
SUMMARY

We're inviting our Life Groups Leaders to play an integral role in our Year in the Bible by aligning their weekly gatherings with our church-wide reading plan. This alignment will not only increase engagement with the plan, but—more importantly—deepen biblical literacy across our church. To support our leaders in this effort, we've created weekly Leader Guides that include discussion questions, commentary insights, and practical teaching tips. Whether your group is Community, Discussion, or Traditional in format, these guides are designed to serve as a helpful and flexible resource.

Format of the Year in the Bible Leader Guides

Our Leader Guides will be sent to Life Group Leaders in monthly packets by the twentieth of the preceding month. Each weekly guide contains five sections, outlined below. Leaders are welcome to walk their group through the guide step by step or to pick and choose the sections that will be most helpful for their group, as we trust that our leaders know their groups best. We've also provided recommendations later on based on group type to serve as a helpful starting point.

1. Create Interest

We'll kick off each guide with a thoughtful opening question designed to help your group engage and generate interest in the Scripture passage being covered. We've found that beginning with simple, personal questions—ones everyone can answer—helps build participation, comfort, and momentum for deeper discussion.

2. Study the Bible

The core of the Leader Guide is the weekly Scripture reading, broken into smaller sections with discussion questions and a few simple activities. Community Group leaders may choose to dive deeply into one section, while Discussion Group leaders may be able to cover the entire passage. Traditional Life Group leaders can use this section to help structure their teaching time.

3. Connect to Christ (Apply God's Word)

Every story in the Bible points to Jesus Christ, and as leaders, it is our responsibility to help our members discover how. We also have the opportunity to show how each passage of Scripture applies to our lives today. Because of its importance, we're asking every group to integrate this section in some way each week.

4. Pray Together

Prayer draws our hearts to God and to one another, so regardless of group type, size, age, or stage, we're asking that every group set aside time each week to pray together.

5. Commentary

For those who want to learn more, this will take excerpted and slightly adapted material from *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the three distinct and valuable types of Life Groups at Central, we wanted to offer recommendations for how each might get the most out of the Leader Guide. We trust you to discern what your group needs and are here to support you along the way.

Community Groups

Time Allotment

- *10 mins – The Bible:* Provide an overview of a passage and how it Connects to Christ.
- *40 mins – People:* Engage through your normal weekly rhythms.
- *10 mins – Prayer:* Lift up concerns and praises shared during the group.

Preparation Tips

- Pray, asking the Spirit to guide you as you prepare and read the Leader Guide.
- Decide which passage of Scripture is most relevant to your group and its Connect to Christ, creating a concise overview of any needed context.
- Adapt or add to your weekly community questions to incorporate the Connect to Christ section.

Discussion Groups

Time Allotment

- *10 mins – People:* Open conversation or discussion over a question, high/low, etc.
- *40 mins – The Bible:* Discuss the passage and its Connect to Christ.
- *10 mins – Prayer:* Invite members to share personal requests and praises.

Preparation Tips

- Pray, asking the Spirit to guide you as you prepare and read the Leader Guide.
- Decide which sections or activities may be skipped due to time constraints and create an overview for those portions.
- Use strategic questions to lead your group into the Connect to Christ section.

Traditional Groups

Time Allotment

- *20 mins – People:* Weekly catch-up and social interactions.
- *30 mins – The Bible:* Teach the passage, revealing its Connection to Christ.
- *10 mins – Prayer:* Provide space for those who want to share requests and pray.

Preparation Tips

- Pray, asking the Spirit to guide you as you prepare and read the Leader Guide.
- Consider following the same passage breakdown as the guide, and incorporate questions either rhetorically or literally, depending on the needs of your group.
- In your application, show how we might trust in God's grace—not our works—for salvation and sanctification revealing the Connection to Christ.

THE RISEN CHRIST IS LORD: Acts 2:29-41

The Point: The crucified and risen Jesus is Lord and Christ, calling all people to repent and believe.

The Purpose: Respond to the gospel with repentance, faith, and public identification with Jesus.

Christ Connection: Acts 2:29-41 proclaims that Jesus fulfills Davidic promise through his resurrection, exaltation, and the gift of salvation to all who call on his name.

CREATE INTEREST**Question: What news have you received that required action?**

This question is intentionally broad. People may mention anything from positive news (a job offer, pregnancy, move, or promotion) to difficult news (a diagnosis, conflict, loss, or unexpected change). The goal is to help participants reflect on how news often requires a response and sets the stage for discussing how we respond to the gospel.

Transition to the Study

Acts 2 records the Spirit's powerful arrival and Peter's bold explanation of what it all means. In verses 29-41, Peter centers everything on Jesus: crucified, raised, exalted, and declared both Lord and Christ. This is not abstract theology. It is the gospel announced to real people with urgent consequences. As your group studies the passage, help them hear both the confidence of Peter's witness and the personal summons that follows: repent, be baptized, and receive the promised gift.

STUDY THE BIBLE**Acts 2:29-32**

Read Aloud: Have someone read Acts 2:29-32.

Discussion: What does Peter say David foresaw?

Peter says David prophetically spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, whose body would not remain in the grave or see corruption. The resurrection stands within God's long promised plan.

Why does the resurrection matter for daily Christian confidence?

It means Jesus is alive, victorious, and trustworthy. Believers are not following a dead teacher, but a living Lord. The resurrection turns hope from wishful thinking into living reality.

Why is Peter careful to distinguish David from Jesus?

David died and remained in the tomb, so the psalm must point beyond him to the Messiah. Peter uses this contrast to prove Jesus fulfills Scripture. Fulfillment requires a risen king greater than David.

Teaching Tip: Trace the argument

In sermon passages, help the group follow the flow of thought step by step. That keeps doctrine connected to persuasion rather than sounding like isolated facts.

Acts 2:33-36

Read Aloud: Have someone read Acts 2:33-36.

Discussion: What claims does Peter make about Jesus here?

Jesus is exalted at God's right hand, has received and poured out the Spirit, and has been made both Lord and Christ. The risen Jesus reigns with divine authority.

How should Jesus' lordship shape ordinary decisions and loyalties?

His authority reaches into relationships, priorities, speech, money, and witness, so no part of life stays untouched if Jesus is Lord. He is my Lord to trust, obey, and submit to, calling for repentance, allegiance, and obedience not merely a title in a doctrinal statement with correct ideas about his authority.

Why is the phrase this Jesus whom you crucified so piercing?

It connects the audience directly to the rejection of God's Messiah. Peter moves the message from information to conviction. Gospel preaching names both Christ's glory and human guilt.

Acts 2:37-41

Read Aloud: Have someone read aloud Acts 2:37-41.

Discussion: How do the listeners respond to Peter's message?

They are cut to the heart, ask what to do, and many respond through repentance, baptism, and receiving the word. True hearing leads toward response.

What does repentance look like beyond feeling bad about sin?

Repentance involves a change of mind, allegiance, and direction that leads to visible response. It turns from sin toward Christ. Repentance is both inward (a honest, Godward grief over sin, naming the sin, owning it without excuses, asking God for mercy) and outward (confessing to the person you hurt, making restitution where possible, changing patterns, seeking accountability).

Why is Peter's invitation both urgent and hopeful?

The audience is guilty, yet forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit are offered. Conviction is met by an open promise in Christ. The gospel exposes in order to restore.

CONNECT TO CHRIST (APPLY GOD'S WORD)

Discussion: How does our passage this week point to Jesus?

This passage points to Jesus as the risen Messiah, exalted Lord, and only source of forgiveness and salvation.

