This part of Acts tells the story of the beginning of the mission beyond the area immediately surrounding Jerusalem to “the uttermost part of the world” (Acts 1:8).

As you read these stories, notice how important the Twelve are in that work. Why do you think that they didn’t delegate more of the missionary work? Is there any connection between the extreme dependence of the early Church on the Twelve and the later apostasy?

Notice also that the members of the Church come into greater conflict with traditional Judaism because of this missionary work. For most of the first century and perhaps even into the second, Christians did not think of themselves as a different religion from Judaism. Why did missionary work eventually change that? Does that perhaps suggest something about our relation to contemporary Christianity?

To try to keep these study materials to a reasonable length, I will concentrate on chapters 10 and 15, with some questions on the intermediate chapters.

**Acts 10**

**Verses 1–8:** Where was Caesarea, and what was its importance to Palestine?

*Italian* was the name of the infantry cohort to which Cornelius belonged. The phrase translated “feared God” is a
technical phrase that tells us that Cornelius was a person who believed in the God of Israel and attended services in the synagogue but did not keep the whole law of Moses and was probably not circumcised. Another term used to describe such people (and there seem to have been many of them) was “proselyte of the gate,” in other words, people who had been converted but had not come all the way in. What do we know about Cornelius, and why does Luke think it important to tell us these things about him?

Why does Luke tell us the time of day when this occurred? What does the angel mean when he says that Cornelius’s prayers have come up to God as a memorial? (Compare Exodus 17:14 and Leviticus 2:2, 9, 16.)

**Verses 9–18:** For the origin of the differentiation between those animals that could be eaten and those that could not, see Leviticus 11:2–23 and Deuteronomy 14:3–20.

What does verse 17 mean in saying that “Peter doubted in himself what this vision . . . should mean”? *Doubted* is a good translation; *was perplexed* would be another.

**Verses 19–33:** Given the content of his vision, how did Peter come to the conclusion that he had been told not to consider any person unclean? The vision was about food, so it could easily have been understood to be a revocation of the laws concerning what could be eaten and what not. How might Peter have gotten from that understanding to the understanding he expresses in verse 28?

As for food, how do we square the Word of Wisdom with this vision? Does the Word of Wisdom declare some foods unclean? If not, how do we explain its prohibitions?
In verses 6 and 32 we learn that Peter was staying with a man who was a tanner. Because it deals in the hides of dead animals, tanning was one of the unclean professions; the Pharisees called all of those who had such unclean professions “sinners” (something to keep in mind whenever we read about Jesus dealing with sinners). How does knowing that Peter was staying with a tanner, by definition a sinner, give this story nuance?

Verses 34–48: Had Peter previously believed that God was a respecter of persons, in other words, a person who showed favoritism to some (verse 34)?

Verses 36–39 give a résumé of Jesus’s ministry, presumably focusing on its most important parts. How is the gospel an announcement of peace? Peace between whom (verse 36)?

How could Peter expect Cornelius already to know the word that was preached (verse 37)?

Why was it important that Jesus’s ministry was throughout Judea?

Peter speaks of the Father anointing Jesus with the Holy Ghost and with power (verse 38). Why might he use that word, anointing?

Why was it important for Peter to testify that Christ went about doing good and healing? What does each of those two things have to do with preaching the gospel? Is it possible to preach the gospel without them?

Why does Peter characterize those healed as having been “oppressed of the devil” (verse 38)? Is he just speaking in
their terms, or could we also reasonably say that those who are ill are oppressed by the devil? If so, how? If not, why not?

Why is it important that Peter and the other members of the Twelve be witnesses of what Jesus did during his lifetime? That he was crucified (verse 39)?

Verse 40 is Peter’s testimony of Christ. Why does he speak of the resurrection rather than the atonement?

What does Peter mean when he says that the witnesses were chosen before (verse 41)?

The Twelve are witnesses of Christ. Here Peter says that they are witnesses that Christ was ordained to judge the living and the dead (verse 42). Why is that the important point to make?

Of what have all the prophets been witnesses (verse 43)?

How is the remission of sins related to the rest of Peter’s testimony?

What do those who are with Peter find astonishing (verse 45)?

