

To the ends of the earth

Proclaiming the Resurrected Lord Jesus



Growth Group Bible Studies in the NT book of Acts
Kenmore Presbyterian Church

Proclaiming the Resurrected Lord Jesus

God's plans and purposes revealed in the Old Testament find fulfilment in the death, resurrection and **proclamation** of Jesus - the Christ. Before ascending into heaven Jesus told His disciples:

*"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and **repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem."* (Luke 24:46-47 NIV)

The book of Acts picks-up where Luke's Gospel finishes. The Gospel records events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - persuading us Jesus is the Christ of the Old Testament. Then Acts continues the account of fulfilment with the proclamation of the resurrected Lord Jesus: *"in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 1:8 NIV)

We are studying Acts in Church and also in Growth Groups. These studies will **focus on the mission to the Gentiles* in Acts chapters 12-20**. We'll first put everything in context with a quick run through some of the earlier chapters.

Acts 1-9	Witnesses to the Resurrected Lord Jesus
Acts 10	Jesus and The Nations
Acts 12:25-14:28	Paul's First Missionary Journey
Acts 15:1-16:5	Opposition to The Mission
Acts 16:6-40	Paul's Second Missionary Journey - Part 1
Acts 17:1-18:21	Paul's Second Missionary Journey - Part 2
Acts 18-22-19:41	Paul's Third Missionary Journey
Acts 20:1-21:17	A Farewell Journey

Time spent studying the Bible in Growth Group should shape all we do as a group. But Growth Group is more than a Bible study - it's an opportunity to share our lives and pray together. We want to grow in **knowing Jesus**, in **living for Jesus** and in **making Jesus known** - and Growth Group is where we can help each other do that.

**The Gentiles could be translated "The Nations," referring to nations other than Israel.*

Witnesses to the Resurrected Lord Jesus

Study 1: Acts 1-9

Prayer

Pray for each other, for friends who don't know Jesus, and for our Church.

Discuss

1. What do you think of when you think of the book of Acts?

For many Christians the book of Acts can fuel disagreements, for example:

the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christians,
when and how a person ought to be baptised,
models of church government,
the correct expectation regarding miracles of healing.

Can you think of any more?

Luke did not write the book of Acts to be used as fuel for our arguments—he is picking-up where his Gospel finished, by giving an account of the proclamation of the resurrected Lord Jesus.

The story of Jesus continues

The first verse of Acts tells us we are looking at a sequel. So let's go back and remind ourselves of why Luke wrote the first book.

Read Luke 1:1-4

2. What can you say about Luke's purpose in writing?

Read Luke 24:45-49 and Acts 1:1-8

3. Talk about how Acts picks-up where the Gospel finishes.
4. Compare Acts 1:8 with Luke 24:45-49. What do these verses lead you to expect to find in Acts.

Witness to the resurrected Lord Jesus

"...and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Luke 24:47 (NIV)

*"...and you will be my witnesses in **Jerusalem**, and in all **Judea** and **Samaria**, and to **the ends of the earth**."* Acts 1:8b (NIV)

Acts 1:8 is a table of contents for the book - outlining what will follow. On the way through Acts Luke uses overview statements (2:41, 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, 19:20) which recall Acts 1:8 (and Luke 24:47). They remind us that the gospel is progressing, as Jesus declared it would.

In the early stages Jerusalem is the headquarters of gospel ministry. Then with the move into Gentile regions, Antioch becomes a new basecamp for mission. Luke's narrative is first dominated by Peter and the Apostles in Jerusalem, but as the mission grows the focus moves to be about Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

We are following the progress of the gospel and the growth of the church—starting in Jerusalem spreading through Judea and Samaria and ending in Rome.

Beginning in Jerusalem..

On the day of Pentecost Peter and the disciples were witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem. There is a huge response: 3,000 people became followers of Jesus. That was only the beginning, each day more were added (2:47, 5:14, 6:1, 7).

Luke has checked-off the first item of Jesus' list in Acts 1:8 - Jerusalem. The witness to Jesus continues to spread, though maybe not in the way the Apostles would have chosen. **Persecution** scatters the gospel beyond Jerusalem.

