



GROW:

OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE

MEMBER'S GUIDE

THE BIBLE CHURCH, SINGAPORE

THE STUDY OF ACTS

PREFACE

After three years of COVID19 pandemic, the church has gone through many iterations of changes and adjustments. Some of us are relieved that we are getting out of this crisis, finally, almost; yet others have become weary. Regardless, our gaze must remain trained on Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. In this regard, we embarked on a journey of *FOLLOWING JESUS* in 2022 through the gospel of Luke, seeking to recapture the very heart of Christ when he was on earth. However, following Jesus is never complete unless we also understand and embrace the mission and mandate that his first disciples undertook in obedience to his command and call.

In this regard, we have this sequel in the book of Acts, written by the same author, doctor Luke. It tells us about the adventures and exploits of his first disciples as they turned the world upside down. Most importantly, Acts describes the works of our Lord Jesus Christ, made possible through them in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the same Spirit who dwells in us disciples today, calling us to pick up the baton of the gospel that has been passed to us. Will we be faithful and obedient to go make disciples of every nation?

Of course, the early church and disciples experienced growing pains, besetting sins, external opposition, and even severe persecution. Many even died for their faith. Nonetheless, despite these, we are told the gospel went from Jerusalem (Acts 1-7) to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12) and then to the ends of the earth (Acts 13-28; Acts 1.8). We are reminded on numerous occasions that the word of God spread, and the number of disciples grew (Acts 6.7, 9.31, 12.24, 16.5, 19.20). How did that happen? Through the work of the Holy Spirit upon obedient and revitalized disciples-witnesses who went out of their comfort zone to do as the Lord led them! They saw and did things they never did before, simply because they were willing to follow Jesus.

Likewise, as we study the book of Acts, I pray that we too, like the first disciples, will be willing to follow Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. I pray that we will be willing to go out of our comfort zone, to do things we would never do on our own accord or even imagined ourselves doing, simply to follow Jesus and his call. May we be led first on our knees, as we embark on this exciting journey with our hands and feet, to bring the gospel to the lost, the last and the least! May the Lord imprint his world-saving vision onto our Spirit-softened hearts so that we will be compelled out of the printed (or digital) pages and discussions in our Bible Studies into the world that Christ has placed us to make a gospel difference.

Let's follow Jesus... *Out of our comfort zone!*

Senior Pastor Beh Soo Yeong

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The following is a portion of the Author's Preface extracted from John Stott's commentary on Acts. This volume is highly recommended, and this piece is reproduced here as it contains helpful background information and tools in the reading of Acts.

Thank God for *The Acts of the Apostles!* The New Testament would be greatly impoverished without it. We are given four accounts of Jesus, but only one of the early church. So, the book of Acts occupies an indispensable place in the Bible.

The value of the Acts

It is important, first, for its historical record. Luke begins his story with the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and the honeymoon period of the Spirit-filled community, which was abruptly terminated by the opposition of the Jewish authorities. He goes on to describe the transition stage in which the foundations were laid for the Gentile mission by Stephen's martyrdom and Philip's evangelism, the conversions of Saul and Cornelius, and the founding of the first Greek church in Antioch. From this international city and church the world-wide Christian mission was launched. Paul and Barnabas evangelized Cyprus and Galatia; the Council of Jerusalem acknowledged the legitimacy of Gentile conversion; Europe was reached during the second missionary journey (including Athens and Corinth) and Ephesus on the third. Then Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, and this was followed by a series of court trials, his appeal to Caesar, and the long sea voyage to Rome, the city of his dreams. There Luke leaves him, restricted to his own rented house, but unrestricted in his preaching of the gospel. Without the Acts we could not have reconstructed the course of Paul's intrepid missionary career or known how the gospel spread to the strategic cities of the Roman world.

