE TIME IS NOT EXPENDED REPEATING THE SAME BIBLE STORIES OVER AND OVER AGAIN FROM YEAR TO YEAR.



WELCOME

Greet the students. Welcome visitors. To prepare the students for class today, read Psalm 134.

¹ Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD! ² Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD! ³ May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!.

Say: *This psalm of praise reminds us of the great privilege we have to gather together and PRAISE the LORD! In Sunday School class, we praise the LORD by learning more about Him in His Word. Let's praise God by studying His Word!*



DRILL TIME

Let's move on to DRILL TIME—our weekly opportunity to review what we have learned in the past. Are you ready?

Today questions: *What happened to Saul on his way to arrest Christians in Damascus? Who spoke to Saul, and what did He say? Whose house did Jesus direct Saul to? What happened to Saul when he was at Ananias' house? What did the Lord change Saul's name to?*

Call on volunteers or select students to make attempts.

Answer:

1. He was blinded by a flash of light from heaven.
2. Jesus. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
3. The house of Ananias, a disciple of Jesus.
4. He could see again. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. He was baptized.
5. Paul.

Say: *The Lord Jesus told Ananias that Saul (Paul) was a "chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings, and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). We will study much more about Saul (Paul) this quarter.*

THE **W.O.W!** IS THE WORD OF THE WEEK. THIS ELEMENT IS INCLUDED TO HELP THE CHILDREN BUILD THEIR THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL VOCABULARIES. THESE WORDS ARE VITAL TO THE CHRISTIAN'S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AND HIS WORLD.



W.O.W!

Remember that every week, we will define a new word and add it to our growing Christian vocabulary. Our W.O.W! (Word of the Week) this week is **GENTILE**. Write it on the board.

What does the word **GENTILE** mean? Jesus told Ananias that Saul would be sent to the **GENTILES**. Who are they?

The word **GENTILE** was used by Jewish people to refer to anyone who was not a **JEW**! So, in the Jewish mind, there were only two types of people in the world: Jews and **GENTILES**.

Raise your hand if you are Jewish. If you didn't raise your hand, that means you are a **GENTILE**. If you were a **GENTILE** before the time of Christ, you could not become one of God's chosen people unless you became a Jew. So do you have to become a Jew today in order to be one of God's chosen people? [No.]

In our studies today, you will see why **GENTILES** like you and me no longer have to become Jews in order to be included in the family of God. Watch for our W.O.W! in our reading today!



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As you study these chapters today, put this timeline on the board for some important historical context.

This Week's Timeline



EACH WEEK, THE BIBLE LESSON WILL BE PLACED IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT BY USE OF A TIMELINE. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE CHILDREN LEARN HOW THE STORY OF REDEMPTIVE HISTORY FITS TOGETHER. BIBLE STORIES MUST NOT BE VIEWED AS DETACHED SCENES—THEY ARE TO BE SHOWN AS A PART OF A MUCH BIGGER PICTURE. THE TIMELINE IS A USEFUL TOOL TOWARD THAT END.



BIBLE INVESTIGATION

THE BIBLE INVESTIGATION TIME IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE WEEK'S LESSON. IT PLUNGES THE STUDENT DIRECTLY INTO GOD'S WORD, NOT SIMPLY A PARAPHRASE OF A BIBLE STORY.

ALL SCRIPTURE TEXT INCLUDED IN THE CURRICULUM IS FROM THE ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION (ESV).

THE BIBLE READING IS TAKEN IN SHORT SECTIONS, SEPARATED BY TIMES OF DISCUSSION, QUESTIONS, AND APPLICATION POINTS. THIS FORMAT ALLOWS AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES TO STOP, THINK ABOUT AND DISCUSS WHAT IS BEING READ.

Introduction: *We begin this quarter squarely in the middle of the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts is a record of what the Holy Spirit did in the lives of the apostles to begin the first New Testament church. Jesus has ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit has been poured out at Pentecost, and the church of Jesus Christ is being formed. The Book of Acts includes the conversion of Saul (Paul) and the beginnings of his missionary efforts outside of Israel.*

*We begin in Acts 15. **Read Acts 15:1.***

¹ But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Discussion: *All Jews had to be circumcised in order to be a part of God's people. No uncircumcised person could become a member of Israel. So, these men believed the same thing about becoming a Christian. They were teaching non-Jews that they must first be circumcised in order to be a Christian. Is that true? [No.] Then this is a problem for the early church, isn't it?*

*Let's read on. **Read verse 2.***

² 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 the apostles and the elders about this question.

Discussion: *Did Paul and Barnabas, the missionary team, believe that non-Jews had to be circumcised in order to become Christians? [No.] So, what were Paul and Barnabas going to do about this problem? [Go to Jerusalem and see the apostles and elders.]*

*Let's see what happens. **Read verses 3-6.***

³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” ⁶ The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.



THIS GREY SIDEBAR FOUND ON ALL PAGES IS FOR THE TEACHER TO WRITE NOTES AS HE OR SHE PREPARES THE LESSON.

OTHER TEACHING TIPS OR IMPORTANT EXEGETICAL INFORMATION MAY ALSO APPEAR ON THE SIDEBAR.