..into all Judea and Samaria..

Read Acts 7:54-8:17

5. Have a look at the map and describe what happens as a result of persecution?
6. Where does Philip proclaim Christ?
7. Where are the Apostles through all this?



..and to the ends of the earth!

The Apostles are not really calling the shots. The resurrected Lord Jesus is at work by His Spirit. As Luke records events we ought to continue to be amazed. One of the men who persecuted Christians is the man Jesus will appoint as his Apostle to the Gentiles. Saul bears witness to the resurrected Lord Jesus all the way to Rome and would have gone further if he could (look at Romans 15:24)!

Read Acts 9:1-31

8. How is Saul's conversion *typical*? And how is it *unique*?
9. In what ways do we see the promise of 9:15-16 begin to come about?

Witnesses to the Resurrected Lord Jesus

We have moved very quickly over the first nine chapters of Acts. Take a moment to reflect on what we have covered.

Discuss

10. How should Luke's purpose in writing affect the way we read Acts?
11. Are Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 a *command* or a *promise*? (Is he saying the apostles must be witnesses, or that they will be?)
12. In what way are **we** as Christians caught-up in witnessing to the resurrected Lord Jesus?

Acts of the Apostles?

It's not what Luke would call it (he didn't give it a name) and the Apostles are hardly the heroes. Perhaps Acts is better seen as the history of what happened *despite* the Apostles!

Rather than see the Apostle's as the focus of this book, we'd be better off thinking of it as the Acts of Christ's Spirit, or the Acts of the Gospel/Word of God, or perhaps most fitting "the Acts of the Ascended Lord Jesus."

Prayer

Thank God for the amazing way he has made it possible for each of us to hear the truth of the Gospel of Jesus.

Jesus and the Nations

Study 2: Acts 10

Prayer

Pray for each other, for friends who do not know Jesus, and for Youth Group.

The book of Acts gives an ordered and purposeful account of the proclamation of the resurrected Lord Jesus from **Jerusalem** into all **Judea** and **Samaria**, and the **ends of the earth** (Acts 1:8). God even uses persecution to advance the gospel. And **the scope of the gospel is unexpected**, at least to the apostles - because *even Gentiles are included!*

1. Who do *you* least expect to become part of God's family? Why?

Proclaiming the resurrected Lord Jesus to Gentiles

Last week we read the account of Saul's conversion - an unlikely event to say the least. Jesus' ongoing plans for Saul are just as unlikely. Saul, or Paul as he becomes known, is to be Jesus' Apostle to the Gentiles. Keep that in mind as we read on.

Read Acts 10:1-33

2. Why do you think God sent visions to Cornelius and Peter?

Peter had to be convinced to meet with Cornelius. God used angels, visions, 'coincidences' to bring Peter around. But Peter should not have needed convincing. Jesus already told Peter the gospel will go to the 'ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8) and the gospel had spread to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-8). The idea, that God's salvation is for the whole world, is even there in the Old Testament.

Part of God's Plan... but unexpected?

Work alone or in pairs to read a few of these passages, then discuss together.

Genesis 12:1-4	What is God's plan for the nations?
Ruth 1:4, 4:13-17	What nationality is Ruth? Who is descended from Ruth?
1 Kings 8:41-43	What is Solomon's hope for 'the foreigner'?
Isaiah 49:5-7	Why does God want salvation to reach the end of the earth?
Malachi 1:11	How extensive will the worship of Israel's God be?
Luke 2:25-32	Who will Jesus be a light for?
Luke 24:47	Who is repentance and forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed to?

Read Acts 10:34-48

3. Does the Jewish response to Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit surprise you?

The conversion of Cornelius' household is a watershed moment for the earliest Christians. It opened their minds to what God has done for the world in Jesus. Accepting Cornelius as a brother in Christ wasn't the end of difficulties between Jews and Gentiles. Even the Apostle Peter, who testified to the work of God in Gentile believers, continues to struggle to come to terms with the full implications (for example have a read of Acts 15 and Paul's letter to the Galatian Christians). But this is the beginning. Gentiles (most of us are not Jewish), this event is our moment in Acts - the gospel reached people like us. We have lots to thank God for!