Why didn’t the Lord just tell Peter that he wanted the Church to baptize non-Israelites from now on? Why have him go through this experience to learn?

Why does the conversion and baptism of Cornelius bring about a change in Christian practice when the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch did not?

**Acts 11**

**Verses 1–18:** Why does Luke describe those who disagree with Peter as “they that were of the circumcision” rather than “the Jews”?

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What is Peter’s proof that what he did was of God (verses 15–17)?

**Verses 19–30:** Does *Grecians* in verse 20 mean the same as it meant in Acts 6:1?

Why did Barnabas go to Antioch (verse 22; compare Acts 8:14)? Why did Barnabas go fetch Saul (verse 25)?

Does the fact that *Christian* is a Latin rather than a Greek word shed any light on the end of verse 26?

One scholar (Erik Peterson) suggests that the passive voice in verse 26 (“were called”) suggests that this is a name the Romans gave to the early Church. Hans Conzelmann agrees, but he argues that the name wasn’t an official designation. What do you think of Peterson’s proposal? How does it compare to us being called Mormons?

Why did the brethren raise money for the Saints in and around Jerusalem (verses 27–30)? Historical records give evidence that a famine occurred during the year AD 46/47 and that, on top of the famine, the year was a Sabbath year. What does it mean that it was a Sabbath year, and how might that make the famine worse?

**Acts 12**

**Verse 1:** Luke has already mentioned the persecution of the Church that began with Stephen. How does this persecution differ from that?

**Verses 1–19:** Why would this story have been important to the early Church? How might it be important to us?
Acts 13

Verses 1–3: Previously we have seen everything in the Church coming out of Jerusalem. What does it mean that now we see it coming also from Antioch?

As mentioned in last week’s materials, tradition says that Saul changed his name from Saul to Paul after he was baptized. However, notice that verse 1 speaks of him as Saul after his baptism. Notice, too, that verse 9 says he was also called Paul: he was called both Saul and Paul. Refer to the materials for lesson 29 for more discussion of Paul’s name.

Verse 5: Who is this John whom Barnabas and Paul have as their minister or assistant? (See verse 25 as well as Colossians 4:10.)

Verse 31: Does Paul claim to be one of the special witnesses? Why or why not?

Verses 42–43: What kind of response did Paul get to his preaching? Why should I care about these events?

Verse 46: What is Paul’s message to the Jews of Antioch who will not accept his message?

Acts 14

This is an interesting story, but what has it to do with us today?

Acts 15

This chapter tells us of what was perhaps the most important general conference of the early Church.
**Verses 1–5:** What is the problem that Paul and Barnabas must deal with? Which members of the Church seem to have been the problem? Who are on the two sides of the dissension? Hadn’t they already heard Peter declare that the gospel should be preached to Gentiles? How might they have answered him? What lesson might there be in this for us?

How does Luke explain the decision that Barnabas and Paul should go to Jerusalem (verse 2)? How does Paul explain it (Galatians 2:2)? What do you make of that difference?

**Verses 6–21:** What yoke is it that neither the fathers of those at this council nor those at the council could themselves bear (verse 10)?

Is it relevant that the view Peter expresses in verses 7–11 was probably not the view of Jews at his time?

Why is it important for Paul and Barnabas to report on the miracles they have wrought among the Gentiles (verse 12)?

In verse 13, who is James and why does he seem to have such authority in this group? (He cannot be James the brother of John, for that James is already dead; see Acts 12:2.)

Who do you think Simeon (verse 14) is? Consider the spelling of his name. What person whom we have already frequently seen goes by a name that is spelled much like that? This name is just a version of that name.

Why does James propose to require only the four things that he mentions in verse 20? (Compare Leviticus 17–18, particularly 17:8–12, 15 and 18:6–18.)

**Verses 22–30:** Note that the name Silas in verse 22 is the Aramaic equivalent of Saul.
How many were sent to Antioch, including Paul and Barnabas?

How have those who demanded circumcision subverted the souls of others (verse 24)?

*Verses 30–35:* Compare Galatians 2:11–14. Is this the same or a different disagreement?

In these confrontations with other Church leaders, could Paul expect to win? Why or why not?

What do you make of these disagreements that, from all we can tell, were quite strong? Do we learn anything about being a leader or being a follower from these stories?