Connect to Christ: Acts 2:29–41 proclaims the heart of apostolic preaching: Jesus was crucified, raised, exalted, and made both Lord and Christ, so salvation is found not in vague spirituality or moral improvement but in responding to the risen Jesus. Peter ties him to David's promises, resurrection hope, and the outpouring of the Spirit, showing that the Messiah now reigns at God's right hand, exposing sin yet offering forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit to all who repent, believe, and call on his name as the kingdom is openly announced through the church.

Application: Choose one of the following ways to apply the study to your life this week:

Identify one area where you need to submit more fully to Jesus' lordship.

Pray for a heart that stays tender and responsive to conviction.

Practice repentance, confess a specific sin to another, then take a step toward restitution.

PRAYER TIME

Ask group members to share prayer needs. Close by thanking God that Jesus is risen, exalted, and mighty to save.

COMMENTARY

The New American Commentary, Dr. Ray Clendennen, General Editor
Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

Book Chapter Background

Acts chapter 2 marks a pivotal moment in the early Christian movement—the birth of the Church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Set during the Jewish festival of Pentecost, fifty days after Passover, this chapter unfolds in Jerusalem where devout Jews from across the Roman Empire had gathered. The disciples, obediently waiting as Jesus had instructed in Acts 1, experience a dramatic infilling of the Holy Spirit, evidenced by wind, fire, and speaking in other languages. This supernatural event draws a crowd and sets the stage for Peter’s bold sermon, which interprets the moment through the lens of Old Testament prophecy and proclaims Jesus as the risen Messiah. Acts 2 concludes with the formation of a vibrant, Spirit-filled community marked by teaching, fellowship, prayer, and generosity—a model for Christian life and mission that continues to inspire churches today.

Verse by Verse

2:29 Peter begins with a respectful and direct address: “Brothers and sisters, I can confidently speak to you about the patriarch David.” This signals both familiarity and authority. In Jewish custom, David was revered as Israel’s greatest king and a prophet (cf. 2 Samuel 23:2). Peter acknowledges that David died, was buried, and that “his tomb is with us to this day.” This statement is crucial—it refutes any notion that David himself was the subject of Psalm 16:10 (“you will not let your holy one see decay”). Peter’s point is that David’s body did decay, and his tomb was a known landmark in Jerusalem. Therefore, the psalm must be pointing beyond David to someone else. This sets the stage for identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of David’s prophetic words.

2:30 Peter now explains David’s prophetic insight. He says David “was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him to seat one of his descendants on his throne.” This refers to the Davidic covenant found in 2 Samuel 7:12–16, where God promises that David’s offspring will establish an eternal kingdom. The phrase “sworn an oath” emphasizes the certainty and divine origin of this promise. In Jewish understanding, the Messiah would come from David’s lineage (cf. Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5). Peter affirms that David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, foresaw the coming of the Messiah—not merely as a political ruler, but as one who would reign eternally. This verse underscores the continuity between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment, a key theme in apostolic preaching.

2:31 Peter concludes this portion by interpreting Psalm 16 in light of Jesus' resurrection. He says, "Seeing what was to come, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah: He was not abandoned in Hades, and his flesh did not experience decay." The term "Hades" here refers to the realm of the dead, not necessarily a place of torment. Peter is careful to show that David's words were not self-referential but messianic. Jesus, unlike David, did not remain in the grave—His body did not undergo corruption. This fulfills Psalm 16:10 and confirms Jesus as the promised Messiah. Peter's use of Scripture is both exegetical and evangelistic: he interprets the psalm in its original context and applies it to the resurrection, which is the cornerstone of Christian faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Theologically, this verse affirms the bodily resurrection of Christ and the reliability of prophetic Scripture.

2:32 Peter continues his sermon by affirming the resurrection of Jesus with bold clarity: "God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this." The resurrection is not presented as a myth or metaphor, but as a historical event verified by eyewitnesses. This aligns with Paul's later testimony in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, where he lists multiple appearances of the risen Christ, including to over five hundred people. In Jewish legal custom, the testimony of two or three witnesses established truth (Deuteronomy 19:15), and here Peter appeals to a multitude of firsthand accounts. Theologically, this verse underscores the centrality of the resurrection in apostolic preaching—it is the cornerstone of Christian hope (Romans 10:9). Peter's use of "this Jesus" is emphatic, pointing to the same person they had seen crucified, now vindicated by God.

2:33 Peter explains the exaltation of Jesus: "Therefore, since he has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear." The "right hand of God" is a position of authority and honor, echoing Psalm 110:1, which Peter will quote in verse 34. This exaltation fulfills Jesus' own words in John 16:7, where He promised to send the Helper after His departure. The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is not a random event—it is the visible and audible evidence of Jesus' enthronement and the inauguration of the new covenant. Theologically, this verse affirms the Trinitarian work of redemption: the Father exalts the Son, the Son receives the Spirit, and the Spirit is poured out on the Church. It also reinforces the idea that Pentecost is not merely emotional or experiential—it is deeply rooted in divine action and fulfillment.

2:34 Peter clarifies that David did not ascend into heaven, saying, "For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says: The Lord declared to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand.'" This is a direct quotation from Psalm 110:1, one of the most frequently cited

Old Testament verses in the New Testament. Peter's point is that David, though revered, was not the subject of this prophecy—he was speaking of someone greater. The phrase "The Lord said to my Lord" reveals a conversation within the Godhead, pointing to the divine nature of the Messiah. Jesus Himself used this verse to challenge the Pharisees' understanding of the Messiah's identity (Matthew 22:41–46). Peter's use of it here reinforces that Jesus is not merely a descendant of David—He is David's Lord. This verse is a powerful apologetic for the deity and exaltation of Christ.

2:35 Peter continues the quotation: "Until I make your enemies your footstool." This imagery of a footstool signifies complete subjugation and victory. In ancient Near Eastern culture, placing one's foot on the neck or body of a defeated enemy was a symbol of conquest (Joshua 10:24). Peter uses this to show that Jesus, now enthroned, will ultimately triumph over all opposition. Paul echoes this in 1 Corinthians 15:25–27, where he speaks of Christ reigning until all enemies are under His feet, with death being the last to be destroyed. Theologically, this verse affirms the eschatological hope of believers—that Christ's reign is both present and future, and that justice will be fully realized in God's timing.

2:36 Peter concludes this section with a powerful declaration: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." The phrase "with certainty" (Greek: *asphalos*) conveys absolute assurance—this is not speculation but revealed truth. Peter confronts the crowd with the gravity of their actions: they crucified the one whom God has exalted. Yet this is not merely a rebuke—it is an invitation to repentance and faith. The titles "Lord" and "Messiah" are deeply significant. "Lord" (Greek: *Kyrios*) denotes divine authority, often used for Yahweh in the Septuagint. "Messiah" (Hebrew: *Mashiach*, Greek: *Christos*) identifies Jesus as the anointed one promised in the Scriptures. This verse encapsulates the heart of the gospel: Jesus is both Savior and King, and the proper response is surrender and trust.

2:37 This verse captures the crowd's response to Peter's sermon: "When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart." The Greek word *katanussō* (pierced) conveys deep emotional and spiritual conviction—an inner wounding that leads to repentance. Peter's bold proclamation of Jesus as "Lord and Messiah" (v.36), coupled with the accusation "whom you crucified," confronts the listeners with the gravity of their sin. Their question, "Brothers, what should we do?" reflects genuine humility and openness to transformation. This moment mirrors the response seen in Luke 3:10, where John the Baptist's audience

also asks what action repentance requires. Theologically, this verse illustrates the Spirit's role in conviction (John 16:8) and the necessity of a personal response to gospel truth.