What about us?

4. Who do you think is least likely to become part of God's kingdom?
5. How can you be more purposeful in proclaiming the resurrected Lord Jesus to them?

Think about it

When we become a Christian we 'automatically' become a witness to Jesus and everything about us bears witness to the work of Jesus in us. But we also need to encourage each other to be purposeful and proactive in our attempts to proclaim the resurrected Lord Jesus.

Prayer

Spend some time praying for people who you would be amazed to see become a follower of Jesus.



Paul's First Missionary Journey

Study 3: Acts 12:25-14:28

Prayer

Pray for each other, for friends who do not know Jesus, and for KPC Kids.

Mission to The Nations

Gentile mission is on view in Acts. We've seen Jesus appoint Saul/Paul as His Apostle to the Gentiles (Study 1). We've seen Peter and the Jewish Christians begin to come to terms with Gentiles being included in God's kingdom (Study 2). Now we come to what is often referred to as 'Paul's first missionary journey' as he takes the Gospel to Gentiles.

First, a quick fly-over the chapters leading into chapter 12.

Luke briefly summarises Paul's early preaching in Damascus (9:19-25).

Paul visits Jerusalem some three years later (9:26-31; Gal 1:18-20).

After the first recorded Gentile conversion (Acts 10:1-11:18) we read of Paul's ministry in the 'mixed' church in Antioch (11:19-26).

Paul 'takes time out' to deliver famine relief to Jerusalem (11:27-30; Gal 2:1-10).

We pick things up as Paul returns to Antioch from Jerusalem - accompanied by Barnabas and John (also called Mark).

A Missionary Journey Begins

Read Acts 12:25-13:12

1. On the map in the centre of the study book, plot Paul and Barnabas' journey.
2. What did the Holy Spirit want Paul set apart for in 13:2 (also 9:15)?

The mission of proclaiming the resurrected Lord Jesus is reaching 'the ends of the earth', as Jesus said it would (Acts 1:8). And the group who are bearing witness has grown - from the little group Jesus spoke to back in chapter one.

Mixed Responses to the Proclamation of Jesus

Luke briefly says Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the word of God in Jewish synagogues with help of John (13:5). Then Luke slows down to recount, in detail, how Sergius Paulus responded positively to the Gospel of Jesus while his attendant did not.

3. Why do think Bar-Jesus responded as he did?

Luke does not hold back in recording both the positive and the negative responses to the Gospel. The proclamation of the resurrected Jesus as Christ as Christ will cut through the blindness for many but it will also trigger a negative response from those who are living in darkness.

Read Acts 13:13-41

4. Add the next stage of Paul's journey to your map.
5. List all Paul says about (1) who Jesus is and (2) what Jesus has done for us?
6. How would you summarise Paul's message of encouragement?

Read Acts 13:42-52

7. The initial Jewish response to Paul and Barnabas was positive. How did this change?
8. How does Paul view these responses in the light of God's promises?
9. How did (1) Paul and Barnabas and (2) the disciples respond to persecution?

The first mission concludes

The sequence of events that occurred in Pisidian Antioch becomes almost the trademark sequence of Paul and Barnabas' work. They take the Gospel **first to Jews, then to Gentiles**.

If you have time you could read Acts 14 together, otherwise individually skim over the chapter and note the places mentioned.

Plot the final stage of this missionary journey on your map.

Read Acts 14:24-28

10. They've returned to their 'home church' and it's debriefing time. How do Paul and Barnabas assess their mission?

What about us?

11. How do *you* respond to persecution and to people rejecting the gospel? How does Paul and Barnabas' response challenge or encourage you?
12. How does the evangelistic determination of the church in Antioch challenge and encourage you?

Prayer

Pray for our efforts to proclaim Jesus.

Descriptive not Prescriptive

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves why Luke wrote. He was recording the progress of the gospel of Jesus.

Much of what we read is descriptive not prescriptive. That is, we are not being told how we must do things.

