

Acts 9-18



Following on from the Acts 1 to 8 series, 'The Gospel Explosion', this series of studies is designed for weekly Growth Groups and looks through Acts 9 to 18.

Growth Group 2016 Schedule

The dates indicate when the passage is preached on. It is recommended that Growth Groups use the term breaks to stagger the year and schedule social events. Please note the special leader's events programed for each term. Also, Acts 13-15 will be preached out of sync from the Growth Group studies.

TERM 1 BEGINS		
24/01	Leader's meeting	
27/01 Growth Group 2016 Launch		
31/01	Acts 9:1-31	
7/02	Acts 9:32-43	
14/02	Acts 10:1-11:18	
21/02	Acts 11:19-30	
28/02	Acts 12:1-24	
6/03	Acts 12:35-13:12	
13/03	Acts 14:1-28	
20/03	Acts 15:1-41	
27/03	Acts 13:13-52	Easter
3/04	Acts 16:1-40	
10/04	Acts 17:1-15	
TERM 1 ENDS		
17/04	Acts 17:16-34	
24/04	Acts 18:1-17	
TERM 2 BEGINS		
1/05	Proverbs 1	
8/05	Proverbs 2-3	
15/05	Proverbs 4	
22/05	Proverbs 5-6	
29/05	Proverbs 7-8	
5/06	Proverbs 9	
12/06	Proverbs: A Wise Tongue	
19/06	Proverbs: A Wise Family	
26/06	Proverbs: A Wise Friend	
3/07	Proverbs: Wise Work	
TERM 2 ENDS		
10/07	Proverbs: Wise Spending	
17/07	Proverbs: A Wise Drink	

TERM 3 BEGINS		
24/07	Proverbs: Wise Sex	
24/07 Leader's lunch & Training		
31/07	Proverbs: Wise Emotions	
7/08	MISSION	
14/08	MISSION	
21/08	Topical: Maturity	
28/08	2 Thess 1:1-12	
4/09	2 Thess 2:1-12	
11/09	2 Thess 2:13-17	
18/09	2 Thess 3:1-5	
TERM 3 ENDS		
25/09	2 Thess 3:6-18	
2/10	The Spirit & God	
9/10	The Spirit & Life	
TERM 4 BEGINS		
16/10	The Spirit & Growth	
23/10	The Spirit & Gifts	
30/10	MEGACHURCH	
6/11	Luke 1:1-4	
13/11	Luke 1:5-25	
20/11	Luke 1:26-38	
25/11 EOY leader's supper		
27/11	Luke 1:39-56	
4/12	Luke 1:57-80	
11/12	Luke 2:1-7	
TERM 4 ENDS		
18/12	Luke 2:8-21	
25/12	Luke 2:22-40	

Welcome to your Growth Group

About Growth Groups

Do you remember the Campbelltown Anglican Churches' Vision Statement?

***'A growing Christian community devoted to
maturing in Jesus for the glory of God.'***

We don't need to grow as a Christian alone. The reality is that doing it alone is both hard and slow - even fatal. God has given us "everything we need for life and for godliness" (2 Peter 1:3) and one of those things is our church community. Growth Groups provide an excellent opportunity to help each other live out grace and apply our knowledge of Jesus. We want to be a community devoted to knowing Jesus and trusting him.

How the Vision is expressed in Growth Groups

Magnification - We are made to glorify God. As we read the bible together, allow yourself to be amazed by God. Share with one another what you have learned about the greatness of God, and let your prayers celebrate his goodness, his power and his care.

Membership - We are designed to love one another. So, love one another. Get to know one another. Listen out for when someone needs encouragement or help. Do your part to make your group a family in Christ. Think about who else you could invite from your congregation to join your group.

Maturity - Our goal is to grow in Christ-likeness. Reading the bible together is not the ends of our meetings. The plan is to mature. Be ready to be rebuked and corrected from the Scriptures as well as being taught and encouraged. Pray for one another's maturity and celebrate with each other when you see God growing people up.

Ministry - God has saved us to serve. Work out how you can help your Growth Group leader to create a great group experience. Look out for what talents others have in the group and encourage them to use their gifts for the group and for the church. As a group, think about something you could do together to serve the church community.

Mission - God's mission is our mission. Pray together about your opportunities and efforts to speak God's word into your world. Pray for the church's mission endeavours and pray for missionaries overseas together. Think about how your group could do something together to reach your community.

Each group is different

One way to help Growth Group work for everyone is to make sure that we are all on the same page. This can be achieved by listening to each other's expectations, discussing them and agreeing to a set of expectations as a group. It is helpful to do this once or twice each year as your group changes over time.

What are your expectations of *this* group? Reflect on the following three questions and then spend some time listening to one another's ideas. What expectations can you come up with as a group?

1. From the leaders in this group I expect...

2. From the others in this group I expect...

3. From myself in this group I expect...

Some things to consider in your discussion together might include:

start and finish times; preparation; discussion; prayer; growth/future; if you can't make it; confidentiality; contact method and details



People in my group

[illegible]

The Story So Far...

Jesus gave the eleven disciples a mission in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit was poured out and a new era in the work of God in this world commenced. The Spirit was no longer limited to people in special offices such as the prophet, priest and king, but all who believed in the name of Jesus would be saved and receive the Holy Spirit. Peter proclaimed the name of Jesus first in Jerusalem and thousands believed his message.

The church grew in size as the gospel was preached. The apostles organised seven men to look after the distribution of money to those in need in the church. These were godly men filled with the Holy Spirit. When Stephen, one of the seven, was persecuted and stoned to death, the church scattered from Jerusalem and into the world. Philip, also one of the seven, went to Samaria and preached the word there. The disciples came as well to investigate and preach. Philip then brought the gospel message to an Ethiopian man by the power of the Spirit. So, the Acts 1:8 plan was being fulfilled. Jesus' witnesses were leaving Jerusalem and going into Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

In Chapters 9 to 18, we shall read more of the gospel spreading throughout the world and as the message reaches further regions, questions about the impact of the gospel will arise. The disciples must discover what being a Christian looks like in Gentile (non-Jewish) areas of the world. At the heart of the gospel is God's action to turn the hearts of men and women back to himself. As Peter and James, Paul and Barnabas will discover, mankind does not get to decide how to relate with God. Rather, they will learn how far reaching God's love is - and how **the gospel grows!**



Study 1 - Acts 9:1-31

New Life in Christ

This man is my chosen instrument. Acts 9:15

Context

While Stephen was stoned to death in Chapter 7, we are told that a young man named Saul looked on and minded the persecutors' coats (Acts 7:58). He "approved of their killing him" (Acts 8:1). While Chapter 8 explores what happened as a result of the church persecution, Chapter 9 returns to the character of Saul.