2:38 Peter's answer is clear and direct: "Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Repentance (*metanoeō*) involves a change of mind and direction—a turning from sin toward God. Baptism follows as a public declaration of faith and identification with Christ. In Jewish custom, baptism was used for ritual purification and proselyte conversion, but here it signifies union with the crucified and risen Messiah (Romans 6:3–4). The phrase "in the name of Jesus Christ" emphasizes allegiance to Him as Lord. Forgiveness of sins is the promised result, echoing Isaiah 1:18 and Psalm 103:12. Peter also promises "the gift of the Holy Spirit," affirming that salvation includes both pardon and empowerment. This verse underscores the foundational steps of Christian conversion: repentance, baptism, and Spirit reception.

2:39 Peter expands the invitation: "For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off." The "promise" refers to the gift of the Spirit and the blessings of salvation. By including "your children," Peter affirms the generational nature of God's covenant, echoing Deuteronomy 6:6–7 and Genesis 17:7. "All who are far off" likely includes Gentiles, anticipating the gospel's expansion beyond Israel (Ephesians 2:13). The phrase "as many as the Lord our God will call" highlights divine initiative in salvation, consistent with John 6:44 and Romans 8:30. This verse affirms both the universal scope of the gospel and the sovereign grace of God in drawing people to Himself.

2:40 Luke summarizes Peter's extended exhortation: "Be saved from this corrupt generation." The word "corrupt" (*skolios*) implies moral crookedness and spiritual rebellion. Peter's call to "be saved" is both personal and communal—it involves escaping the judgment that awaits a sinful culture and entering the redeemed community of Christ. This echoes the prophetic warnings of Isaiah and Jeremiah, who called Israel to turn from wickedness and seek the Lord. Paul later echoes this theme in Philippians 2:15, urging believers to shine as lights "in a crooked and perverted generation." Theologically, this verse reminds us that salvation is not just about forgiveness—it's about transformation and separation from the world's values.

2:41 This verse records the immediate fruit of Peter's preaching: "So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them." Acceptance of the message implies belief and submission to its truth. Baptism follows as the outward sign of inward faith. The number—three thousand—is remarkable,

especially considering the context of Pentecost, when Jews from many nations were gathered in Jerusalem. This mass conversion fulfills Jesus' promise in Matthew 16:18 and reflects the power of Spirit-empowered proclamation. The phrase "added to them" marks the beginning of the Church as a distinct community of believers. Theologically, this verse affirms that the gospel, when faithfully preached, produces real and measurable fruit, and that baptism is the normative response to saving faith.

GOD IS NOT CONTAINED: Acts 7:2-10, 35-39, 48-56

The Point: God remains faithful to his people, and no human resistance can contain his presence or purposes.

The Purpose: Grow to trust God beyond familiar places, respond to his word with humility, and stand faithful when obedience is costly.

Christ Connection: Stephen's sermon and witness point to Jesus as the Righteous One, rejected by people yet exalted at God's right hand as the fulfillment of God's saving plan.

CREATE INTEREST

Question: When have you realized that something important could not be controlled as tightly as you thought?

People often feel safer when life is predictable, manageable, and neatly contained. Yet the most important realities in life, truth, love, conviction, and God's work, rarely fit inside the boundaries we try to build.

Transition to the Study

Acts 7 records Stephen's defense before a hostile audience, but it becomes much more than a defense. He retells Israel's history to show that God has always been at work beyond familiar people, places, and expectations. From Abraham in Mesopotamia to Joseph in Egypt to Moses in Midian, God keeps moving his purposes forward. Stephen then confronts the leaders for resisting the Holy Spirit and rejecting the Righteous One. As your group studies this passage, help them see that God cannot be confined to human systems, and Jesus is the center of the story they were refusing to receive.

STUDY THE BIBLE**Acts 7:2-10**

Read Aloud: Have someone read Acts 7:2-10.

What pattern does Stephen begin to establish through Abraham and Joseph?

God calls, leads, and preserves his people even outside the land and often through rejection. Stephen's opening shows that God's presence and covenant purposes were never limited to one location.

How might this passage help believers trust God when life feels displaced or uncertain?

God was with Joseph in suffering and exile, which reminds believers that hardship does not mean abandonment. God's faithfulness often becomes clearer while his people are in unfamiliar places.

Why do you think Stephen begins with Israel's history instead of a direct defense?

He reframes the issue by showing that his accusers have misunderstood their own story. Stephen's argument is not anti Israel or anti temple, but a call to recognize God's larger redemptive pattern.

Teaching Tip: Follow the Storyline

Help the group trace repeated phrases and movements in the text. When people notice patterns in the biblical story, the main point becomes clearer and discussion becomes more grounded.

Acts 7:35-39

Read Aloud: Have someone read Acts 7:35-39.

Discussion: What irony does Stephen highlight in the people's response to Moses?

The one they rejected as ruler and deliverer became the very one God sent to rescue them. Stephen uses this to expose how God's appointed servants are often resisted before they are received.

Where do people today tend to resist God's leadership even while wanting his help?

People often want relief without surrender, guidance without repentance, or blessing without obedience. This passage presses believers to examine whether they welcome God's rule or only his benefits.

How does Moses prepare readers to understand Jesus more clearly?

Moses was a rejected deliverer who spoke God's words and pointed ahead to a greater prophet. His story prepares the way for Jesus, who was also rejected yet sent by God for salvation.

Acts 7:48-56

Read Aloud: Have someone read aloud Acts 7:48-56.

Discussion: What does Stephen teach about God's presence in verses 48-50?

God is not confined to buildings made by human hands. The temple mattered in Israel's history, but it was never meant to shrink God into something manageable or local.

What forms of spiritual stubbornness show up in Stephen's confrontation?

He describes hearts and ears that resist the Holy Spirit, reject God's messengers, and refuse the truth about Jesus. Religious activity can exist alongside deep resistance to God.

Why is Stephen's vision of Jesus at God's right hand so important?

It confirms that Jesus is exalted, vindicated, and reigning even while Stephen suffers. The rejected Righteous One is now the enthroned Son of Man, and that changes how believers understand opposition.

CONNECT TO CHRIST (APPLY GOD'S WORD)

Discussion: How does our passage this week point to Jesus?

Stephen traces a pattern of rejected deliverers across Israel's history that reaches its fulfillment in Jesus. He is the Righteous One they betrayed, yet he now stands exalted at the right hand of God, proving that human rejection cannot overturn God's saving plan.

Connect to Christ: Acts 7 points to Jesus by showing that the whole story of Israel has been moving toward him. Like Joseph and Moses, Jesus was rejected by the very people he came to save, yet God's purpose stood firm. Stephen identifies Jesus as the Righteous One and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand, vindicated after suffering and rejection. The passage makes clear that God's presence is no longer centered on a building, but fully revealed in the risen and exalted Christ, who now reigns and welcomes faithful witnesses into his presence.

Application: Choose one of the following ways to apply the study to your life this week:

Release one area where you have tried to keep God safely inside your preferences, routines, or expectations, and ask him to reshape your obedience this week.

Identify any place where conviction has made you defensive, and respond with repentance instead of resistance.

Stand openly for Jesus in one difficult conversation this week, trusting that his approval matters more than human acceptance.

PRAYER TIME

Ask group members to share prayer needs. Close by thanking God that his presence is not confined, his purposes cannot be stopped, and Jesus now reigns in glory.