What difference does this make? We should resist the temptation to use Acts in support of our point of view in 'arguments' about church government, baptism, mission, the role of the Holy Spirit, etc.

Opposition to the Mission

Study 4: Acts 15:1-16:5

Prayer

Pray for each other, for friends who do not know Jesus, and for other Growth Groups. Pray we would help each other speak the truth about Jesus.

On their missionary journey into Asia and Galatia, Paul, Barnabas, and John (also called Mark) met with opposition from unbelieving Jews. This would have come as no surprise. However, as Paul and Barnabas recoup in their home church in Antioch, opposition to their missionary endeavours is brewing from within the Christian community as well.

Read Acts 15:1-4

1. How would you describe the 'issue'? (recall what Paul preached in 13:39.)
2. How might the makeup of the church in Antioch (11:19-21) have added to the complexity of the issue?
3. How did the church in Antioch address the issue?

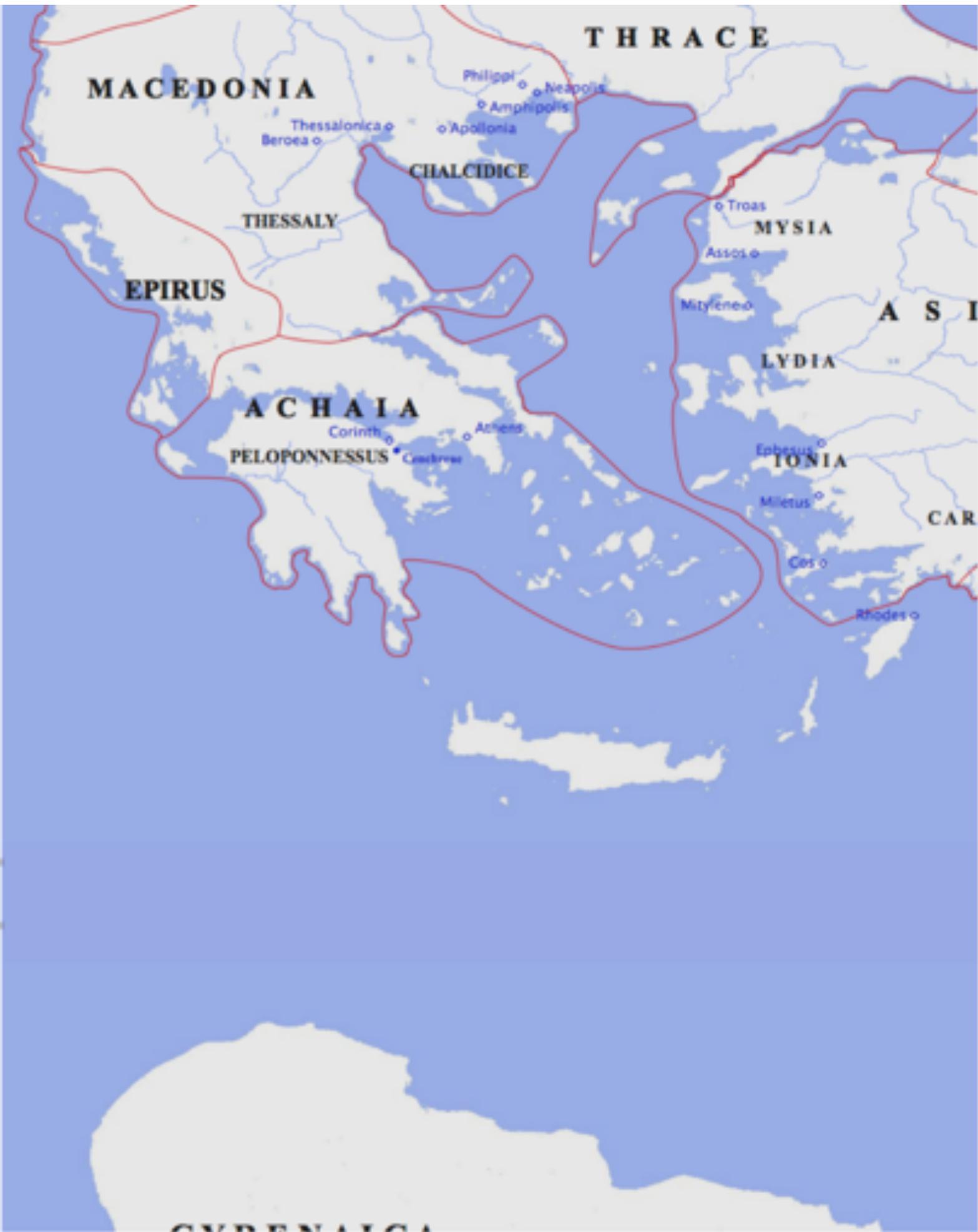
Read Acts 15:5-29

We would no doubt respond quickly and confidently if anyone insisted Christians must be circumcised. However, for the early Christians things were not so simple or clear. The Jew-Gentile divide was a significant hurdle (e.g. think back to Peter's reluctant visit to Cornelius in Acts chapter 10).

4. What reason does Peter give for not imposing circumcision on Gentile believers?
5. What is James' conclusion? And what does he base this on?
6. What steps do the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem take to ensure conflict would be resolved?

Think about it...

7. Are there contemporary issues that can prove just as divisive or similarly threaten the gospel?
8. What might we learn from the way these Christians dealt with their differences?





Difference in opinion over circumcision was a significant issue and a hindrance to the mission to Gentiles. Next Luke reveals another obstacle - conflict within the mission team!

Read Acts 15:36-41

(Glance back at Acts 12:25 and 13:13)

9. Do you think Paul and Barnabas made the right decision?

10. What impact do you think this interaction had on the spread of the gospel?

Before we finish, let's come back to the matter of circumcision.

Read Acts 16:1-5

11. What is Paul doing?! He compels Timothy to be circumcised (v3) and then delivers the letter saying circumcision is not necessary (v4). How might you defend Paul's actions?