Chapter 9 opens with the fiery hate of Saul aimed at the growing disciples of the Lord, members of 'the Way'.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 9:1-2

1. Describe Saul's plan, ambition, strategy and character in these two verses. What do you think is driving him? What was Saul's perspective of the people of 'the Way'? Read Acts 22:3-5. Can you add anything more to your description of Saul?

Read Acts 9:3-9

2. What did Saul experience on the Damascus road? What was Jesus' perspective on Saul's mission? What does this teach us about Jesus and Christians? What does this teach us about those who mistreat, reject or dismiss Christians?

Read Acts 9:10-19

3. Who was Ananias to Saul before Saul left Jerusalem? Who was Ananias to Saul now that he has seen the risen Jesus? How does Ananias treat Saul when he meets with him?

Read Acts 9:20-22

4. What is Saul's new mission? How does it contrast to his initial mission in Verses 1-3? What is the basic difference in Saul's thinking? How has this mission changed Saul?

Meaning

"This man is my chosen instrument." (Acts 9:15) Christ chose Saul. Christ confronted Saul. Christ enlightened Saul. Christ put Saul to work. Saul became an instrument for Christ's mission - his passion and drive was redirected from the powers of darkness to the gospel of light. Ephesians 2:4-10 come to mind.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:4-10

Application

Topic A: The power of the gospel to save

Examine in your heart who you think God is unable to save. Do you feel like there are people who are out of God's reach? How does this passage convict you to change your mind?

Topic B: God's calling on you

How has God been preparing you all of your life for his service? God didn't give Saul a sudden depth of knowledge of the Scriptures but drew on years and years of his knowledge to show him how it is applied now to Jesus. Are there ways that God has been shaping you from birth for a certain task for his kingdom?

Topic C: God's general approach to church growth

The disciples in Jerusalem grew in number, living in fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Consider how you can adopt these two approaches to life - a right and healthy view of Jesus and the growth in knowledge and understanding that comes by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer for the week

Lord Jesus Christ, eternal Son of God and our King, bless our church, we pray, that we might learn to worship you, rejoice in knowing you, love to speak about you and welcome new believers into our midst. Amen.

Acts 9:1-31 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

9 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest **2** and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. **3** As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. **4** He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

5 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked.

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. **6** 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'

7 The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. **8** Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. **9** For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!'

'Yes, Lord,' he answered.

11 The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. **12** In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.'

13 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. **14** And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.'

15 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. **16** I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'**18** Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised, **19** and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. **20** At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. **21** All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who caused havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?' **22** Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

23 After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, **24** but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. **25** But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. **27** But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. **28** So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. **29** He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. **30** When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

Study 2 - Acts 9:32-43

The Ministry of Miracles

⁴⁰ Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. Acts 9:40-41

Context

Saul, with violence and hate in his heart toward those of 'the Way', is confronted by the risen Jesus. This results in his sudden conversion that occurred over three days. He is embraced by the disciples as they see that he has embraced Jesus as Lord.

In Jerusalem, the church was experiencing peace, strengthening and growth. The mission that Jesus gave to the disciples back in Acts 1:8 was to testify about him beyond Jerusalem.

Lydda is located at the far west of Judea, historically Jewish but in the time of the disciples, quite Greek and pagan (Lydda is a Greek name while the town is most likely the town of Lod in the Old Testament times). Joppa was the port that Jonah travelled to in order to get as far away from the Lord as possible. Travelling abroad is part of the theme of this week's passage.

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 9:32-35

- 1. What can you make of Peter's mission described in Verse 32? Can we learn anything from it?**
- 2. Peter performed a miracle akin to the miracles Jesus performed. What was the result of this miracle, and therefore, its purpose?**

3. Another miracle occurs and this time even greater than the first! List as many details you see in this account that seem important. Can you see a point to *this* miracle?
4. Both miracles find comparable accounts in the gospels - the sick healed and the dead raised. Read Matthew 10:5-8. What is different between then (when Jesus was on earth) and now (after Jesus' ascension)? What is the same?

Meaning

The message of Jesus as Lord is going out to the Gentiles along with the same healing ministry that Jesus displayed in Jerusalem. The gospel of new life is being delivered to new territory in a similar way that Jesus delivered it to the Jews. Different people, but the same humanity that need to know Jesus.

Application

Topic A: Jesus does bring ultimate healing to all who believe

The resurrection will see all tears and pain disappear (Rev 21:4). Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The search for miracles in this world must lead us to Jesus or else they will not be found at all. The message of the gospel goes beyond forgiveness and works. It brings us life with God, eternal life and salvation from death! Do you believe this is the ultimate fulfillment to Christ's healing power? What would you say to someone who searches for Christ's healing power now?

Topic B: The gospel for all people

The strength of the gospel news travelled beyond Jerusalem. Gentiles were witnessing the power of Jesus in their own towns. The gospel is as much for China as it is for England as it is for the Middle East. Discuss how we can reach the gospel in our own area to people of other cultural backgrounds.

Topic C: The gospel for all nations

The gospel has already reached the port of Joppa. Do you remember that Jonah left Joppa to go as far away as he could imagine? Here stands Simon Peter, in the home of Simon the tanner, at the gateway to the world. Matthew 28 is being fulfilled. The 'go' in "go therefore" is important to our commission. How are we keeping global mission in our view?

Prayer for the week

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours. Now and forever. Amen.

Acts 9:32-43 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

32 As Peter travelled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. **33** There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralysed and had been bedridden for eight years. **34** 'Aeneas,' Peter said to him, 'Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.' Immediately Aeneas got up. **35** All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. **37** About that time she became ill and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. **38** Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, 'Please come at once!'