COMMENTARY

The New American Commentary, Dr. Ray Clendennen, General Editor
Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

Book Chapter Background

Acts 7 records Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin, where he recounts Israel's history to reveal a consistent pattern of rejecting God's chosen leaders. Beginning with Abraham (7:2-5), Stephen emphasizes that God's presence and promises were never tied to a specific land, since Abraham himself received the promise without possessing it. He then outlines a pattern of promise and fulfillment (7:6-7), showing that God's ultimate goal was not merely land but true worship. Moving through the patriarchs (7:8-10), Stephen highlights Joseph as one rejected by his brothers yet used by God to bring deliverance. He continues with Moses (7:35-38), another rejected deliverer who foreshadows Christ as redeemer and mediator of God's word. Stephen then recalls Israel's rebellion in the wilderness (7:39), demonstrating their inward turning away from God. Addressing the temple (7:48-50), he argues that God cannot be confined to man-made structures, confronting misplaced reliance on the temple itself. Stephen concludes (7:51-53) by directly accusing his audience of continuing this pattern, culminating in their rejection of the "Righteous One," Jesus. His speech sets the stage for his martyrdom and marks a turning point in the spread of the gospel.

Verse by Verse

7:2-5 Stephen began his speech with great deference to his hearers, reminding them that they were his fellow Jewish "brothers" and showing respect to the elders on the Sanhedrin by referring to them as "fathers." He quickly moved into his survey of patriarchal history by quoting Gen 12:1, God's call to Abraham to leave land and relatives and travel to a land to which he would direct him. By thus stressing that the call came to Abraham at the very beginning, Stephen implicitly made the point that God was in control of Abraham's entire movement. The reference to God as "the God of glory" may also be a subtle touch. God revealed himself to Abraham in his full glory, even in a pagan land. From Haran, God called Abraham into "this land where you are now living" (v. 4). Yet Abraham was given no inheritance in Canaan, not so much as "a foot of ground" (v. 5). In fact, it was to this landless Abraham that God gave the promises to Israel. The promise of the land was truly a promise, since at the time it was given, Abraham had neither the land nor an heir to possess it (v. 5).

7:6-7 Verses 6-7 provide the pattern for the fulfillment of the promise, combining Gen 15:13-14 with Exod 3:12. Abraham's descendants would be sojourners in a foreign land, would be enslaved and mistreated for 400 years, would be delivered through God's judgment of their foreign lords, and then finally would come and worship God "in this place." These verses provide the promise-fulfillment pattern for the entire historical sketch Stephen drew in his speech. God ever renews his promise despite the constant failures of his people, who reject his chosen leaders like Joseph and Moses. It reaches the temple itself, which should have led to the fulfillment of the promised goal "to worship God in this place." According to v. 7b, the real goal of God's promise to Abraham was not the land at all. It was instead the freedom to render true worship and devotion to God. Stephen would go on to show that even the temple had not realized this purpose. The promise remains yet unfulfilled. It is only fulfilled in Christ.

7:8 Verse 8 is a transition verse, showing the beginnings of the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and leading into the history of the patriarchs. The covenant of circumcision (Gen 17:10-14) implies the birth of children, and the circumcision of Isaac confirms that God kept his promise to give descendants to Abraham (Gen 21:4). Stephen moved quickly through the patriarchal history using the motif of circumcision, from Isaac to Jacob to the twelve patriarchs.

7:9-10 Drawing at various points from the Joseph tradition of Gen 37-46 without quoting any passage directly, Stephen told the story of Joseph's being sold into Egypt by his brothers, his rise to power in Egypt. A sharp contrast existed between Joseph and his brothers. God was with Joseph (v. 9). The Genesis narrative has much to say about Joseph's suffering, but Stephen chose not to dwell on this. Instead he stressed God's presence with Joseph. God fulfilled his promises through Joseph, delivering Israel from famine by his hand. God granted him "favor and wisdom" (RSV).

Note how the same characteristics are used of Stephen himself (6:3, 8, 10). Wisdom is a particular sign of God's favor to his faithful disciples and would characterize Moses as well later in Stephen's speech (7:22). God gave Joseph favor with people which allowed him to rise in the eyes of Pharaoh, who established him as ruler over Egypt and the royal household (v. 10). Attention is focused on Joseph's brothers. Though Joseph was characterized by wisdom and favor, his brothers were marked by jealousy, which led them to sell their brother into Egypt (v. 9). God was decidedly not with the jealous brothers. They experienced famine and great distress and were unable to find sustenance (v. 11).

7:35–36 With the emphasis on Moses himself, his relation to Christ was more explicitly drawn. Stephen reminded his hearers of the Israelites' rejection of his role as "ruler and judge" over them. They denied Moses, but God "sent" him (v. 35). Israel rejected him, but God affirmed him. The comparison to Christ becomes even stronger in the reference to Moses as "deliverer/redeemer" of Israel. It is the only occurrence in Luke-Acts of the noun "redeemer" (lytrōtēs); but the verbal form, "the one who was going to redeem Israel," is applied to Christ in Luke 24:21. The word "redeemer" is virtually equivalent to "Savior" (cf. 5:31), and the comparison to Christ is unmistakable. Moses was a type of Christ. Both were sent by God to deliver Israel. Both were denied, rejected by those they were sent to save.

7:37–38 More than a foreshadowing of Christ took place with Moses. He predicted the coming of Christ, the prophet like himself whom God would raise up (v. 37). With all these obvious overtones of Moses' likeness to Christ in vv. 35–37, one cannot help wondering whether they do not carry over into v. 38 with the references to Moses' being with the "assembly" in the wilderness and to his giving "living words" to the Israelites. The word for assembly, *ekklēsia*, is the normal word used in the Septuagint for the gathered community of Israel. The term also is one Christians used for their own assembly, the church. It is hard to resist the comparison between Moses standing in the assembly of Israel, mediating between the Israelites and the angel of God, and the presence of Christ in his church fulfilling the same role. The reference to "living words" denotes the law Moses received on Mt. Sinai. Stephen did not in any sense criticize the law in any part of his speech. The angelic presence only serves to enhance the law and its status as the "living words" of God. Moses was the God-sent redeemer for Israel, the worker of signs and wonders, the one who transmitted the living words of God. As such he was a type of Christ. Also like Christ, he was rejected by his people.

7:39 In this section Stephen highlighted Israel's apostasy in the wilderness, particularly as illustrated by the golden calf. Just as the single Israelite had pushed Moses aside in his attempt to mediate (v. 27), now in the wilderness the entire nation refused to obey him and pushed him aside ("rejected," v. 39). "In their hearts" they turned to Egypt. It was an inward turning to the ways of Egypt, their minds already set on other gods (cf. Ezek 20:8). Stephen directly quoted Exod 32:1, where the people asked Aaron to make them gods.