One of the themes in Acts - is opposition to the gospel. Opposition to the gospel which has continued. Christians have been mocked, imprisoned, and killed for proclaiming Jesus. Yet despite (and often because of) opposition, the gospel continues to spread, grow, and increase - it's unstoppable.

Perhaps a greater threat to the progress of the gospel comes not from outside, but from within churches and within ministry teams? Yet, in the end, not even internal division and conflict can stop the message of the resurrected Jesus growing to the ends of the earth. **Luke is showing that this is God's unstoppable mission, with the resurrected Lord Jesus in charge.**

In Acts we see the gospel message proclaimed and churches encouraged. Paul and Barnabas continue to bear witness to Jesus and the mission team grows with Silas and Timothy joining. In God's timing (and kindness) it would seem that Paul, Barnabas and John/Mark were reconciled (Col 4:10).

What about us?

12. We can expect opposition to our efforts to proclaim the truth about Jesus. What encouragement do you find from Luke's account of the mission to the Gentiles?

13. Consider Paul's decision to have Timothy circumcised. Is it wrong to preempt and avoid opposition to the gospel like that?

14. Reflect on the dispute between Paul and Barnabas. Should we expect to be able to resolve all our differences? Do you have any thoughts on how we can keep proclaiming the gospel, despite such differences?

Prayer

Pray for each other and the challenges we face in sharing the gospel.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey - 1

Study 5: Acts 16:6-40

Prayer

Pray for each other. Ask for opportunities to turn conversations to Jesus and the gospel this week.

"This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Acts 9:15-16 (NIV)

Paul was commissioned by God to take the message of the resurrected Lord Jesus to the Gentiles. However, in Acts 15 there was a need to 'pause' this mission to deal with false teaching that threatened the very heart of the Gospel. Yet the mission wasn't derailed. In this study we'll see God's mission push on, this time against external opposition.

Paul and Barnabas planned to revisit the churches they planted (15:36). After their disagreement they stuck to the plan but divided the area (15:39-40).

Having completed their follow-up, the mission continued. Paul's missionary group is growing. He started with Silas, picked up Timothy (16:1-3) and now Luke joins - notice the 'we' in 16:10 as Luke includes himself in the narrative.

