

The Story Adult Study Guide

For the Week of May 3, 2020

Chapter 29: "Paul's Mission"



Key Events: the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul, excerpts from Paul's epistles (letters)

Key Characters: Barnabas, Paul (see page 493 for descriptions)

Bible Reference for this Chapter: Acts 13-14, 16-20; Romans 1, 3-6, 8, 12, 15;

1 Corinthians 1, 3, 5-6, 10, 12-13, 15-16; Galatians 1, 3, 5-6; 1 Thessalonians 1-5

Note: For a map of the New Testament world during the time of the early Christian church, please see the back inside cover of the book.

1. Consider Paul's missionary journeys described in this chapter. What golden opportunities and difficult challenges did he encounter?
2. How would you describe the balance of Paul's being "led by the Spirit" and being led by good sense in his travel and ministry?
3. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul thanked God for the close relationship he enjoyed with the believers there. (pages 416-419) What is Christian fellowship? How does God bless us through fellowship?
4. Chapter 29 contains excerpts from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. (pages 424-429) Identify six subjects Paul addressed. To what extent is each of these topics relevant to Christians and congregations today?
5. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he states, "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free." (page 431; Galatians 5:13) What is meant by the term Christian freedom, and how does this freedom apply to our life in Christ?
6. Read the paragraph on page 432 that contains the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel . . . as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17) Reflect on these important passages by describing the following words and phrases:
 - a) not ashamed –
 - b) gospel -
 - c) salvation -
 - d) first to the Jew, then to the Gentile -
 - e) righteousness of God -
 - f) by faith -
7. Paul's epistles (letters) contain a wealth of God's wisdom vital to our Christian faith and life. Share favorite sections and passages you found in this chapter from Thessalonians pp. 416-419; Corinthians pp. 424-429; Galatians pp. 429-431; and Romans pp. 432-437.

Prayer Suggestions

Thank God for fellowship, and pray that I encourage others in faith and am encouraged by other Christians. Pray for a greater appreciation of the wonders of the gospel, and the joy of sharing it.

Study Guide Helps

1. Opportunities include: 1) he preached in and around transportation hubs of the 1st century, places from which the gospel would spread; 2) Paul had intimate knowledge about Jewish and Gentile cultures, valuable for reaching diverse audiences; 3) Paul's message of forgiveness and salvation in Christ was fresh and new among people from works-based and pagan religious backgrounds; 4) God used miraculous signs through Paul (and others), which validated his preaching; 5) the Holy Spirit caused Paul's message to catch fire – people talked about it in their social circles. Challenges include: 1) he faced incredibly diverse audiences with assorted cultures and beliefs, often needing to juggle the variety at the same time and place; 2) Paul was opposed by Jews (even Christian Jews) who felt that he preached against their OT belief system; 3) he was opposed by Gentiles whose belief systems included pagan philosophies, mythology, and sorcery; 4) Paul often lacked basic needs, and he faced physical threats, imprisonment, and execution; 5) he encountered disagreements and factions among believers and colleagues, but in Christ-like love they worked to resolve them.
2. There were times when Paul was directly led by the Holy Spirit to stay in a certain place or travel to a certain place. He boldly followed wherever God led him. At the same time, Paul, in good sense, chose major cities or capitals of countries where he could plant the gospel news and have it spread to the whole region. Larger cities also had synagogues where Paul initiated his work
3. Fellowship refers to the bond Christians have with one another as members of God's family. The foundation of fellowship is a common faith in Jesus. Believers form one body in Christ – we belong to God and we belong to one another. God uses the relationship among fellow believers as a support network for his children. Blessings include: opportunities to worship God together, share his Word, and carry out Christ's mission to the world; we encourage one another and *spur one another on* in our walk of faith (see Hebrews 10:23-25); we lead those who sin to repentance and lovingly restore them through Christ's forgiveness; we are kind, compassionate and forgiving toward each other; we serve together using the different gifts God gives us; we hold firm to God's truth together, standing as one against the spiritual enemies of the devil, the world and our sinful natures.
4. 1) pp. 424-5 = divisions and factions among Christians in the congregation; 2) p. 425 = practicing and condoning sexual immorality; 3) p. 426 = idolatry and participating in idol practices; 4) pp. 426-7 = understanding spiritual gifts from God; 5) p. 427 = exercising God's gifts in love; 6) pp. 427-9 = understanding Christ's resurrection and its meaning (1 Cor. 15 "The Resurrection Chapter" was featured in the chapter 27 Bible study on April 19). Each and every topic Paul addressed with the Corinthians is very important, relevant and meaningful for us today. Participants can discuss the relevance of these subjects. The form of these issues may have changed, but they remain and will remain significant. Example: the forms of 1st century idolatry vs. 21st century idolatry.
5. There are a few aspects of Christian freedom. One pertains to **freedom from the law** as the way to gain righteousness. Because Christ redeemed mankind, we are right with God through faith in Jesus; thus, we are not burdened with having to obey the law in order to be saved. Another aspect involves **freedom from sin and the devil** and **freedom to serve God**. Since we are empowered by the Spirit through faith in Jesus, we shouldn't live by gratifying our sinful nature and Satan (see paragraph on p. 431 = *The acts of the flesh are obvious . . .*). Rather, the Spirit compels us to serve and obey God out of love for Christ (see next paragraph on p. 431 = *But the fruit of the Spirit is . . .*). We use our Christian freedom as a way to glorify God and lead others to Christ. Freedom from sin and freedom to serve God is part of our daily existence. Paul referred to this truth as an internal civil war battling in Christian hearts. The opposing forces are the devil and our sinful desires vs the Holy Spirit working through our faith (see Romans 6 and 7).
6. These verses define the gospel of Christ, and separate the gospel from the notion of salvation by works: a) the truth of how one receives God's favor (described in the second sentence – verse 17) is so remarkable that we can't keep it to ourselves and can't hide it; b) gospel means "good news" or "good story" that God sent his Son to live, die and rise again to save the world; this good news carries God's unlimited power revealed in Christ; c) salvation means more than life in heaven; it refers to everything that God has done and does to deliver his people from this sinful world, including his plan of salvation, the gift of saving faith, and forgiveness and life eternal in Jesus Christ; d) by his grace, God's plan to send a Messiah/Savior came through the Jews; his promise was fulfilled through his chosen people of the OT (although OT Gentiles were also saved through faith in God's promise); after Christ's death and resurrection, God used the Jews to carry the gospel to the Gentiles and the entire world, which was his original plan; e) we must be righteous, that is perfect, in order to be right with the holy God and acceptable to him, a status impossible for sinful humans to achieve; God made it possible for sinful mankind to be made perfect in his sight through his Son; as mankind's Substitute, God transferred righteousness through Christ's perfect life of obedience, his death payment for man's sin and guilt, and his resurrection which sealed mankind's redemption; f) this righteousness through Christ is offered to all people (objective/universal justification = God declared the whole world not guilty), but only those with faith in Jesus the Savior are made righteous and receive the spiritual benefits (subjective/individual justification = personally receiving God's not guilty verdict through faith in Christ).
7. Participants can share favorite sections and passages. Search through the pages for each epistle, select passages, and discuss the hope, comfort, encouragement and direction God's wisdom brings.