The Acts is also important, however, for the contemporary inspiration which it brings us. Calvin called it ‘a kind of vast treasure’.¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones referred to it as ‘that most lyrical of books’, and added: ‘Live in that book, I exhort you: it is a tonic, the greatest tonic I know of in the realm of the Spirit.’² It has, in fact, been a salutary exercise for the Christian church of every century to compare itself with the church of the first, and to seek to recapture something of its confidence, enthusiasm, vision and power. At the same time, we must be realistic. There is a danger lest we romanticize the early church, speaking of it with bated breath as if it had no blemishes. For then we shall miss the rivalries, hypocrisies, immoralities and heresies which troubled the church then as now. Nevertheless, one thing is certain. Christ’s church had been overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit, who thrust it out to witness.

The literature of the Acts

Because of its unique importance, the Acts has attracted an enormous literature, and it would be almost impossible for anybody to read it all. I have enjoyed some of the older commentators, who nowadays are often neglected. I am thinking of John Chrysostom’s fifty-five homilies on the Acts preached in Constantinople in AD 400 and of John Calvin’s two volumes written in sixteenth-century Geneva. I have appreciated the pithy comments of Johann Albrecht Bengel of the eighteenth century, the godly and clear-headed insights of J. A. Alexander, the brilliant Princeton linguist of the nineteenth century, and the archaeological expertise of Sir William Ramsay, who wrote ten books between 1893 and 1915 bearing on Luke and/or Paul, the best-known being *St Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (1895). I have also struggled with the critical postures of liberal works like

¹ Calvin, I, p. 20.

² *The Christian Warfare* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 274.

the five volumes edited by F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake under the title *The Beginnings of Christianity* (1920–32) and the 700 pages of Ernst Haenchen's scholarly treatment (1956).

Among contemporary conservative authors I have specially profited from the commentaries by F. F. Bruce (Greek, 1951; English, 1954), Howard Marshall (1980) and Richard Longenecker (1981). I particularly regret that the late Dr Colin Hemer's *magnum opus* entitled *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (1989), ably edited by Conrad Gempf, was published too late for me to study thoroughly; I have been able, as this manuscript is being prepared for the press, to spend only a morning in the perusal of it. This has enabled me to refer the reader to a number of Dr Hemer's discussions. The wealth of recent archaeological discovery (especially from papyri, inscriptions and coins), which he has painstakingly collected and sifted, will make his work a standard reference book for many years to come. Encyclopaedic in knowledge, conscientious in research and cautious in judgment, Colin Hemer has put all students of Acts in his debt.

It is easy to echo the sentiment of Sir William Ramsay, who wrote: 'It is impossible to find anything to say about Acts that has not been said before by somebody.'³ Then how on earth can one justify adding yet another volume to the extensive library on Acts? If anything distinctive can be claimed about this book it is that, whereas all commentaries seek to elucidate the original meaning of the text, the *Bible Speaks Today* series is committed also to its contemporary application. I have tried, therefore, to address myself with integrity to some of the main questions which the Acts raises for today's Christians, such as the baptism of the Spirit and charismatic gifts, signs and wonders, the economic sharing of the first Christian community in Jerusalem, church discipline, the diversity of ministries, Christian conversion, racial prejudice, missionary principles, the

³ Ramsay, *St Paul*, p. viii.

cost of Christian unity, motives and methods in evangelism, the call to suffer for Christ, church and state, and divine providence.

The interpretation of the Acts

But can we leap the gap of nineteen centuries between the apostles and us, apply the Acts text to ourselves without manipulating it to suit our own preconceived opinions? Yes, it is right to affirm that the Word of God is always relevant. But this does not mean that we may simply ‘read off’ the text as if it was originally addressed to us in our context. We have to recognize the historical particularities of Scripture, especially of the ‘salvation-history’ which it records. In one sense, for example, the Day of Pentecost was unique and is unrepeatable, because the outpouring of the Spirit on that day was the final act of Jesus following those equally unique and unrepeatable events, his death, resurrection and ascension. Similarly unique in some respects was the ministry of the apostles, whom Jesus appointed to be the pioneer teachers and the foundation of the church.⁴ We have no liberty to copy everything they did.