Together they sail from Troas to Samothrace and then work their way over-land through Macedonia and into Achaia - all the way down to Corinth. From Corinth they sail back to Caesarea via Ephesus. They glance past Jerusalem (18:22) before coming back to Antioch - the base-camp for Gentle mission.

In our next two studies we'll look at what happened on this missionary journey.

Pushing Out

Read Acts 16:6-10

1. How do Paul and his companions respond to 'closed doors'?
2. How does Luke emphasise God is in control of the spread of the gospel?

In Macedonia

Read Acts 16:11-24

3. Trace the journey from Troas to Philippi on your map.
4. What indication does Luke give that Paul was purposeful and intentional in his missionary endeavours?
5. How does Lydia become a Christian?
6. "Once when we were going to the place of prayer" (v16) implies there may be events Luke has chosen to leave out and that the incident with the slave-girl is significant - perhaps more than just explaining why Paul and Silas were imprisoned. What do you make of this incident?

Paul and Silas find themselves dragged into the marketplace, falsely accused, flogged, and thrown in prison under guard with their feet in stocks. But Luke tells us they can still sing praises to God! Let's read on.

Read Acts 16:25-34

7. How is the jailer's conversion similar to and different from Lydia's?

Read Acts 16:35-40

8. Any ideas why Paul and Silas chose to stick up for their rights?

Looking Back ... Looking Forward

9. Some incredible things happened in Philippi—casting out a spirit, a targeted earthquake that released prisoners—amazing! But what does Luke say brings Lydia and the jailer to trust in Jesus?

Read Philippians 1:1-11

10. What does Paul's letter show about the relationship established between himself and the first believers in Philippi?

What about us?

As we read Luke's ordered and purposeful account we should be *careful not to jump too quickly to application* e.g. "Paul cast out an evil spirit in the name of Jesus, so we should too;" or "Paul got thrown in prison, so let's stir things up till we are too." Luke is narrating not giving instruction. He is showing the unstoppable proclamation of the resurrected Lord Jesus from Jerusalem, into all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8, c.f. Luke 24:46-57, c.f. Luke 1:1-4). How's this for some application which takes that into account?

- Luke shows Paul and his companions were strategic, shrewd, enthusiastic, spontaneous, and driven. This encourages us to want to be the same.
- Luke shows some respond positively to the gospel of Jesus. Others negatively - very! This encourages us to press on despite opposition.
- Luke shows us God is working, bringing more and more people to believe in Jesus, which encourages us to keep trusting in Jesus too.

11. How can we encourage each other to be as enthusiastic about spreading the gospel as Paul, Silas, and the others? (without beating over the head or guilt-tripping).

12. Lydia and her household, and the jailer and his household, responded to the proclamation of Jesus—not to miracles or signs, and wonders. There are many things that can distract us from the importance of proclaiming Jesus. Try listing a few.

Prayer

Pray we would be intentional in our efforts to share the truth about Jesus.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey - 2

Study 6: Acts 17:1-18:21

Prayer

Pray for each other. Pray for your neighbours and for ways to share your life and the Gospel of Jesus with them.

1. How is proclaiming the resurrected Jesus today similar to and different from the task of the apostles?

You could say the mission to Macedonia wasn't all that successful. Paul and his partners have been expelled from the premier city of the region after only a few days! But the mission continues and in this second leg of the journey the message of the resurrected Jesus is proclaimed into diverse contexts.

Read Acts 17:1-18:21

1. As you read about each region, trace out this journey and fill in this table.

	What is the strategy?	How successful is it?	How long do the stay?	What causes them to move on?
Thessalonica				
Berea				
Athens				
Corinth				
Ephesus				

Discuss

2. What do you think caused the different responses in Thessalonica and Berea?
3. Compare the speech to the Areopagus with the summaries of Paul's teaching in 17:3 and 18:5 or Peter's sermon in Acts 2. How does Paul's sermon in Athens show he is conscious of his audience?

After leaving these cities, Paul wrote letters back to a number of the churches. In pairs or on your own, read about one of these churches below. Answer the question/s and then come back together and share your thoughts.