39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood round him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning towards the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. **41** He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. **42** This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. **43** Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Study 3 - Acts 10:1-11:18

God Has No Favourites

³⁴*I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism*
³⁵*but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. Acts 10:34-35*

Context

After a chapter describing the conversion of Saul (Chapter 9), the account in Acts has returned to Peter and his work in following Jesus' mission into the world. He healed a man and raised a woman from death in the name of Jesus, and many turned to the Lord at that time.

The mission of Christ through the Holy Spirit continues to drive the narrative of the book and Peter remains in the narrative, staying in Joppa, a coastal town and Gentile populated.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 10:1-48

1. Read again the description of Cornelius in Verses 1-8. What are we told about him? How does God perceive this man? What does God then do for him? What does this teach us?
2. In Verses 34 and 35, Peter expresses his realisation about Gentiles. What impact do his words have on you? Read James 2:1-5 and see if there are other ways to sin through discrimination.

3. Create a list of all the statements that Peter makes concerning the gospel. Compare it with the speech in Acts 2. What other significant detail links Chapter 10 with Chapter 2?

Acts 10:36-43 List Peter's gospel points	Acts 2:22 List Peter's gospel points

4. Verses 44-48 distinguish the baptism with water with the giving of the Holy Spirit as two separate things. What do these verses contribute to our understanding of baptism? Remember to keep your focus on these verses and learn from them and resist importing your general knowledge of this subject.

Meaning

The one gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the same gospel across the globe. Across the globe, there is no other gospel. All people, no matter how 'good', need Jesus.

Application

Topic A: Know the gospel - it's all about Jesus

Peter's recital of the gospel was fluid yet full. Fluid because he didn't stick to the same practiced words each time. Full because it was more than Jesus dying for sins. It was an ancient promise fulfilled by God that Jesus is Lord and eternal life can be found in his name. Do you know the gospel fluently? Confidently? Can you articulate it in your own words so that it makes sense and is true to the name of Jesus?

Topic B: Everybody needs salvation

A good man who loves his wife, kids and neighbours still needs to hear that Jesus is Lord. God saw that Cornelius was a good, God-fearing man, and he worked everything out so that he would hear the gospel.

Topic C: God does not show favouritism

Any race. Any mental state. Any gender. Any religion of origin. God desires all to hear and respond to the name of Jesus. How does this impact you? Do you shy away from some people and favour others? How can you work on that? How can we improve as a church in reaching everybody for the gospel?

Prayer for the week

Lord God, teach us to love the world as you do. Help us to remove favouritism or discrimination from our hearts and minds. Give us your Spirit of compassion for all peoples and cause us to speak the gospel naturally and truthfully. Amen.

Acts 10:1-48 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

10 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. **2** He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. **3** One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, 'Cornelius!'

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it, Lord?' he asked.

The angel answered, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. **5** Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. **6** He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.'

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. **8** He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. **10** He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. **11** He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. **12** It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. **13** Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

14 'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.'

15 The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'

16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. **18** They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. **20** So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.'

21 Peter went down and said to the men, 'I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?'

22 The men replied, 'We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.' **23** Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. **24** The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. **25** As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. **26** But Peter made him get up. 'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man myself.'

27 While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. **28** He said to them: 'You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. **29** So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?'

30 Cornelius answered: 'Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me **31** and said, "Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. **32** Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea." **33** So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.'

34 Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism **35** but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.**36** You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. **37** You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – **38** how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39 'We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, **40** but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. **41** He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. **42** He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. **43** All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. **45** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. **46** For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, **47** 'Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptised with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' **48** So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Study 5 - Acts 11:19-30

A Great City Saved By Grace

The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. Acts 11:26

Context

In Chapter 7, Stephen was martyred with Saul overseeing the execution. As a result, the disciples in Jerusalem fled to many parts of the world. Saul was converted to believe that Jesus is Lord and has shown himself to be a true convert to the disciples. Barnabas, a great man of faith and an encourager, believed Saul was converted and initiated the meeting between Saul and the disciples.

Peter was taught by God to expect the gospel to extend beyond the Jews and to all the Gentiles; that God shows no favouritism.

The narrative now leaves Peter in Joppa, the port Jonah was when he disregarded God's mission to go to the great pagan city of Nineveh, and we now return to the scattered disciples, to Barnabas and to Saul, as the gospel finds a stronghold in the large Greek city of Antioch.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 11:19-30

1. **"The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." (Acts 11:26) Look over the description of the gospel being planted, watered and grown in Antioch in Verses 19-26 and discuss the significance of this title, Christian.**

2. Take a look now at Barnabas from Verses 22-26 (also Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-27). What gifts does he possess for the work of the gospel? In other words, what role does he seem to play in church mission? What do you think might have happened without him? Consider what 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 contributes to this.
3. Look finally at the account of the predicted famine in Verses 27-30. What did the Christians of Antioch decide to do about the famine and what can we learn from them?

Meaning

A new hub of the Christian faith was built in Antioch. The gospel is no longer spreading out from one centre which is Jerusalem - it is now forming a network from which the gospel can be spread further. The disciples of the Disciples are now making disciples. The gospel of Jesus is growing from strength to strength.

Application

Topic A: Christian aid to Christians

Barnabas was known as an encourager and sort for Christian aid to help aid the Christian church. Check out the Barnabas Fund and discuss their method, aims and beliefs <https://barnabasfund.org/About/who-we-are>

Topic B: Being part of a community devoted to maturing in Jesus

What part of the work are you doing in growing the Christian community? There are planters and waterers and encouragers. How has God gifted you?

Topic C: Mission strategy

The disciples in Jerusalem targeted Barnabas to go to Antioch. Likewise, Barnabas targeted Saul to join him on the mission. These are deliberate strategies for growing the kingdom. The gospel spread initially in Antioch when the Jewish-Christians opened their mouths to talk to the Greeks. What strategies do Campbelltown Anglican Churches have to further the gospel and to strengthen the kingdom? Discuss.

Prayer for the week

Father God, send out your light and your truth on all who will believe. Use us, we pray, to be the instruments of your gospel to bring life and light to the world. Amen.

Acts 11:19-30 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. **20** Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.**21** The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

22 News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.**23** When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. **24** He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, **26** and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. **28** One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) **29** The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. **30** This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Study 6 - Acts 12:1-24

Out of our minds to pray!

¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen." ¹² When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Acts 12:11-12

Context

The book of Acts has been describing the spread of the good news that Jesus is Lord. The expansion of the gospel is taking place in many directions now, in Jerusalem and surrounding towns, to the north of Jerusalem as far now as Antioch, and to the south-west where Philip had baptised an Ethiopian.

The story has bounced between Peter's experiences and Saul's experiences. We return to Jerusalem now, to Peter and the others. There has been a great explosion of faith since Acts 2 but also scattering of believers through persecution. Jerusalem was experiencing a time of strengthening, peace and growth (Acts 9:31). But then King Herod acts. This is the Herod who had arrested and beheaded John the Baptist. In Mark 14:1-12, we learn that Herod was aware of prophets and their public influence. We also learn that he is influenced by the whims of the people and of the moment.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 12:1-24

- 1. Focus on Verses 1-6 first and discuss the position that Peter and the other believers were in. What stands out to you about the threat against the church? What defense did the church have?**

2. Suddenly the pace of the narrative changes from Verse 7. Read through Verses 7-17 and take note of the strange events that happen. How would you describe the tone of these verses? What does this tone or mood tell us about the meaning of the passage?
3. How does the end of this story, in Verses 18-24, build on the theme discussed in the previous question?
4. Look at Verses 5, 9, 11, 12 and 15. Discuss what the church and Peter expected the outcome to be in this situation. What do you expect the church was praying for?

Meaning

The church might appear out of their mind to pray - but we would be out of our minds not to! The greatest power of mankind is nothing against the will and actions of God. Prayer may look weak, but it is handing our trust over to the One who is in ultimate control.

Application

Topic A: Prayer, of course!

Prayer must be understood as a request or plea to the Almighty to take action. It is not a demand or a 'name it and claim it' practice, but neither is it a social pleasantry aimed at closing a Christian gathering or wishing someone good luck. When we pray, we enter the council of the Lord our God and we ask him to save, to restore, to renew, to protect or to reveal. Christians have turned their life to Christ and admit that God is supreme over their lives, which they are failing to live properly. Prayer is this faith speaking. The community of saints must be a community of prayers. If we are to be a 'Christian community devoted to maturing in Jesus', then let us devote ourselves to prayer!

Topic B: The content of our prayers

Reflect on your prayers and consider what you pray for. Do you bring to God the things that you believe he would want you to want? Do you speak with him knowing that he is actually more powerful than the situation you find yourself in? Are you often surprised just as the church was when their prayers were answered perhaps better than they had expected?

Topic C: Stop talking about prayer and pray!

There are plenty of things to pray for. Here are three suggestions: 1) Pray for yourself and those you care most about. Pray primarily for their salvation and inclusion in the kingdom of God. 2) Pray for things that people in your church are asking prayer for. (Keep in mind that what we pray for ought to respect what God is willing to do.) 3) Pray for the persecuted church. opendoors.org.au, vom.com.au, and barnabasfund.org

Prayer for the week

Father God, we pray for your people around the world who fear their safety. Please protect them with your truth and keep your promise not to let them go. May you bless and keep all who call on your Son, Jesus, to be saved. Amen.

Acts 12:1-24 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

12 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. **2** He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. **3** When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. **4** After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. **7** Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. 'Quick, get up!' he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

8 Then the angel said to him, 'Put on your clothes and sandals.' And Peter did so. 'Wrap your cloak round you and follow me,' the angel told him. **9** Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. **10** They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

11 Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.'

12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. **13** Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to

answer the door. **14** When she recognised Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, 'Peter is at the door!'

15 'You're out of your mind,' they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, 'It must be his angel.'

16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. **17** Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. 'Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,' he said, and then he left for another place.

18 In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. **19** After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. **20** He had been quarrelling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

21 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. **22** They shouted, 'This is the voice of a god, not of a man.'**23** Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

24 But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

Study 7 - Acts 12:25-13:12

Saul is called Paul

¹⁰ You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹ Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun. Acts 13:10-11a

Context

The account in Acts leaves Peter now and returns to Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas was actually born Joseph but renamed after his gift of encouragement. He had embraced the born-again Saul and brought him to Antioch, a major Greek city, which had responded well to the gospel. Saul and Barnabas travelled together from Antioch to Jerusalem on a mission to give aid to the Christian brothers and sisters there during a famine.

Peter had been arrested in Jerusalem but rescued by an angel from God. He went immediately from the prison to the house of John, also called Mark. This house was used for prayer while Peter was in prison.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 12:25-13:12

1. How did Saul, Barnabas and the community make decisions according to Verses 1-5? What can we say is prescriptive for us?

2. Quite a few names are mentioned in this story. Notice that some characters have more than one name. What do you notice about the

use of name changing in this passage? Contrast Saul with the one named Bar-Jesus.

3. Paul rebuked Elymas. What is the nature and method of the rebuke in Verses 9-11?

Meaning

Names and titles are nothing. A child of Satan can call himself anything he likes, he will still be a child of Satan, full of deceit and corruption. A child of God's can also change his name to better fit his audience, but he will remain a child of God who brings the word of God to people's ears and hearts. I recall Paul's commentary of his method for changing the things that don't matter for the sake of what really matters...

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Co 9:19-23)

Application

Topic A: The word of God divides

Those who are children of God will love the truth and the word of God, while those who are children of the devil will thrive in deceit and corruption, and will oppose the word of God. You won't tell them by their names or what they wear, but by how they respond to the word of God. Are you conscious of this? Some of the nicest people around will still show their true colours when confronted with Jesus and the word of God.

Topic B: Prayer, fasting and hearing the Holy Spirit

What the prophets did in Antioch was to worship the Lord and fast and pray (Acts 13:2-3). Their minds were focused on the word of God, the will of God, the majesty of God, while other life matters such as food were set apart. It was simply a concentrated time to seek God's guidance. The word from the Holy Spirit in Verse 3 may have been audible, but may also have been a clear agreement from those beseeching the Lord. Again, in Verse 4, they travel with the Holy Spirit. These are all agreeable with a practice of consulting with God through prayer and meditation on the Scriptures, and proceeding in line with God's general will and purpose. The point is, do you subject your life and directions to the will of God through deliberate requests for guidance? What might fasting look like for you?