It is in this connection that I need to say something about the difference between didactic and narrative parts of Scripture, and about the importance of allowing the didactic to control our interpretation of the narrative. For what I wrote about this in *Baptism and Fullness* has been

⁴ See Eph. 2:20.

misunderstood by some, and I will try to clarify it.⁵ I am emphatically not saying that biblical narrative has nothing to teach us, for of course ‘all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable’.⁶ Moreover, what happened to others in former times has been recorded for our instruction.⁷ The question, however, is *how* are we going to interpret these narrative passages? For some of them are not self-interpreting, and contain within themselves few if any clues as to what we are intended to learn from them. Are they necessarily normative? Is the behaviour or experience recorded in them meant to be copied? or perhaps avoided?

I am not referring only to charismatic questions like the gift of the Spirit to the Samaritans (Acts 8). The same query has to be raised in regard to other descriptive passages. For example, are we to make local church elections by drawing lots, because this was what they did when choosing an apostle to replace Judas (1:23–26)? Are we to hold our possessions in common, sell our goods and share the proceeds with the needy, as the members of the early church in Jerusalem did (2:44–45; 4:32ff.)? Again, are we to expect at our conversion to see a bright light and hear an audible voice, as Saul of Tarsus did (9:3ff.)? It should be clear from these examples that not everything that people are recorded in the Acts as having done or experienced is meant to be replicated in our lives. So how

⁵ See *Baptism and Fullness* (IVP, second edition 1975), pp. 15–17. Roger Stronstad in his *The Charismatic Theology of St Luke* (Hendrickson, 1984) writes of those who allege ‘an unbiblical dichotomy between the so-called descriptive and didactic passages of Scripture’ (p. 6) and appears to include me among them. But I plead ‘not guilty’! I am not denying that historical narratives have a didactic purpose, for of course Luke was both a historian and a theologian; I am rather affirming that a narrative’s didactic purpose is not always apparent within itself and so often needs interpretative help from elsewhere in Scripture.

⁶ 2 Tim. 3:16.

⁷ Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11.

shall we decide? It is here that the didactic must guide us in evaluating and interpreting the descriptive. We have to look for teaching on the issue, first in the immediate context (within the narrative itself), then in what the author writes elsewhere, and finally in the broader context of Scripture as a whole. For instance, the apostle Peter's plain statement to Ananias that his property, both before and after its sale, was his own and at his disposal (5:4), will prevent us from regarding all Christian possessions as being necessarily held in common.

John Stott
Easter 1989

Acts

ORIENTING DATA FOR ACTS

- **Content:** part 2 of Luke's account of the good news about Jesus; how by the power of the Spirit the good news spread from Jerusalem to Rome
- **Author:** see the Gospel according to Luke
- **Date:** see Luke
- **Recipients:** see Luke
- **Emphases:** the good news of God's salvation through Jesus is for Jew and Gentile alike, thus fulfilling Old Testament expectations; the Holy Spirit guides the church in spreading the good news; the church has the good sense to side with God regarding his salvation and the inclusion of the Gentiles; salvation for all is God's thing and nothing can hinder it; the good news is accepted in joy by some and rejected in anger by others

OVERVIEW OF ACTS

In writing his larger account of the good news about Jesus, Luke has shaped the two parts to correspond in some significant ways. In Acts, for example, the geography is now reversed; it starts in Jerusalem and then branches out to other parts of Judea (chs. 1–12); its large central section is another travel narrative, as Paul takes the gospel from Antioch to Europe

(chs. 13–20); the final third (chs. 21–28) portrays Paul’s trials before the same three tribunals as Jesus (the Jewish Sanhedrin [Luke 22:66–71/Acts 22:30–23:10]; the Roman procurator [Luke 23:1–5, 13–25/Acts 24:1–27]; and one of the Herods [Luke 23:6–12/Acts 25:23–26:32])—which in Paul’s case results in his getting the gospel to the heart of the empire (Rome).