7:48–50 Stephen implied that all the trouble began here, for he immediately stated "the Most High does not live in houses made by men" (v. 48a) and backed this up with a quote from Isa 66:1f., which delineates the folly of building a house for the Creator-God who has all heaven and earth for his dwelling place (vv. 49–50). The theme of worshiping God in this

place (i.e., in the Jerusalem temple) is set forth quite positively in the beginning of Stephen's speech (v. 7). The emphasis, however, is on the worship—not the "place" of worship. Stephen did not reject the temple as such but the abuse of the temple, which made it into something other than a place for offering worship to God. His view is thus closely linked to that of Jesus, who also attacked the abuses of the temple cult and stressed its true purpose of being a "house of prayer" (Luke 19:46). Stephen's reference to its being "made by men" (v. 48, literally, "hand-made") connects directly with the golden calf in the wilderness (v. 41) and is an implicit charge of idolatry. When a place of worship becomes a representation for God himself, it becomes a substitute for a living relationship to God. The man-made "house" is worshiped, not the living God; and that is idolatry. This seems to have been the point Stephen was driving at in his whole speech. God cannot be confined to one place or people. God is transcendent. He cannot be restricted to any "house," where one can say, "This is where God is to be found." He is Creator of heaven and earth, and his presence is to be found in all his creation. Stephen was a reformer, standing in a long line of prophets who criticized Israel's tendency to substitute man-made institutions for a living relationship to God. Likely the most accurate of the Jewish charges leveled at Stephen's teaching on the temple was the reference to his propounding Jesus' prophecy of the temple's destruction (6:14; cf. Mark 13:2). As a Christian he was convinced that Israel would never find its true relationship to God, its true worship, apart from the Messiah, as the following verses (vv. 51–53) make clear. The Romans reduced the temple to rubble in a.d. 70; not one stone was left on another. The warnings of Jesus and of Stephen had not been heard.

7:51–53 The final portion of Stephen's speech could be described in classical rhetorical terms as the "peroration," where the speaker applies the lessons learned from the previous material in his speech in a direct, frequently emotional appeal to his hearers to act. The aim was to secure their awareness of their own culpability in these matters and motivate them to take remedial action. The function of the peroration of Stephen's speech was not simply to malign his Jewish audience. In Christian terms his ultimate goal was their remedial action, their repentance.

The polemical nature of these verses is immediately evident in Stephen's switch from first to second person. Before now, Stephen had included himself in his references to the Jews. It was always "our fathers" (cf. vv. 19, 38, 39, 44). Now it was "your fathers." It was no longer a question of Jewish history with which Stephen identified but a direct personal appeal to his hearers. Using the language of the prophets, he accused them of being "stiff-necked ..., with uncircumcised hearts and ears," always resisting the Holy Spirit (v. 51). His entire historical sketch has illustrated this point, the consistent pattern on Israel's part of rejecting its leaders. He reminded them of how they had always resisted and even killed their

prophets—the very ones who in the Spirit spoke the words of the Lord. Stephen referred to the Messiah as the “Righteous One.” The whole purpose of Stephen’s speech now becomes clear. His historical survey had illustrated Israel’s constant rejection of God’s chosen leaders. Moses, Joseph, the prophets are all types of and pointers to Christ; and Stephen pointed out to his hearers that they had already rejected and killed him.

7:54–55 Whether Stephen intended to give a direct appeal for his hearers to repent we will never know, for they abruptly broke him off. They were absolutely livid at Stephen’s placing them on trial. Luke described their rage in terms of their being “cut to the heart” (dieprionto, cf. 5:33) and “grinding their teeth” (cf. Ps 35:16). Stephen’s response to their rage certainly did nothing to assuage it. Looking into heaven, he had the beatific vision; he beheld the glory of the heavenly throne room and Jesus standing at God’s right hand (v. 55). 7:56 Having first given this vision in narrative form, Luke underlined its importance by repeating it in direct discourse, as Stephen shared the experience with the infuriated Sanhedrin: “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” Jesus had spoken similar words at his own appearance before the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:69), and what had been a prediction on his part became a reality for Stephen. Jesus is indeed now risen and exalted to his position of authority at God’s right hand. The vision confirmed Stephen’s testimony. His messianic claims for Jesus were verified in his vision of the exalted Son of Man. Significantly, Stephen referred to him as “the Son of Man,” not simply as “Jesus,” as in the narrative of v. 55. This is the only instance in the New Testament where the term is spoken by another than Jesus himself. Even more striking is the reference to his standing. Generally the reference is to his being seated at God’s right hand, as in Luke 22:69. Scholarly opinion differs about the significance of the uncharacteristic standing position in Stephen’s speech. Some see no significance other than a variation in expression. Others see it as a reference to Christ having risen from his seat to welcome the martyr Stephen.

The view with the most far-reaching implications, however, is that Stephen’s vision links up with the original Son of Man vision in Dan 7:13–14, where the Son of Man is depicted as standing before the Ancient of Days. The primary role of the Danielic Son of Man was that of judgment, and the New Testament consistently depicts Christ in this role of eschatological judge (cf. Matt 25:31–46). The standing position may thus depict the exalted Christ in his role of judge. If so, Stephen’s vision not only confirmed his testimony, but it showed Christ rising to render judgment on his accusers. They, not he, were the guilty parties. In Dan 7:14 the Son of Man was given dominion over “all peoples, nations, and men of every language.” If this is a further implication of Stephen’s Son of Man vision, it ties in well with his understanding of God as not being bound to one nation or people. It is a

vision of the boundless reign of Christ, which was soon to begin with the Samaritan mission of Stephen's fellow Hellenist Philip.

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FINISH THE RACE FAITHFULLY: Acts 20:17-32

The Point: Faithful ministry requires endurance, humility, and alertness to guard the gospel and care for God's people.

The Purpose: Embrace faithful perseverance, take spiritual responsibility seriously, and remain anchored in God's word amid pressure and distraction.

Christ Connection: Paul reflects the pattern of Jesus by serving sacrificially, speaking truth without compromise, and entrusting God's people to the word of grace.

CREATE INTEREST

Question: Who has influenced your life by the way they finished well, not just by how they started?

Most people admire strong beginnings, but lasting influence usually comes from steady faithfulness over time. Integrity, endurance, and clarity under pressure often leave a deeper mark than talent alone.

Transition to the Study

In Acts 20, Paul meets with the Ephesian elders for a deeply personal farewell. He reminds them how he lived among them, warns them about coming dangers, and charges them to shepherd the church faithfully. These verses are full of urgency, tenderness, and gospel conviction. As your group studies this passage, help them feel the weight of spiritual leadership, whether formal or informal. Paul is not simply reflecting on ministry memories. He is showing what it looks like to finish a season with a clear conscience, deep love, and unwavering commitment to the grace of God.

STUDY THE BIBLE**Acts 20:17-24**

Read Aloud: Have someone read Acts 20:17-24.

Discussion: What qualities mark Paul's ministry in these verses?

He serves with humility, tears, courage, and consistency. Paul does not measure success by comfort but by faithful obedience to the assignment God has given him.

What does Paul's example teach believers about hardship and calling?

He expects affliction, yet he does not treat suffering as failure. This passage helps believers see that costly obedience is often part of faithful ministry, not a sign that something has gone wrong.

Why does Paul say he values finishing his course more than preserving his life?

He understands his life in relation to the mission of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. When purpose is rooted in Christ, self protection loses its controlling power.

Teaching Tip: Leaders Be Human

This passage is deeply personal. Encourage the group to notice not only what Paul taught, but how he loved, suffered, and persevered. Being vulnerable often opens the door to more honest discussion.

Acts 20:25-31

Read Aloud: Have someone read Acts 20:25-31.

Discussion: What responsibility does Paul place on the elders?

They must pay careful attention to themselves and to the flock, shepherding the church God purchased with his own blood. Spiritual oversight begins with personal watchfulness.

What dangers does Paul say the church will face?

Savage wolves will come from outside, and distorted teaching will rise from inside. The church is threatened both by open attack and by persuasive voices within.

Why does Paul connect truth, vigilance, and love so closely here?

Real shepherding protects people because it loves them. Paul's warning is not harshness for its own sake, but pastoral care shaped by tears, truth, and long term concern.

Acts 20:32

Read Aloud: Have someone read aloud Acts 20:32.

Discussion: What does Paul ultimately entrust the church to?

He commends them to God and to the word of his grace. Lasting spiritual strength does not come from personality or structure, but from God's sustaining work through his word.