Thessalonica

Read 1 Thessalonians 1

Why is Paul sure he has left true believers in Thessalonica?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-10

What can we learn from Paul's missionary methods?

Corinth

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

What can you say about what happened in the Corinthian church after Paul left?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

What does this tell us about Paul's missionary methods?

Ephesians

Read Ephesians 2

What has happened for the Ephesians now they have accepted the gospel?

What about us?

Sharing our lives and the gospel

One of the things which stands out is the way Paul shares both **his life** and **the gospel**. Paul's reflection on his time in Thessalonica (1 Thess 1-2) reveals his genuine heart for these believers - they are like his own children. We also see the way he is sensitive to his hearers as he bears witness to the resurrected Jesus, while never compromising the truth.

4. How does Paul's missionary journey help us to think about proclaiming the message of Jesus to Brisbane?

Prayer

Pray for each of us as we work together to share the gospel of Jesus.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Study 7: Acts 18:22-19:41

Prayer

Pray for each other, for friends who need to live for Jesus and for challenges you face in living as a Christian.

Ephesus

We are not told how long Paul stayed in Antioch (Acts 18:23), now he's off again. This is Paul's last trip as a free man - once he arrives in Jerusalem he will find himself in chains before being dragged to Rome.

One of the features of Paul's third missionary journey is how Paul and friends **correct and complete gospel preaching of others**. First, some background.

The city of Ephesus is prominent in this third missionary journey. Previously the Spirit prevented Paul going near Ephesus (Acts 16:6). In Acts 18 Paul stopped there briefly (18:19-21). Now, on his third trip Paul spends three years in Ephesus (20:31). It seems he became attached to the place. Later, in his haste to return to Jerusalem, Paul is unable to return to Ephesus, but meets the elders of the Ephesian church in Miletus (20:16-17).

Others came to Ephesus too. In Corinth Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla. (Acts 18:1-4) then Aquila and Priscilla accompanied Paul to Ephesus, where Paul left them (Acts 18:18-19). After Paul left Apollos arrived in Ephesus, and that's where we pick up the story.

Getting the Message Right

Read Acts 18:23-28

1. Can you see any danger with Apollos' teaching?
2. Consider Acts 18:27-28. Do you think Priscilla and Aquila had any impact on Apollos' ministry?

Luke has included this incident in his account of things that "have been fulfilled among us," we are left to speculate why he included it. Apollos continues to have a significant impact (eg. he features in Paul's letters to the Corinthian church) so perhaps Luke thinks it is helpful for us to know a little about Apollos' background. Or perhaps readers need to be reassured Apollos is now preaching the complete gospel. Or perhaps Luke is gently showing the significant way God can use behind-the-scenes women and men like Priscilla and Aquila in support of the more public role of preaching Jesus. Or maybe it's all of the above? What do you think?

There are others in Ephesus who need to have their theology corrected. Or perhaps this is still part of the process of cleaning-up after Apollos' incomplete gospel message. Take a look.

Read Acts 19:1-7

3. How were these half-baked disciples similar to and/or different from Apollos?

Paul's mission continues. We see God working miracles through Paul, just like he did through Peter and John in Jerusalem (eg. Acts 5:15). It's like God is confirming these men are preaching the true gospel. It sounds like what is being described in Hebrews 2:3-4:

"This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." (NIV)

Read Acts 19:8-10

4. Can you detect Paul's established 'method' in his evangelistic efforts?
5. How 'effective' was Paul's time in Ephesus?

Read Acts 19:11-20

6. What happened as a result of the humorous incident with the sons of Sceva?

Paul's ministry in Ephesus is long and fruitful. Many follow Jesus (v20) and their lives are changed by the gospel (vv18-19). What could cause Paul to leave?

Read Acts 19:21-20:1

7. Why did Paul leave Ephesus?
8. How much truth is there in Demetrius' accusation?
9. How significantly has the gospel impacted Ephesus?

Think about it...

10. What problems do you think the church in Ephesus may face? *(Write this answer down because we'll come back to this in the next study)*

What about us?