The key to your reading of Acts is to recognize the “movement” of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, narrated in six parts (panels) and signaled by Luke’s little summary statements in 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; and 19:20. In each case the narrative seems to pause for a moment before it takes off in a new direction—sometimes geographically, sometimes ethnically, and sometimes both. The good news that is being spread, of course, is God’s salvation (the forgiveness of sins) offered to all people (Jew and Gentile alike) through the death and resurrection of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Here at last the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:2–3; see Acts 3:25), expressed repeatedly by the prophets as part of their hope for the future—that Gentiles would join Israel as the people of God (e.g., Isa 2:1–5; Mic 4:1–5; Zech 14:16–18)—had found its fulfillment.

The first panel (1:1–6:7) tells the story of the spread of the good news about Jesus in Jerusalem by the apostles. The second (6:8–9:31) marks the first geographical expansion to neighboring Judea and Samaria (see 1:8), where Stephen and the Hellenists play the major role. The third (9:32–12:24) narrates the first expansion to the Gentiles (Cornelius) and the conversion of the key figure (Paul) in what is to be its still greater expansion. With Paul now the central figure, the fourth panel (12:25–16:5) narrates the expansion to Gentiles in Asia, and how the early leaders dealt with the “problem” of Gentile inclusion “law-free.” The fifth (16:6–19:20) marks the jump of the gospel from Asia to Europe; the church is also now steadily more Gentile than Jewish. The sixth (19:21–28:31) tells how Paul (the apostle to the Gentiles) finally got to Rome (the capital of the Gentile

world) with the good news—but he did so, Luke reminds us, by way of Jerusalem through a series of trials very much like those of Jesus.

SPECIFIC ADVICE FOR READING ACTS

The story in part 2 is still about Jesus, as the brief prologue (1:1–2) reminds us. The first part was about what “Jesus *began* to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven” (emphasis added). With some carefully chosen connections to part 1, Acts begins by picking up the prophecy from Luke 3:16 by John the Baptist about the coming Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). The disciples are promised the “power” of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 24:49, “clothed with power from on high”) so as to bear witness to Jesus. Luke then narrates the ascension (cf. Luke 24:51) in the context of Jesus’ promised return; the clear implication is that through the Spirit they are to carry on the story until he comes (cf. the parable in Luke 19:11–27).

How Luke does this is the genius of Acts. First, note the large number of speeches that Luke records throughout the narrative (e.g., Peter in 2:14–39; 3:11–26; 10:27–43; Stephen in 7:1–53; Paul in 13:16–47; 17:22–31; 20:17–35). These tend to appear at key points and illustrate how the gospel is preached (or defended) in a variety of settings. In each case the speech either includes the essence of the story of Jesus or focuses on him at the end. Thus Jesus’ story continues in Acts as the early believers bear witness to him.

Second, note (1) the connection between Jesus Christ and the Spirit and (2) that the Spirit is ultimately responsible for every major turning point in the narrative. How Luke connects Jesus and the Spirit is especially important. You will remember from reading Luke that the Spirit is the key to Jesus’ earthly ministry (cf. Acts 10:38). Now “exalted to the right hand of God, he has *received* from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and *has poured out* what you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33, emphasis added). Christ, the great bearer of the Spirit, is also the great “baptizer” in the Spirit so

that others will receive the Spirit and thus bear witness to Christ. It is therefore not surprising that at every turn, the Spirit is the driving force behind the forward movement of the gospel.