Topic C: Being all things to all people for the sake of the gospel

Would you change your name if it meant bringing the word of God to someone else who has not heard it? Would you shop in a different district if you believed that the gospel would be received better there? Would you move house for the sake of the gospel? What about your job, suburb or leisure activities? Put it this way: what are you unwilling to change for the sake of God's kingdom?

Prayer for the week

Lord God, you became man in order to win us back to your kingdom. Help us to devote our lives to following your will and plans for us. Build in us the desire to spend time with you and commit all things to you in prayer. Amen.

Acts 12:25-13:12 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

25 When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark. **13** **1** Now in the church at

Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. **2** While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' **3** So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. **5** When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

6 They travelled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, **7** who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. **8** But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. **9** Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, **10** 'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? **11** Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.'

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. **12** When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

Study 8 - Acts 13:13-52

A Light for the Gentiles

⁴⁶ Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

*“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”*

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. Acts 13:46-48

Context

Paul (who was Saul) and Barnabas continue in their mission to take the gospel abroad. They had been sent by the church in Antioch (already a Gentile area), having been called by God, to go and preach the word of God and make disciples. They were successful on the island of Paphos to convert the Roman Proconsul to believe the good news. Their tactic has been to find local Jewish synagogues first before presenting the news to the greater community.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 13:13-52

- 1. Paul describes the account from Abraham to John, covering around 2,000 years in ten verses (Verses 16-25). Look at his overview and discuss what you notice he includes and what he does not. What message is Paul wanting to get across?**

2. **The second half of Paul's address concerns evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah (Verses 26-37). Compare these verses with Paul's summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6.**

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time. 1 Corinthians 15:3-6

3. **At the conclusion of Paul's address, he gave his hearers two outcomes for them. Re-read Verses 38-48. What are the two possible outcomes and how do you see them both portrayed at the end of this chapter?**

Meaning

Jesus Christ is God's gift of salvation to all the earth. The whole of the bible speaks of him fulfilling the promises of God. He is the Saviour to everybody who believes and therefore, the Scriptures are for everybody to hear and adore.

"...You have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 3:15

Application

Topic A: Knowing the word of the Lord

Paul's understanding of the bible meant that he could see how everything is connected to Jesus. It didn't matter whether he was preaching to Jews or Gentiles, he used the word of the Lord to show how it is written for all to put their trust in Jesus. Biblical Theology is a modern term used to describe this approach to reading the bible. Being able to read the bible the way Paul did helps us to reach better understanding on everything about this world and to grow in our maturity in Jesus. Reading the Old Testament as Law and ancient history is only a shallow reading. If you would like to grow in your knowledge of God and learn to read the bible as a whole, the 'God's Big Picture Plus' course is aimed to help you do this, as is the Moore College Distance Learning subject called 'Introduction to the Bible.'

Topic B: Being a light in the world

Although God chose Abraham's descendants to receive his blessings, they were intended to be a light to the world. This same principle applies to Christians. We are saved and are called to proclaim the word of the Lord to the world (2 Peter 1:9-10; Matt 28:19-20). We live each day because God is holding back his wrath so that more people may hear and respond to the gospel (Romans 2:4).

Topic C: Loving the gospel regardless of the response to it

Knowing when to speak and when to walk away is a tough thing. Paul's strategy was to arrive at a new place and seek a Jewish community with whom to speak. From there, opportunity arose to speak broader than that. His tactic was not to speak only to those who he knew would respond well. History assured him that the Jews could easily reject him and persecute him. When and where to speak are strategic decisions but whether to say something or nothing is really not that hard. Whenever there is opportunity to say something, say it. Let the Spirit call in the elect and learn to rejoice no matter what the outcome. The evangelist, John Chapman, used to ask himself when he returned home from preaching, 'Did I preach Jesus? Was I clear? Did I call people to respond? Then shut up and go to bed.'

Prayer for the week

Almighty God and Father, we thank you for your generosity in sending your Son for us. Please help us to present Jesus Christ to the world you have placed us in so that others may have the chance to respond in faith. Help us to speak regardless of the outcome and give us joy in our hearts even through persecution and trials. Amen.

Acts 13:13-52 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. **14** From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. **15** After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.'

16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: 'Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! **17** The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; **18** for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness; **19** and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance.**20** All this took about 450 years.

'After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. **21** Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled for forty years. **22** After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do."

23 'From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised. **24** Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. **25** As John was completing his work, he said: "Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

26 'Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. **27** The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognise Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. **28** Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. **29** When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. **30** But God raised him from the dead, **31** and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

32 'We tell you the good news: what God promised our ancestors **33** he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

"'You are my son; today I have become your father.'"

34 God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, "I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David."

35 So it is also stated elsewhere: "You will not let your holy one see decay."

36 'Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. **37** But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

38 'Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. **39** Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. **40** Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

41 "Look, you scoffers,
wonder and perish,
for I am going to do something in your days
that you would never believe,
even if someone told you."

42 As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. **43** When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. **45** When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. **47** For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. **50** But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. **51** So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. **52** And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Study 9 - Acts 14:1-28

Lost in Translation

We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. Acts 14:15

Context

The mission of Jesus exploded in Jerusalem and has been spreading abroad. Barnabas and Saul (now called Paul since chapter 13) left Antioch to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:3). They had sailed to Cyprus, preached in Paphos, parted with John in Perga and proclaimed Jesus the Saviour to the Pisidian Synagogue. The word of the Lord had been received by some Jews but rejected by many others. It had also been received well by Gentiles and yet not all believed. Always, the message was the word of the Lord and the proclamation that Jesus is Lord. Freedom from sin comes to everybody who believes. This word of the Lord spread throughout the region, but Paul and Barnabas left Pisidian Antioch once it was clear that many were rejecting the gospel.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 14

1. The incident with the lame man in Verses 8-10 give the background miracle context for Verses 11-18. How is this story familiar to us? How is it not? Discuss. How does Verse 3 contribute to your discussion?
2. Paul says, in Verse 15, "We too are only human, like you". The people of Lycaonia responded to miracles differently to the Jews. How did their reaction affect the gospel message that Paul had for them?