Discussion: *Did you hear our Word of the Week? This event is called the first church council at Jerusalem—and it came about because of the GENTILES. What had Paul and Barnabas been telling everyone regarding the GENTILES? [How so many of the GENTILES had been converted to Christianity.] How did most of the people respond when they heard about the GENTILES becoming Christians? [They were very glad!] Yet the Pharisees reacted a different way. What did they say about the GENTILES? [That they had to be circumcised and were required to obey the law of Moses.] So, the Jerusalem church council considered this very important question.*

Application: *From the very beginning of the Church of Jesus Christ, Christian leaders have come together in councils or assemblies to deal with important questions. Because we are sinful human beings, we will always have conflicts about who God is and what He requires of His people.*

So let's read what Peter has to say now. **Read verses 7-11.**

⁷ And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

Discussion: *Wow! That's a very powerful speech. According to Peter, who has made a choice to save even GENTILES? [God.] How did God show the apostles that He accepted GENTILES into His family? [By giving them the Holy Spirit too.] So, is there a real difference between Jews who become Christians and GENTILES who become Christians? [No!] How do both Jews and GENTILES become Christians? [By the grace of God through Jesus Christ!]*

Application: *It is easy to make Christianity into a religion of rules you must follow in order to be a Christian. Yet, as Peter said, our forefathers couldn't bear all those rules, and they weren't saved by any of those rules. You will not be saved by doing good things—it will only be the grace of God that will save you. And we receive this grace of God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ alone, not by following the rules!*



Let's see what happens next in the assembly. **Read verse 12.**

¹² And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Discussion: *Now it's Paul and Barnabas' turn. What did they report to the assembly? [That God had been doing signs and wonders among the GENTILES.] Paul and Barnabas, as missionaries to the GENTILES, saw firsthand what God was doing in the lives of these new Christians. It was truly miraculous to see that God was saving the GENTILES!*

Let's read more. **Read verses 13-19.**

¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸ known from of old.' ¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,

Discussion: *James was now the man in charge of this assembly. It was his turn to address all the apostles and elders. What was his judgment regarding the GENTILE question? [He believed that the GENTILES should not be burdened with laws in order to become Christians.] James quoted from the Old Testament, showing that God had planned to include the GENTILES in His family.*

But listen to what else James says. **Read verses 20-21.**

²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

Discussion: *James did say that these new GENTILE Christians should obey some of the Law of Moses. What things should they abstain from? [Food polluted by idols, sexual sin, meat from strangled animals, and from blood.] These were some of the basic laws in Israel. Did James say that GENTILES had to abstain from*



APPLICATION POINTS ARE WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF THE DISCUSSION, RATHER THAN BEING LEFT TO THE END OF THE LESSON.

these things in order to become Christians? [No.] He was just saying that keeping away from these things would just be the right way to live. Circumcision or any other law-keeping was not required in order to be saved!

Application: *There's a huge difference between obeying God's rules IN ORDER TO be saved and obeying God's rules AS A RESULT of being saved. Your ability to obey God only comes when you put your faith in Christ. Then, you are able (in God's strength) to abstain from evil things and follow God's ways.*

*Let's read on. **Read verses 22-29.***

²² Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, ²³ with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, ²⁵ it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

Discussion: *So the apostles and elders of the first Jerusalem council have ruled and sent their ruling out by way of a letter. Who would deliver this letter to the churches? [Paul and Barnabas, as well as Judas and Silas.] The letter made it clear that the new GENTILE Christians would not have to get circumcised in order to be saved. They are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ!*

*Let's continue. **Read verses 30-31.***

³⁰ So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.



Discussion: *How did the GENTILE Christians respond to this decision? [They were very glad and encouraged.] This was good news to all who had been troubled by the circumcision teachers!*

Let's continue. Read verses 32-35.

³² And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. ³³ And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Discussion: *So Paul and Barnabas remain in Antioch. Does anyone remember what is so significant about the church in Antioch? [People were first called Christians at Antioch.] What were Paul and Barnabas doing in Antioch? [They were teaching and preaching the Word of God.]*

Let's read more. Read verses 36-38.

³⁶ And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." ³⁷ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

Discussion: *Now we have a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. John Mark was a young man who did missionary work with them but went home partway through the trip. Paul thought it wasn't wise to trust John Mark again. Barnabas disagreed.*

Let's finish up and see what happened. Read verses 39-41.

³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Discussion: *Is this division between Paul and Barnabas a good thing? In one way, yes! Now we have two missionary teams: Paul and Silas, and Barnabas and John Mark. Maybe they can spread the gospel to the GENTILES much faster. Even though it is not good to have division, God can use it for His own glory!*



Conclusion: *Do you realize how great it is for God to open up His kingdom to the GENTILES? That means that you and I can go to heaven if we put our faith in Christ alone! The grace that is found only in Jesus puts Jews and GENTILES together as Christians. This is the message that Paul and Barnabas and others will continue to teach through the Book of Acts.*

We will read more about the acts of the apostles next time!



LESSON-AT-HOME

Distribute the “Lesson-At-Home” bookmarks. Read the Scripture Memory verse (Acts 15:11) together.

Acts 15:11 (ESV)

¹¹ “But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

Say: *This short verse is that bold statement Peter made to the Jerusalem council. It affirms the entire gospel of God—that we are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ! And, Jews and GENTILES are saved the same way! Memorize this verse to remember that it is God’s grace that saves, not our works.*

Review the verse.

Direct the students’ attentions to the bottom half of the bookmark. It includes reminder points of today’s lesson that can be discussed with their parents and reviewed during the week.

Close in prayer and dismiss the students.

THE LESSON-AT-HOME SECTION IS THE CLOSING TIME EACH WEEK. BOOKMARKS ARE GIVEN TO THE STUDENTS THAT INCLUDE THE SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE AND A LESSON REVIEW. THE LESSON REVIEW CONTAINS WORDS AND PHRASES THAT CAN SPARK MEMORIES AS WELL AS CONVERSATION WITH PARENTS.