Third, because the gospel is God's thing, initiated by him and expressing his faithfulness to Israel through Christ, and carried out by the power of the Spirit, Luke also regularly reminds us that nothing can hinder it—not the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (chs. 3–5; “you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God,” 5:39); not unbelieving Jews, like Saul of Tarsus, bent on destruction (8:1–3); not the church in Jerusalem (11:1–18; “who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?” Peter asks, v. 17); not secular leaders, like Herod (12:1–24, “Herod ... was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to increase and spread”[!], vv. 23–24); not Judaizers within the church (15:1–35; “why do you try to test God?” v. 10); not religious or secular opposition from Greeks (16:16–40; 19:23–41); not shipwrecks or snakes (chs. 27–28). With the coming of Jesus and the Spirit, the time of God's favor has come. The gospel is God's activity in history; salvation is for all people, Jew and Gentile alike, and nothing can hinder it. And so the book concludes with Paul preaching in Rome with all boldness and without hindrance (28:31).

You will remember about Luke's Gospel that the universal nature of salvation was expressed in a *vertical* way to include the poor of every imaginable kind. In Acts Luke has concentrated *horizontally* on the Gentile mission—those ultimately marginalized by Israel. But throughout the narrative the restoration of Israel (Acts 1:6) is also always kept in view. The gospel begins as good news to Israel, “heirs of the prophets and of the covenant” (3:25), so that thousands turn to Christ from the start. As it moves outward, carried by Hellenistic Jews, it embraces fallen Jews (the Samaritans, 8:4–25) and a Jewish proselyte (8:26–40). The first Gentile convert is a “God-fearer” (10:2), and wherever Paul goes, he always begins in the synagogue, where some believe. And at the end, in Rome, he still

pleads with Israel to believe in Jesus (28:17–28), but they refuse, so “God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” (v. 28).

That leads us to remind you of the other side of Simeon’s prophecy (Luke 2:34–35)—that Jesus will be a “sign that will be spoken against.” You will want to note as the narrative progresses that the church becomes more and more composed of Gentiles, while Diaspora Jews and the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem lead the opposition. This obviously saddens Luke, but it also is part of the reminder to his implied (Gentile) readers that they belong to the Israel that God is reconstituting through Christ and the Spirit.

Finally, you will want to watch for the sudden insertion of “we” in the narrative at 16:10 (in Troas), which goes on until verse 17 (in Philippi), is picked up again at 20:5 (again in Troas), and continues through 21:19 (in Jerusalem) and again at 27:1 through 28:16 (from Caesarea to Rome). Two things are noteworthy about this phenomenon: (1) The author presents himself without fanfare as a sometime traveling companion of Paul, and (2) in these passages the details are far more abundant and vivid, suggesting that he may be using something like a diary.

A word about its placement in the canon. Luke understands his Gospel and Acts to be two parts of one story. It ended up in two books of about equal length (rather than one long book) because each would fit on one papyrus scroll. But in putting together the New Testament canon, the early church separated Luke from Acts (since both would have existed on separate scrolls, even when copied) through inspired insight. In the canon Luke now belongs to the fourfold Gospel, while Acts serves as a bridge between the Gospels and Paul. But in reading Acts, you need always to remember how it fits into Luke’s inspired plan.

A WALK THROUGH ACTS

□ 1:1–6:7 *The Good News Begins in Jerusalem*

After the prologue that picks up where the Gospel left off (1:1–11), Luke first narrates the *filling up* of the Twelve (1:12–26), since they serve as the representatives of/to Israel. The coming of the Spirit then marks a new beginning (2:1–13; the Gentile world is already present in microcosm), followed by Peter’s explanation of the phenomenon of tongues and the results (2:14–41). This is followed by a series of sketches that illustrate the early life of the church in Jerusalem—its common life (2:42–47; 4:32–37); its preaching and healing ministry (3:1–26; 5:12–16); the opposition (4:1–22; 5:17–42); and judgment within the community for “testing the Spirit” (5:1–11). What you will discover as you read is a new community that believes in Jesus but continues to live within Judaism.