3. **God “has not left himself without testimony” (Verse 17). What does Paul mean by that? Read Romans 1:18-21. What is the good news and the bad news about God’s own testimony?**

Meaning

The shape of the gospel message will look different, depending on to whom you speak it. A person with the understanding that there is one god may be asked, ‘How are you saved?’, while someone who thinks of many gods or many religions as equal may be asked, ‘Who is ultimately in charge of everything?’, and someone with an atheistic or agnostic background may be asked, ‘How do you know right from wrong?’. The same gospel can take different approaches depending on your audience.

Application

Topic A: Common objections to Christianity

What are some common objections to the Christian faith? After raising a few, can you think of some clear responses to each?

Topic B: Getting past the cultural barriers

The gospel must pass through huge walls of cultural conviction. The Jews responded to the gospel by attacking the messengers. The Lycaonians responded to the gospel by treating the messengers as gods! Both groups needed to be convicted of the truth and to respond to that. What cultural obstacles do we face in our area as we try to preach the gospel?

Topic C: Rejoicing in the mission of God

What things have you seen God doing in the past few months that give you joy? What has been an encouragement to you in watching the mission of God unfold around you?

Prayer for the week

Lord God, creator and judge, we praise you for the beauty that you have bestowed on all the world in your creation. We thank you for the care that you have shown throughout this earth. We love you for speaking your word to us and showing us Jesus. Help our hearts to sing with joy because we know you, the living God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Amen.

Acts 14 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

14 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. **2** But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. **3** So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. **4** The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. **5** There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to ill-treat them and stone them. **6** But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, **7** where they continued to preach the gospel.

8 In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. **9** He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed **10** and called out, 'Stand up on your feet!' At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have come down to us in human form!' **12** Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. **13** The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: **15** 'Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. **16** In the past, he let all nations go their own way. **17** Yet he has not left himself without testimony: he has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides

you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.’ **18** Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

19 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. **20** But after the disciples had gathered round him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

21 They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, **22** strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said. **23** Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. **24** After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, **25** and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. **27** On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. **28** And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Study 10 - Acts 15:1-41

It's a Gospel Issue

God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. Acts 15:8

Context

After persecution broke out in Jerusalem (Acts 7), most of the believers were scattered abroad and preached the gospel wherever they went. To the north of Jerusalem, and all of the Jewish region, is the major city in Asia-minor, Antioch. The gospel was well received in Antioch and many Gentiles turned to Jesus for salvation. Paul and Barnabas preached there and were sent out from Antioch in Syria to go on their first missionary journey through Cyprus, Paphos, Pamphylia, Iconium and Lycaonian. Check out the map in the front for this booklet, in your bibles or online to see these locations.

Peter had also experienced God's teaching on Gentiles being included in his salvation plan. He was taught by God that he does not show favouritism. Peter saw the Holy Spirit come upon the household of Cornelius and he baptised them into the Christian faith. Peter remained based in Jerusalem along with James, while Paul and Barnabas enjoyed the fellowship in Antioch.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 15:1-41

1. **"Unless you...you cannot be saved." Look at the teaching given in Verse 1. Are there other similar ideas you have heard which fit the same formula? What is the dangerous issue here? Is Paul and Barnabas' reaction to this warranted?**

2. The sharp dispute found a resolution in this chapter. Describe the steps that took place and discuss how this was possible.
3. Contrast the teaching given in Verse 1 with the instruction given in the letter to Antioch. We may consider Verses 23-29 as the First Epistle to the Church at Antioch! What do you notice about the method, message and purpose of the letter?
4. Optional question: How does the dispute in Verse 39 compare and contrast to the rest of the chapter?

Meaning

Unity in the gospel comes through putting the mission and vision of God before our own. For the church to grow as one body, it must function together with the word of God at the head.

Application

Topic A: Church structure

The Anglican Church exists in order to preserve a common way of thinking about church life. It contains a list of 39 articles to describe what we all hold commonly together. It also follows a structured organisational system of Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons and councils. What are the pros and cons of these things? Do you see support for or against these in this week's passage?

Topic B: Encouraging Christians abroad

The Clark family are doing God's work in Germany and Karen Darda is serving the Lord in Japan. How can we encourage them and the churches that they are ministering to?

Topic C: Helping one another without hindering

What advice would you give to a young Christian in the faith? What would you recommend as beneficial to them? What is the right amount of advice and help and what is too much?

Prayer for the week

Father of all who believe, judge of all mankind, we humbly pray that you will help your church here on earth to keep unity in the faith for the sake of Jesus Christ. May we be a Christian community devoted to maturity in Jesus. Help us to build up one another in faith and love, and be ready to defend the gospel of grace when we know it is not taught. Amen.

Acts 15 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

15 Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' **2** This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. **3** The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. **4** When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.'

6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. **7** After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: 'Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles should hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. **8** God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. **9** He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. **10** Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? **11** No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.'

12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. **13** When they finished, James spoke up. 'Brothers,' he said, 'listen to me. **14** Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. **15** The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

16 "After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,
17 that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things" –
18 things known from long ago.

19 'It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. **20** Instead we should write to them, telling them

to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. **21** For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.'

22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. **23** With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorisation and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. **25** So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul – **26** men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **27** Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. **28** It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: **29** You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

30 So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. **31** The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. **32** Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. **33** After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. **35** But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' **37** Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, **38** but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. **39** They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, **40** but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. **41** He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Study 11 - Acts 16:1-40

Being Lead by the Spirit

We got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:10

Context

While Paul and Barnabas worked well together in spreading the gospel to the north-west of Israel, they had a dispute over working together with Mark (formerly known as John). Barnabas and Mark sailed to Cyprus but Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 16:1-40

- 1. This chapter is a combination of very normal things happening mixed with supernatural. Which parts would seem natural in anyone's travel diary and which parts are unusual?**
- 2. Consider Timothy (Verses 1-5), Lydia (Verses 13-15) and the jailer (Verses 23-34). What influences in their lives led them to Christ? To what extent could Paul have planned these in his mission?**

3. Look at the question the jailer asks Paul in Verse 30. Think about all the questions you might get asked about God and faith, and consider whether there is a more important question than what this man asked.
4. What irony do you see in the jail episode of Verses 23-37? Who are in prison literally and who spiritually? Who really has the words to set people free?