11. The gospel makes a big impact in Ephesus - lives and even economies are changed. How have you seen the gospel change people in your circles?
12. Priscilla and Aquila corrected Apollos' teaching. How might this encourage each of us to keep playing a part in the ongoing proclamation of Jesus?
13. What can we do to ensure we keep true to the message and continue to pass on the truth of the resurrected Jesus?

Prayer

Pray we would do all we can to work together, and support Gospel ministry.

A Farewell Journey

Study 8: Acts 20:1-21:17

Prayer

Pray for each other and for two friends we would like to see become Christians.

The message of the resurrected Christ has spread from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, and its impact is being felt 'to the ends of the earth'. But the work that Jesus began (Acts 1:1) and that he's continuing to do, isn't finished.

In this final study we'll wrap-up the last of Paul's 'missionary journeys,' which is more a farewell tour. We'll consider how Paul's part in the ongoing mission ends.

Moving on ... to Jerusalem

After spending three years in Ephesus (20:31) Paul is on the move again. He is determined to revisit the churches in Macedonia before returning to Jerusalem and finally making it to Rome (19:21, c.f. 1:8b).

Things were not so simple!

Read Acts 20:1-16

1. Have a go at tracing the places mentioned on your map and at the same time make a list of who Paul's travelling companions are. It's quite a group.

2. Eutychus is famous for all the wrong reasons! But what does this incident show about how Paul encouraged Christians?

Paul knows he will not make another trip to Ephesus, instead he arranges to meet the elders from the church in Ephesus, in Miletus.

Read Acts 20:17-21

3. How does Paul describe his ministry in Ephesus?

4. What does Paul reveal of his purpose and methods?

It's worth recalling what Jesus said to Ananias when Paul had been struck blind on the road to Damascus:

"But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9:15-16 NIV)

Paul is in no doubt that he will suffer - yet he presses on.

Read Acts 20:22-38

5. Why does Paul keep on going despite the certainty of hardships?
6. What threat is Paul concerned about for the future of this church?
7. Considering this church's history is this the threat you'd expect? (*glance back at your answer to question 10 in the last study*)
8. What defence does Paul provide against this threat?
9. What does his farewell tell us about Paul's ministry?

That day in Miletus must have been difficult for Paul and the elders from Ephesus, and no doubt for everyone in Paul's travelling party. They had many shared memories and much to thank God for but at the same time they all had things to be concerned about in the days to come.

Luke continues his account of Paul's journey to Jerusalem.

Read Acts 21:1-19

10. Quickly trace Paul's journey on your map.
11. Run your eyes back over the passage and note the ways Paul is warned and discouraged against going to Jerusalem.
12. Paul should have no doubt about the result of his visit to Jerusalem. Why do you think he continued despite these warnings?

What about us?

13. How does Paul's passion for Jesus and for other believers challenge you?
14. What can we learn from Paul's farewell speech about how to keep following Jesus? What warnings do we need to hear? What encouragement do we need?

The End?

Soon after arriving in Jerusalem, Paul is arrested. In chapters 21-28 we read of Paul's numerous 'trials' - though they're also opportunities for Paul to keep proclaiming the resurrected Lord Jesus, even to members of Caesar's household (see Philippians 1:12-13; 4:22). But more of that another time. We need to tear ourselves away from Luke's narrative and finish up with a glance at how Acts closes.

Read Acts 28:28-31

15. How is the end of Acts a fulfillment of Jesus' words in Acts 1:8?

That's it. The end of Luke's account of the "things that have been fulfilled among us" (Luke 1). Jesus has suffered and died. Jesus has risen from the dead. And Jesus has been proclaimed to the ends of the earth. (Luke 24:46-47 and Acts 1:8) But is that really the end?

Remember what the two men dressed in white said to the disciples - just after Jesus had told them they would be witnesses to the ends of the earth?

"They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10-11 NIV)

The work Jesus has begun, the work that we have read about in Acts, continues. God works in us, through us, and despite us, to see Jesus proclaimed Lord and Christ and to see repentance and forgiveness of sins proclaimed to the ends of the earth. This work continues until Jesus returns.

Prayer

Think back over our studies and pray for each of us and the part we play in God's unstoppable mission - to proclaim the resurrected Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