Be looking also for two things that carry over from the last chapter of Luke’s Gospel: (1) The disciples’ ministry is primarily in the temple courts—the same temple courts cleansed by Jesus and made the arena of his final days of teaching (see Luke 19:45–21:38)—and (2) everything in this section is seen as fulfillment of very cardinal moments from the Old Testament story: the end-time gift of the Spirit promised by Joel (Acts 2:16–21); the resurrection of Jesus, as David’s true heir (2:24–32); the present exaltation of Jesus as the exalted Lord of Psalm 110:1 (2:33–35); that the Messiah would suffer (3:17–23); that the promise to Abraham that he would bless the nations is about to be fulfilled (3:25); that the rejected Jesus is the rejected cornerstone of Psalm 118:22 (4:11) and the Messiah against whom the nations rage (4:25–26). Be on the watch for this motif as you continue through the rest of Acts.

The section ends (6:1–7) by noting that two groups have emerged within the community: Greek-speaking (Hellenistic) Jewish Christians and Aramaic-speaking (Jerusalem-based) Jewish Christians. The former of

these, who belong to the Hellenistic synagogue in Jerusalem, become the key to the next expansion. Note how verse 7 brings this panel to a conclusion.

□ **6:8–9:31** ***The Good News Spreads to Judea and Samaria***

Note that this section picks up where the last one left off. You will see that the gospel has made significant inroads into the Greek-speaking synagogue (6:8–15). The first two of the leaders mentioned in 6:5 (Stephen and Philip) are responsible for the next phase of the story. Stephen’s speech (ch. 7), patterned after such passages as Nehemiah 9:6–37 and Psalms 105 and 106, takes up the two crucial issues—from their accusation (Acts 6:13)—where the new wine cannot be contained in the old wineskins (Luke 5:36–39): (1) the temple (God does not dwell in buildings made by hands, in fulfillment of Isa 66:1–2) and (2) the law (the true lawbreakers are those who crucified Jesus, not the believers). Especially watch for the role of Moses in this speech—that he who was “rejected” by Israel (Acts 7:23–29, 35, 39) also foretold that God would send them “a prophet like me from your own people” (v. 37), who was also rejected (vv. 51–52).

Next comes the expansion to Samaria and to a Gentile proselyte through Philip’s ministry (ch. 8); note here that Jesus is understood to be Isaiah’s suffering servant (vv. 32–35). The panel then concludes with the conversion of one of the chief leaders of the opposition in the Hellenistic synagogue—Saul of Tarsus, who will be responsible (for the most part) for the next two phases of the expansion (Asia, Europe). Note how Saul is first introduced (8:1, 3); you might also want to look ahead to the two instances where Paul himself repeats this story (22:1–21; 26:2–23), in both cases emphasizing his role in the Gentile mission. Again, watch how 9:31 sums up and thus concludes this section.

□ **9:32–12:24** *The Good News Spreads to the Gentiles*

Note how Luke begins and ends this panel with Peter stories (9:32–43; 12:1–19). The first one is intended to set the stage for the Cornelius story and to remind you that the apostles continue to do mighty works. The conversion of Cornelius is so important that Luke narrates it twice (10:1–48; 11:1–18). The significance is that the first Gentile was brought to faith, not through the Hellenists (who might be suspect in Jerusalem), but through Peter, resistant though he is. The whole is orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. When criticized in Jerusalem, Peter tells the story all over again. Because of the work of the Spirit, Peter could not hinder God (11:17). Jerusalem is amazed: “even the Gentiles” (v. 18) get in on the good news. Also crucial to this panel is the founding of the church in Antioch by the Hellenists (vv. 19–30), since it will be the sending church for the mission to Asia and Europe. The Peter story with which the section ends (12:1–19) not only illustrates the “nothing can hinder it” motif but also sets the stage for the death of the opposition in this case (12:19–23). Note especially how the summary sentence of 12:24 sits in direct contrast to verse 23.

□ **12:25–16:5** *The Good News Spreads to Asia*

Look for several pivotal matters as you read this phase of the story: (1) The church in Antioch is the new center (12:25–13:3; 14:26–28); (2) Paul becomes the predominant figure (13:4–12); (3) the sermon in Pisidian Antioch (13:16–41) illustrates preaching in the Diaspora synagogues; and (4) the spread of the gospel also leads to the first open breach with Judaism, specifically over the Gentile mission, supported by Isaiah 49:6 (Acts 13:47).