Meaning

Finding people and places to preach the gospel is as much a part of following the lead of the Spirit as it is setting an agenda and a plan. The plan will fail without the Spirit of God, but the plan must be to preach where the Spirit opens doors (or locks you in). The gospel itself is a work of the Spirit to open the hearts of the elect to respond. Our message must direct people to Jesus as Lord - this is the good news.

Application

Topic A: Guided by the Spirit

Discuss ways in which you have seen the Spirit of God directing you in your life? How have you been aware of this? What principles must we follow to know whether it is the Spirit of God or not?

Topic B: The good, the bad and the Sovereignty of God

Our plans do get changed and it is important to understand the sovereignty of God in all situations. Bad events in life are also used by God for his good purposes. Do you have examples of this in your life? How might you see your current situations (today, this week, a specific function) as an opportunity to spread the gospel and to glorify God?

Topic C: Filling your heart with joy

The jailer was filled with joy because of the gospel. Would you describe your life as full of joy for knowing God? Would you use the word joy at all to describe your life? Why or why not? Discuss.

Prayer for the week

Lord God, thank you for giving us freedom from sin and death. Thank you for removing our chains by guiding us to Jesus by your Spirit. As we live out our days, help us to be aware of the doors you open and close for our benefit. Give us the wisdom to know which way is with you and which is against you. Amen.

Acts 16 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

16 Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. **2** The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. **3** Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. **4** As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. **5** So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

6 Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. **7** When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. **8** So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. **9** During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' **10** After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. **12** From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. **14** One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. **15** When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded us.

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. **17** She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.' **18** She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned round and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her.

19 When her owners realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place to face the authorities. **20** They brought them before the magistrates and said, 'These men

are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar **21** by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise.'

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. **23** After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. **24** When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. **26** Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. **27** The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. **28** But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!'

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. **30** He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'

31 They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.' **32** Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. **33** At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptised. **34** The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole household.

35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: 'Release those men.' **36** The jailer told Paul, 'The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.'

37 But Paul said to the officers: 'They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.'

38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. **39** They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. **40** After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Study 12 - Acts 17:1-15

Reasoning from the Scriptures

² "He reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said.

¹¹ They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² As a result, many of them believed." Acts 17:2-3, 11-12

Context

Paul and Silas left Antioch in Syria for Paul's second missionary journey. In Chapter 16, they had spent time in Philippi where they met a lady named Lydia who, along with her household, gave her life to Christ. Paul met a jailer who did the same - he and his household. Paul and Silas left Philippi of their own will to continue their journey. Their mission is to take the word of the Lord - the message of salvation - to the Gentiles but it has been Paul's practice to begin wherever he found a Jewish Synagogue.

Watch a Video

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 17:1-15

1. Describe and discuss the strategy Paul had for proclaiming the name of Jesus wherever he went. See Verses 1-3.

2. Compare and contrast the Jewish hearers in Thessalonica with the Jewish hearers in Berea. Can we draw any conclusions from these two reactions? Note: 'noble character' in Verse 11 would be better understood as 'noble-minded' or 'open-minded'.
3. Paul reasoned from the Scriptures that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. Read Isaiah 53 and reflect on how the prophesied servant of the Lord is fulfilled in Jesus.

Meaning

The gospel demands a thorough investigation. It is a message grounded by an **ancient text** predicting its fulfillment in Jesus and in an **historic event** where a man suffered and rose to life again having shown himself to be the Messiah. To disprove Christianity, there are two clear places to attack: the ancient texts and the historic event. A fool who does not wish to believe can then attack the believers out of jealousy and hate. The wise man, however, will search the evidence thoroughly and come to see that Jesus is Messiah and Lord.

Application

Topic A: How thoroughly do you search the Scriptures?

Are your beliefs and convictions driven more by surface feelings and thought or are they grounded in deep understanding and study? Talk about how you study the Scriptures or how you could learn to study them better.

Topic B: What is the gospel?

Can you sum up the gospel in one word? Try it! Can you sum it up in a sentence? A paragraph? A page? What things are important in the gospel message and what things are of secondary importance? Where does the cross and resurrection fit in your answer?

Topic C: One-to-one discipleship

Do you have anybody that you should or could disciple? Discuss how that is going and what you need to do to improve in the area of discipling others. (If you are a parent, then you clearly have some people that you need to disciple.)

Prayer for the week

Lord, keep us devoted to maturing in Jesus, and ready to explain and persuade others of the truth. Thank you that your gospel stands ready to be tested, and that our faith was taught to us on the grounds of reason and evidence. We praise you for Jesus, who suffered, died and rose again so that we are now set free from sin and death. Amen.

Acts 17:1-15 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

17 When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. **2** As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, **3** explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,' he said. **4** Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

5 But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the market-place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. **6** But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: 'These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, **7** and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.' **8** When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. **9** Then they put Jason and the others on bail and let them go.

10 As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. **11** Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. **12** As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

13 But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. **14** The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. **15** Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

Study 13 - Acts 17:16-34

How to preach Jesus as Lord

³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:30-31

Context

It's a new world where God has revealed Jesus to be the Messiah. He was rejected by his people and crucified but was raised to life again, showing his approval by God. Jesus is God's Son, His promised Saviour, and, quite literally, the Champion of the world. But will the world receive Him?

Paul has been travelling a great distance from his home church in Antioch to take the gospel to the Gentile world. He left with Silas and Timothy also joined him later in his journey. Paul preached in Thessalonica and Berea. He was escorted from Berea to Athens for his safety while Silas and Timothy remained. His travel partners were summoned for, however, and Paul waits for them in Athens.

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 17:16-34

- 1. What is it that distressed Paul according to Verse 16? Does his reaction surprise you? What did he do in response to what he saw?**

2. Look at the description of the people in Verses 18-21. How is this audience different to most that he had encountered previously?
3. What was Paul's starting point for his gospel presentation in Verses 22-24? What is his logic in doing this?
4. Follow Paul's argument in Verses 24-31 and observe how he leads the people to the knowledge of Christ (the appointed one). What elements of the gospel has Paul been able to include in this speech?

Meaning

The gospel preached to non-Scriptural folk begins with a different context but still concludes with Jesus as Lord and the resurrection from the dead. No human is exempt from this one test - Do they believe that Jesus is Lord, risen from the dead? Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Otherwise...judgement is coming.