How does the phrase word of his grace steady believers today?

It reminds them that growth, endurance, and inheritance come from grace, not self reliance. God's word does not merely inform the church. It builds the church.

Why is this such a fitting ending to Paul's charge?

After warnings and responsibilities, Paul ends with confidence in God's power. Faithful ministry depends on effort, but it finally rests on grace that keeps and matures God's people.

CONNECT TO CHRIST (APPLY GOD'S WORD)

Discussion: How does our passage this week point to Jesus?

Paul's farewell reflects the ministry of Jesus, who served with humility, taught the truth fully, loved people sacrificially, and remained faithful all the way to the end. The passage points beyond Paul to the Chief Shepherd who secures and sustains his church.

Connect to Christ: Acts 20 points to Jesus by showing that all faithful shepherding is patterned after him. Jesus served in humility, declared the whole will of God, and laid down his life for the flock. Paul's tears, warnings, and endurance echo the heart of Christ, who loves his people enough to protect, instruct, and preserve them. Verse 28 reaches the center of the passage by describing the church as purchased with blood, which directs attention to the cross. The exalted Christ is the true Shepherd of the church, and every believer is called to live and serve under his grace filled care.

Application: Choose one of the following ways to apply the study to your life this week:

Ask God to show you one area where spiritual drift has made you less alert, and respond by returning to Scripture and prayer this week.

Encourage or support a church leader who carries responsibility for others, remembering that faithful shepherding is costly work.

Identify one gospel conversation, service opportunity, or act of obedience you have delayed, and take the next step with courage.

PRAYER TIME

Ask group members to share prayer needs. Close by thanking God for the word of his grace, for faithful shepherds, and for Jesus, the Chief Shepherd who keeps his people.

COMMENTARY

The New American Commentary, Dr. Ray Clendennen, General Editor
Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

Book Chapter Background

Acts 20:18–35 records Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, offering a powerful summary of his ministry and a charge for future leadership. Paul begins by reminding them of his example (20:18–21), highlighting a ministry marked by humility, openness, and inclusiveness. He faithfully proclaimed the gospel to both Jews and Greeks, calling all people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. As he looks ahead (20:22–24), Paul explains that he is compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, fully aware that suffering and imprisonment await him. Yet he remains committed to finishing his mission of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. In his farewell (20:25–27), Paul declares that he has faithfully proclaimed the whole will of God and is therefore not responsible for those who reject it. He then warns the elders (20:28–31) to shepherd the church carefully, guarding both themselves and the flock against false teachers who will arise from both outside and within the church. Finally (20:32–35), Paul entrusts them to God and His word of grace, urging them to follow his example of selfless service. This passage emphasizes faithful leadership, doctrinal vigilance, and perseverance in the gospel.

Verse by Verse

20:18–19 The opening section of Paul’s address reminded the elders how Paul had conducted himself during the whole time of his ministry with them (v. 18). He pointed to three basic characteristics of his ministry. First was the humility that had marked his service for the Lord (v. 19). The proper demeanor of a servant is “humility” (*tapeinophrosynē*), and Paul frequently pointed to that quality as a major hallmark of the Christian life (Phil 2:3; Col 3:12; Eph 4:2). It is striking that Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of his trials through the plots of the Jews. The most recent plot was ultimately responsible for his presence at Miletus at this time, causing him to change his original plan to sail directly to Syria from Corinth (20:3).

20:20 A second characteristic of Paul’s ministry was the openness of his proclamation (v. 20). He kept no secrets, held nothing back. Whatever was true to the gospel and helpful to the faithful, he preached both publicly and from house to house. The reference to houses most likely is to the house-church meetings of the Ephesian Christians. He reminded them of the honesty and openness of his own preaching. When one was faithful to the truth, there was nothing to hide.

20:21 The final characteristic of Paul's ministry was the inclusiveness of his witness. He had preached to everyone, both Jews and Greeks (v. 21). No one had been left out. Paul saw his own special calling as being the apostle to the Gentiles, but he never abandoned the synagogue. God is the God of all. In Christ he reaches out for the salvation of all who will trust in him. There is no distinction (cf. Rom 3:29f.). There is no room for exclusivism in the gospel in the sense that the gospel is for Gentiles and Jews, slaves and free, and men and women. The gospel itself is, however, exclusive in its claims, "for there is no other name under heaven ... by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Salvation is available only in the name of Jesus. It is to repent, to turn from one's former life to God and to "believe," to place one's trust in Jesus.

20:22–23 Having reminded the Ephesian leaders of his example during his presence with them, Paul now prepared them for his absence. Paul was leaving them and was on his way to Jerusalem, not knowing what would happen to him there (v. 22). He was going to Jerusalem with the collection, and he did indeed have serious misgivings about how it would be received there and was fully aware that the enterprise involved some personal risk (cf. Rom 15:31). Under the compulsion of the Spirit, Paul was going to Jerusalem. Paul was indeed being led to Jerusalem. God had a purpose for his going there. The warnings prepared him for what awaited him in Jerusalem and assured him that whatever happened, God was in it. Paul would undergo severe trials in Jerusalem, but through them he would ultimately bear his witness in Rome, which was his own heart's desire (cf. 19:21; Rom 1:9f.).

20:24 In v. 24 Paul stated the reason he was willing to face the dangers in Jerusalem. He was ready to surrender his life for the gospel. The race that Paul was running was the ministry he had received from Jesus. That ministry is described as his testimony to the "gospel of God's grace." Oddly, that exact phrase never occurs in the epistles of Paul. One could scarcely summarize the heart of Paul's message better than the "good news of God's grace."

20:25–27 Paul now gave his farewell to the Ephesian elders. They would never see his face again (v. 25). Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. Danger awaited him there. He concluded this portion of the speech with the statement that he was innocent of the blood of all because he had proclaimed the full will of God (v. 26f.). Paul had preached the full gospel, the whole will of God. He had called people to repentance. Now the responsibility rested with them. Again this remark is not to be seen so much as Paul's defense of himself as an

example to the Ephesian leaders. They were to do what Paul had done before them, herald the gospel and call to repentance. This is the task of a Christian witness, to proclaim the full will of God. Witnesses can do no more. The response is not theirs but the hearer's responsibility.

20:28 The third section of Paul's address exhorts the Ephesian leaders to be vigilant shepherds over the flock of God, warning of savage wolves who would arise in the future to prey upon it. The clear function of v. 28 in this appeal is to give a basic charge to the elders to be watchful overseers of their charge. It is important to notice, however, that Paul's first exhortation to the elders called for them to "guard themselves."

20:29–31 The shepherd imagery is continued with Paul warning the Ephesian elders of a time to come when religious predators would ravage the flock of God. They would arise both from outside and inside the church. The term "savage wolves" describes the false teachers from without (v. 29). That false teachers did soon arise to prey upon the Asian churches is well attested by Eph 5:6–14 and Col 2:8 as well as by the Letter to Ephesus in Rev 2:2. Paul's warning was thus timely and essential.

20:32 The conclusion to Paul's Miletus address includes both a benediction upon the elders (v. 32) and a final exhortation to follow his exemplary conduct (vv. 33–35). In his benediction Paul committed the leaders to "the word of [God's] grace," i.e., to the truth of the gospel that has God's saving grace at its center (cf. v. 24). The language is again strongly reminiscent of Paul's epistles. The reference to "those who are sanctified" (*hēgiasmenois*) reflects Paul's favorite designation of Christians as "the saints" (*hoi hagioi*), those who have been "sanctified," i.e., "set apart" as God's people in Christ. He likewise often spoke of the future life of the Christian in terms of sharing in an inheritance (*klēronomian*). In v. 32 Paul passed on the banner to the Ephesian elders to continue to lead the church after his departure, urging them above all to be faithful to his gospel in the light of the coming threats

THE COST OF REJECTING GOD: Romans 1:18-32

The Point: When people reject God, sin distorts worship, thinking, desires, and community.