Note how the three accounts in Acts 14 reinforce these themes, especially the power of God that accounts for the inclusion of many Gentiles and the widening breach between Diaspora Jews and the early believers in Christ. The Jerusalem council (15:1–35), with the chief roles being played by Peter and James, affirms a “law-free” gospel to the Gentiles. Note how brief the summarizing sentence is in this instance (16:5).

□ **16:6–19:20** *The Good News Spreads to Europe*

Here Luke records Paul’s second and third missionary trips (16:6–18:22; 18:23–19:20); note how Paul always goes out from and returns to Antioch. The mission to Europe is especially orchestrated by the Spirit (16:6–10)—and here the author joins the story. In this panel Luke also records instances of conflict with pagan authorities (16:16–40; 17:5–9; 18:12–17), which tend to be instigated by Diaspora Jews (17:5, 13; 18:12). In each case the state either will not intervene or apologizes. Luke also includes here an example of preaching in a totally pagan environment (17:16–34). Again note how 19:20 functions to conclude the section.

□ **19:21–28:30** *The Good News (and Paul) Reaches Rome*

You should find this final section an absorbing narrative. As you read, don’t miss that most of it deals with how Paul gets to Rome—through a series of trials similar to those of Jesus. Again be watching for the entrance and exit of the author. At the beginning and at the end, Paul is still reaching out to his fellow Jews (21:17–26; 28:17–28). But they resolutely reject Christ, so the final word is one of judgment in the words

of Isaiah 6:9–10 (cf. Luke 8:10) and acceptance by the Gentiles (Acts 28:26–28). Note especially that in Paul’s two “defenses” (22:1–21; 26:2–23), he tells his story so as to highlight his role in the Gentile mission. Also crucial to the story is the constant reminder that just as with Jesus (who, even though he died as a state criminal, had three times been pronounced “not guilty”), so with Paul: He and the church are found “not guilty” of wrongdoing against Rome (22:29; 23:26–30; 26:32).

In his vivid narrative of shipwreck in 27:1–28:16, Luke also makes it clear to us that Paul’s getting to Rome was ultimately God’s doing. So when the apostle to the Gentiles arrives in the Gentile capital, still reaching out to the Jews but affirming the Gentiles, Luke’s grand story comes to an end.

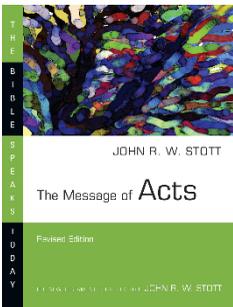
It is hard to imagine how impoverished the biblical story would be without part 2 of Luke-Acts. Here we not only have a lot of the gaps filled in, but we are constantly reminded that the gospel is *God’s thing* in the world—salvation for all through Jesus Christ and the Spirit.

Source: Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. K. (2002). *How to read the Bible book by book: a guided tour* (pp. 295–303). Zondervan.

Links Between Acts and Paul's Epistles

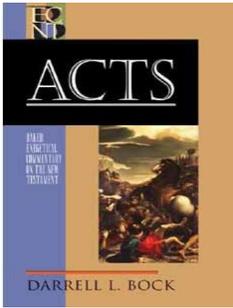
<i>18:2; 19:21; 23:11; 28:14–31</i>	<i>Romans</i>
<i>18:1–19:1</i>	<i>1 and 2 Corinthians</i>
<i>13:14–14:23; 15:36–16:6; 18:23</i>	<i>Galatians</i>
<i>18:19–20:1; 20:16–38</i>	<i>Ephesians</i>
<i>16:11–40; 20:1–6</i>	<i>Philippians</i>
<i>17:1–15</i>	<i>1 and 2 Thessalonians</i>
<i>6:1; 17:14–16; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4</i>	<i>1 and 2 Timothy</i>

Recommended Resources

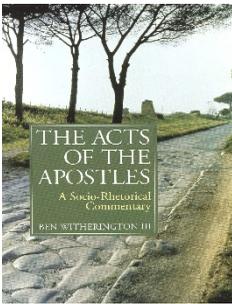


Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Acts: The Spirit, the church & the world*. InterVarsity Press.