Application

Topic A: Being distressed by the world that you live in

Have you considered your own reaction to people saying OMG? Do you worry about the amount of energy, time and dedication people give to shopping malls? When you look at the world, do you see people striving to get along while we wait for our lives to be over or do you see people living in ignorance and desperately in need of a Saviour? Reflect on the way you see the world in which you live.

Topic B: Reasoning instead of attacking

Even though Paul was distressed by the idolatry, he used it as a way to make inroads to the gospel. He did not attack their sin but reasoned with them to see the truth. It seems like Paul did not view the Athenians as primitives but as fellow humans in need of the gospel. Consider how you view those around you? Are they exempt from judgement and true worship because of their different look at life? Or are they living in ignorance and need persuasion to repent?

Topic C: The resurrection as proof

Do you believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus? Why? What makes you so sure? Could you persuade someone who is interested to listen?

Prayer for the week.

Lord God, draw near to us we pray, and teach us daily to respect and revere the name of Jesus. Thank you for your patience and love for all mankind, and give us wisdom and boldness to know and tell the gospel. Amen.

Acts 17:16-34 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. **17** So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the market-place day by day with those who happened to be there. **18** A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbler trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.' They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. **19** Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? **20** You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.' **21** (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. **23** For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

24 'The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. **25** And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. **26** From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. **27** God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. **28** "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring."

29 'Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by human design and skill. **30** In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. **31** For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.'

32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, 'We want to hear you again on this subject.' **33** At that, Paul left the Council. **34** Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Acts 18:1-17

God's people in Corinth

⁹ Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you." Acts 18:9-10

Context

Paul's second missionary journey has taken him from Antioch in Syria to Athens in Greece. He is only a short boat ride away from Rome. He preached the gospel in Athens while he was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him there. He reasoned with the Athenians that Jesus is God's chosen one, risen from the dead, who will judge the entire world one day with justice. No other so-called gods are anything. Neither he nor the gospel will not tolerate that.

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Acts 18:1-17

- 1. When in Corinth, Paul took up a job of making tents but he stopped doing this once Silas and Timothy arrived. Why do you think he did this? Read 2 Corinthians 11:9 for more information. What did Paul continue to do whether being a tentmaker or not?**

- 2. Read Verse 5 and consider Paul's message to the Jews. Is he teaching the Jews that there is a Messiah or a Saviour or something else? When the Jews opposed Paul, who are they really opposing? Read John 3:18 to help answer this.**

3. When Paul 'shook out his clothes in protest' and left the Jews, where did he say he would go next (see Verse 6) and how far did he have to go to get there (see Verse 7)? What inference does this have on mission?
4. The Israelites have been known as the people of God for generations but in Verses 9-11, God supports Paul's decision to stay in Corinth and preach his Word. Who does he declare exist in Corinth? See Verse 10.

Meaning

The Jews are no longer considered the people of God but only those whom God has set aside to receive Jesus as Lord. Both God and the rulers of the land seem to cast the Jews aside.

Application

Topic A: When do you stop reasoning with people about the gospel?

What do you do when one dead end is reached on the mission field?

A five year plan was set for us all to bring one person to church and to Christ in the next five years. What stage of the plan are you up to? Take time to pray for the person or people you believe God has given you to witness to.

Topic B: 'Tentmaking'

Paul was a tentmaker for a time but later devoted himself fully to preaching the word of God. Discuss how we use 'tentmaking' and giving people fully to the work of the gospel in our church and community.

Topic C: Reflect on Acts 9-18

Reflecting on Acts Chapters 9-18, consider the various ways the gospel has been presented. Look back over the map in the front of your booklet and see the area that Paul has covered. Give thanks to God that the gospel spread so far and so quickly into a world that had only known darkness. Pray for our world today that still needs this gospel so that we can know God, know eternal life and know the freedom that comes from serving Him alone.

Prayer for the week

Lord God, your gospel is so profoundly simple and yet so easily rejected by many. Give us endurance and persistence to follow Jesus, know Jesus and make Jesus known throughout this world. Lord, send out your servants into the world and send all of us into our community to tell the good news to all. Amen.

Acts 18:1-17 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

18 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, **3** and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. **4** Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

5 When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. **6** But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'

7 Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. **8** Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptised.

9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. **10** For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.' **11** So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

12 While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. **13** 'This man,' they charged, 'is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.'

14 Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, 'If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanour or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. **15** But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law – settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.' **16** So he drove them off. **17** Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.

Feedback

Please return this to your leader or place it in the church offertory bag/plate **by Sunday 17th of April, 2016.**

- 1. What is your gender:** ☐ Male ☐ Female
- 2. What is your age:** ☐ Under 18 ☐ 18-29 ☐ 30-49 ☐ 50 or above
- 3. My Growth Group is:** ☐ Mixed ☐ Men only ☐ Women only
- 4. Group leader's full name:** _____

5. Most questions in the studies were clear and unambiguous.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly Disagree			Neutral	Strongly Agree		

6. The questions generally promoted good discussion about the passage and helped the group to discover the main ideas and practical applications for themselves.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly Disagree			Neutral	Strongly Agree		

7. The studies generally made it enjoyable to study the Bible.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly Disagree			Neutral	Strongly Agree		

8. Were the questions generally 'too simplistic' or 'too tough' for your group?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too Simplistic			About Right	Too Tough		

9. Were there generally 'too many' or 'too few' questions in each study?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too many questions and too shallow discussion of each			About right	Too few questions and discussion dragged out too long		

10. Our Growth Group has gone really well this term.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly Disagree			Neutral	Strongly Agree		

Thanks for your patience! ... Just a few more over the page

11. What did you like about these studies that we should keep doing in the future?

12. How can we improve our studies for future terms?

13. Do you have a story about how you've personally grown in your love and knowledge as a result of Growth Group this term (it is really encouraging to hear them!). If not, have you observed growth in someone else?

14. Would you like to have a go and try to lead one or two studies next term? If so, please put your name and contact details so that Simon Twist can contact you (don't worry, training will be provided!).

15. Is there anything that you would like to write to thank and encourage your Growth Group leader for their leadership this term?

Please return this page to your leader or place it in the church offertory bag/plate **by Sunday 17th of April, 2016.**