The Purpose: Learn to take sin seriously, reject self deception, and respond to the gospel with humility, gratitude, and repentance.

Christ Connection: Romans 1 exposes humanity's need for Jesus, the only Savior who reveals God's righteousness and rescues sinners from wrath through the gospel.

CREATE INTEREST

Question: Share about a time in life when you or someone you know ignored a warning sign and suffered the consequences?

You might receive anything from a check engine light to a child being distant. Be sure to respond in kind matching the topic. Most people know that warning signs matter, but they are often easier to dismiss than to face. Over time, ignored truth usually leads to deeper damage, not greater freedom.

Transition to the Study

Romans 1 is direct, searching, and deeply relevant. Paul explains that God's wrath is revealed against human ungodliness because people suppress the truth, exchange God's glory for substitutes, and follow desires that disfigure life. This is not written to stir self righteous judgment, but to expose the seriousness of sin and prepare the way for the good news of the gospel. As your group studies this passage, help them see that the problem is not merely bad behavior. It is worship gone wrong. When God is rejected, everything else begins to unravel.

STUDY THE BIBLE**Romans 1:18-23**

Read Aloud: Have someone read Romans 1:18-23.

Discussion: What does Paul say people do with the truth about God?

They suppress it rather than honor God rightly. Paul argues that the problem is not lack of all knowledge, but moral resistance to the knowledge people already have.

How does this passage connect worship and thinking?

When people reject God, their thinking becomes futile and their hearts darkened. Worship is never isolated from the mind. What people adore shapes how they see reality.

Why is idolatry such a serious issue in these verses?

It exchanges the glory of the Creator for created things. Idolatry is not just a wrong preference. It is a deep reversal that puts lesser things in God's place.

Teaching Tip: Slow Down for Weighty Texts

Some passages should not be rushed. Let the group sit with the seriousness of the language, and guide them away from talking about other people's sins while avoiding their own hearts.

Romans 1:24-27

Read Aloud: Have someone read Romans 1:24-27.

Discussion: What repeated phrase helps explain God's judgment in these verses?

God gave them over. Paul describes judgment not only as future punishment, but also as God handing people over to the consequences of rejected truth and disordered worship.

How does sin move from the heart into lived experience?

What begins in worship and desire eventually reshapes actions, relationships, and identity. Sin is never merely private. It works outward into the whole pattern of life.

Why is this passage difficult but important for the church to read honestly?

It confronts cultural assumptions and personal rebellion at the same time. The church needs both truth and humility so it can name sin clearly while remembering every person needs grace.

Romans 1:28-32

Read Aloud: Have someone read aloud Romans 1:28-32.

Discussion: What does Paul show about the spread of sin in these verses?

Rebellion against God corrupts every layer of life, including thought, speech, relationships, and community. The list is meant to show the breadth of human fallenness.

Which part of this section most challenges easy moral comparison?

The passage moves beyond obvious public sins into patterns like envy, pride, gossip, and lack of love. It leaves little room for pretending that only certain people need repentance.

Where in life might you tend to not “acknowledge God”?

Any area of sin is a lack of acknowledgment of God. From lust to worry to theft to anger and everything in between.

CONNECT TO CHRIST (APPLY GOD’S WORD)

Discussion: How does our passage this week point to Jesus?

Romans 1 shows why Jesus is necessary. Humanity has exchanged truth for lies and deserves judgment, but the gospel reveals the righteousness of God through Christ, who saves sinners from wrath and restores right worship.

Connect to Christ: Romans 1 points to Jesus by revealing both how deeply humanity needs rescue and how fully God provides it in him. Paul presents Jesus as the Son of God, descended from David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God in power through his resurrection, so the gospel is anchored in who Jesus is and what he has done. This chapter shows that sin is not just breaking rules, but rejecting God himself, which leaves people under judgment and unable to fix their condition. Against that dark backdrop, Jesus stands as the righteous Son who perfectly reveals the Father, bears judgment for sinners, and makes God’s righteousness available to all who believe. Where people exchange truth for lies and worship created things, Jesus reveals the glory of God and calls them back to faith, obedience, and true worship, setting the stage for the rest of Romans to unfold how that transformation happens through him

Application: Choose one of the following ways to apply the study to your life this week:

Ask God to expose one substitute worship pattern in your life, whether comfort, approval, control, or pleasure, and turn from it this week.

Refuse both self righteousness and self excuse by confessing sin honestly and receiving God's grace with gratitude.

Pray for a deeper compassion for people trapped in deception, remembering that the gospel is good news for sinners, not a reward for the deserving.

PRAYER TIME

Ask group members to share prayer needs. Close by thanking God for sharing the truth about sin and for providing mercy through Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

The New American Commentary, Dr. Ray Clendennen, General Editor
Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

Book Chapter Background

Romans chapter 1 serves as the opening of Paul's theological masterpiece, written to the Christian community in Rome around A.D. 57. Paul, who had not yet visited the city, introduces himself and outlines the central theme of the letter: the gospel as the power of God for salvation to all who believe. The chapter sets the stage by affirming God's righteousness revealed through faith and contrasting it with humanity's unrighteousness. Paul emphasizes that God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—are evident in creation, leaving people without excuse. Yet, many have rejected God, exchanging truth for lies and worshiping created things rather than the Creator. This rejection leads to moral and spiritual decline, which Paul describes in stark terms to highlight the need for redemption.

Verse by Verse

1:18 Paul introduces the concept of “the wrath of God”—not merely as future judgment, but as a present reality revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. This wrath is not capricious anger but a holy, just response to sin. The phrase “suppress the truth by their unrighteousness” implies an active resistance to what is plainly known about God. In the Greco-Roman world, where idolatry and moral relativism were rampant, Paul's assertion would have been countercultural. Theologically, this verse affirms that sin is not just ignorance—it's rebellion. Cross-reference this with John 3:19–20, where Jesus says people “loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.” God's wrath is not arbitrary; it is provoked by the deliberate rejection of divine truth.

1:19 Paul explains that knowledge of God is accessible to all because “what can be known about God is evident among them.” This verse supports the doctrine of general revelation—God has made Himself known through creation and conscience. The Greek word for “evident” (phaneron) suggests something clearly visible or manifest. In ancient Jewish thought, this aligns with Psalm 19:1, which declares that “the heavens declare the glory of God.” Paul is building a case that humanity is without excuse because God has not hidden Himself. Even in pagan cultures, the moral law and the order of nature point to a Creator.

1:20 Here Paul deepens the argument: “His invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world.” The paradox of invisible qualities being “clearly seen” is resolved in the idea that creation itself testifies to God’s power and deity. The phrase “without excuse” (anapologetos in Greek) is a legal term, meaning there is no defense. This verse is foundational for apologetics and the doctrine of accountability. Acts 14:17 echoes this, saying God “did not leave himself without witness.” In Paul’s day, many Gentiles worshiped nature or celestial bodies, yet Paul insists that the true God is evident through those very things they misdirected their worship toward.

1:21 Despite knowing God, “they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude.” This verse marks the tragic turning point: recognition without reverence. The failure to worship leads to “futile thinking” and “darkened hearts.” The Greek word for “futile” (mataioō) implies emptiness or worthlessness. Paul is describing a downward spiral—when people reject God, their reasoning becomes distorted, and their moral compass fails. This echoes Ephesians 4:17–18, where Paul describes Gentiles as “darkened in their understanding.” Gratitude is a key marker of worship, and its absence signals spiritual decay. In the Roman world, where gods were honored for prosperity or protection, Paul’s emphasis on true gratitude to the Creator is striking.

1:22 Paul now exposes the irony: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools.” This is a direct critique of human pride and philosophical arrogance. The word “fools” (moraino) is the root of our word “moron,” and it conveys spiritual blindness. In the first-century context, Greek philosophers prided themselves on wisdom, yet Paul asserts that apart from God, their wisdom is folly. This verse parallels 1 Corinthians 1:20, where Paul asks, “Hasn’t God made the world’s wisdom foolish?” Theological conservatism sees this as a warning against elevating human reason above divine revelation. Wisdom divorced from worship leads to idolatry and moral collapse.

1:23 Finally, Paul describes the exchange: “They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.” This is a reference to idolatry, common in both Roman and Egyptian cultures. The word “exchanged” (allassō) implies a deliberate trade—giving up something glorious for something corruptible. The descent from man to reptiles reflects the degrading nature of idolatry. Psalm 106:20 laments that Israel “exchanged their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass.” Paul’s point is clear: when people reject the Creator, they inevitably worship creation. This sets the stage for the rest of Romans 1, where Paul outlines the consequences of this spiritual rebellion.

1:24 Paul begins this section with the sobering phrase, “Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity.” The Greek word for “delivered over” (*paradidōmi*) is judicial in tone, suggesting that God, as a righteous judge, allows people to pursue the consequences of their rebellion. This is not passive abandonment but active judgment—God giving people what they insist on choosing. The phrase “dishonoring their bodies among themselves” points to a misuse of the human body, which was created for dignity and worship. In the Greco-Roman world, sexual immorality was often tied to pagan worship, including temple prostitution and fertility rites. Paul’s language echoes Hosea 4:14, where God allows Israel to reap the consequences of their unfaithfulness. This verse marks the beginning of a downward spiral in which spiritual rejection leads to moral collapse.

1:25 Here Paul explains the root of the problem: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie.” This deliberate trade—truth for falsehood—is the essence of idolatry. The phrase “worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator” reflects the inversion of proper worship. In ancient cultures, people often worshiped animals, celestial bodies, or human figures, crafting idols that mirrored creation rather than honoring the Creator. Theologically, this verse reinforces the idea that false worship leads to false living. Paul’s doxological aside—“who is praised forever. Amen.”—interrupts the flow to affirm God’s eternal worth, contrasting His glory with the degradation of idolatry. This moment of praise reminds readers that God remains sovereign and worthy, even when humanity turns away.

1:26 Paul intensifies the argument: “God delivered them over to disgraceful passions.” Again, the phrase “delivered over” signals divine judgment, not mere allowance. The term “disgraceful” (*atimia*) conveys shame and dishonor, especially in the context of violating natural design. Paul specifically mentions that “their females exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.” This is a clear reference to same-sex behavior among women, which was less commonly discussed in ancient texts but known in Greco-Roman society. Paul’s use of “natural” (*physis*) implies a created order—what God intended for human sexuality. This verse is often cross-referenced with Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, where God creates male and female and establishes heterosexual marriage as the normative sexual relationship. Paul is not merely condemning behavior; he is diagnosing a deeper spiritual disorder rooted in rejecting God’s design.

1:27 Paul continues with male same-sex relations, stating that “the males in the same way also left natural relations with females and were inflamed in their lust for one another.” The

word “inflamed” (ekkaiō) suggests uncontrolled passion, a fire that consumes. Paul describes this as “shameless acts,” emphasizing both the moral and spiritual consequences. He adds that they “received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error,” which may refer to both physical consequences (such as disease or broken relationships) and spiritual judgment. In the first-century Roman world, homosexual behavior was practiced in various forms, including pederasty and temple rituals, but Paul does not distinguish between types—he condemns the behavior as a result of rejecting God’s truth. This verse is often linked to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, which also prohibit same-sex relations. Paul’s tone is not one of superiority but of lament, showing how far humanity falls when it turns from the Creator to self-made desires.

1:28 Paul continues the progression of divine judgment with the phrase, “And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind.” The Greek word for “corrupt” (adokimos) means worthless or disqualified—suggesting a mind that can no longer discern right from wrong. This is the third time Paul uses the phrase “God delivered them over,” emphasizing that when people persistently reject God, He allows them to experience the consequences of their rebellion. The refusal to “acknowledge God” is not ignorance but willful dismissal. This aligns with Proverbs 1:28–31, where those who reject wisdom are left to eat the fruit of their own way. Paul’s description of a mind that does “what is not right” reflects moral inversion—where evil is called good and good is dismissed. This verse sets the stage for the extensive list of sins that follow, showing how spiritual rejection leads to societal breakdown.

1:29 Paul now catalogs the visible fruit of a corrupt mind: “They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness.” The phrase “filled with” (plēroō) implies saturation—these sins are not occasional but pervasive. The list includes both moral and relational sins, such as envy, murder, deceit, and malice. In the Greco-Roman world, many of these behaviors were normalized or even celebrated, especially in political and philosophical circles. Paul’s list echoes similar vice catalogs in Galatians 5:19–21 and 2 Timothy 3:1–5, reinforcing that sin is not just personal but communal—it infects relationships, communities, and cultures. The inclusion of “murder” and “malice” shows that sin escalates from internal corruption to external harm. Paul is not singling out one group but describing the universal condition of fallen humanity.

1:30 The list continues with sins that fracture both divine and human relationships: “They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.” The inclusion of “disobedient to parents” may seem minor

compared to “God-haters,” but in Jewish and Roman culture, honoring one’s parents was foundational to societal stability (see Exodus 20:12). Paul’s mention of “inventors of evil” suggests creative rebellion—people not only sin but devise new ways to do so. The terms “arrogant” and “boastful” reflect a heart that exalts self over others and over God, which is the essence of pride. Isaiah 5:20 warns against those who “call evil good and good evil,” and this verse illustrates that warning vividly. Paul’s tone is not merely accusatory—it’s diagnostic, showing how far humanity has drifted from God’s design.

1:31 Paul describes people as “senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.” These traits reflect a breakdown of conscience and compassion. “Senseless” (asynetos) means lacking understanding or moral discernment. “Unloving” (astorgos) refers to the absence of natural affection, such as between family members. In a culture that prized honor and loyalty, Paul’s description would have been shocking. The absence of mercy and trustworthiness signals a society where covenant, compassion, and community have eroded. This verse parallels 2 Timothy 3:3, which describes people in the last days as “without love, unforgiving, slanderous.” Paul is painting a picture of a world where the image of God in humanity has been deeply marred by sin.

1:32 Paul concludes with a chilling indictment: “Although they know God’s just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.” This verse reveals the depth of moral decay—not only is sin practiced, but it is celebrated. The phrase “deserve to die” echoes Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23, affirming that the wages of sin is death. The approval of sin reflects a communal endorsement of rebellion, which accelerates cultural decline. Isaiah 5:23 warns against those who “justify the wicked for a bribe,” and here Paul shows that sin is not just tolerated—it’s promoted. This verse serves as a warning to believers: when truth is rejected and sin is applauded, judgment is not far behind. Paul’s purpose is not to condemn without hope, but to prepare the reader for the gospel’s power to rescue from this condition, which he begins to unfold in Romans 2 and beyond.