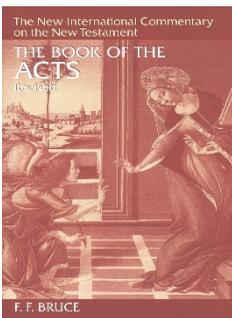
Written from the angle of sermons, this is the most accessible and inexpensive commentary on the list. Highly recommended.



Bock, Darrell L. (2007): *Acts*. Baker.



Witherington, B., III. (1998). *The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.



Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Book of the Acts*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Study 1

The Bible Church, Singapore Spiritual Growth Inventory and Plan (GRIP)

Preamble

As a local church, we understand our mission as “To glorify God by being disciples in a disciple-making community of Jesus Christ.” This means that as a community, we continually seek to establish and equip one another, as well as evangelise others winsomely to be followers of Jesus. But how does a disciple look like? How do we know whether we have hit the mark?

Well, there are at least four integral aspects of a disciple of Jesus:

1. Head (knowledge and wisdom);
2. Heart (conviction and character);
3. Hands (life skills); and
4. Feet (relationships).

While these are four different aspects, they are also very much integrated. In this regard, we seek to develop each aspect in a holistic manner. We encourage our believers to be taking personal ownership of their spiritual formation and growth and the church seeks to work alongside the disciple to provide the community and the resources for such nurturing.

Of course, each of us is at different stages of our spiritual formation. Some of us are new disciples, while others are maturing disciples. Although we know we will never become fully mature on this side of heaven, it is still our goal – to be fully mature disciples of Jesus.

How does a maturing disciple look like?

A *maturing* or *growing* disciple is someone who is a follower of Jesus Christ and who is keen about his spiritual well-being or spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is a lifelong process of becoming more like Christ, reflecting more and more of his image in every aspect of our lives. Jonathan Edwards, the great eighteenth-century Puritan preacher and leader of the Great Awakening, did a weekly self-check, summing up how he was doing and seeking God's help in the process of a growing number of personal resolutions. At the age of seventeen he penned twenty-one resolutions by which he would live his life. While it doesn't take twenty-one resolutions for us to live a spiritually transformed life, it certainly requires that we resolve to daily attend to the state of our souls.

How do we know that we are indeed growing as disciples? Well, growing disciples are fundamentally marked by a deep desire to: i) love God; and ii) love others (believers and pre-believers). In turn these are evidenced by the fruit one produces in one's life (such as a godly character; God-honouring lifestyles and relationships, winsome demeanour, etc).

In order to produce such fruit, one is totally dependent on the Holy Spirit. Yet at the same time, one needs to cultivate suitable spiritual disciplines and practices so as to allow the Spirit to undertake His transformative work. Some specific characteristics of a disciple include:

1. Surrenders and submits to God in worship
2. Studies and applies God's Word
3. Relies on God in prayerfulness
4. Grows interdependently in community
5. Serves joyfully within and without the church
6. Relates winsomely to pre-believers
7. Lives out life's vocation faithfully
8. Seeks to make other disciples intentionally

Incidentally, these characteristics are consistent with the **Core Values** and **Mission** of the Church, which expresses our aspirations of commitments to worship; the Word of God; grow spiritually; prayer; build godly families; strengthen biblical community; serve; share the gospel; and make other disciples of Christ.

So am I a maturing disciple?

A Disciple's Spiritual Growth Inventory & Plan (**GRIP**)

In order to assist you take stock of your personal spiritual progress and where God wants you to work on next in your life, this self-administered inventory has been designed. Sections 1 - 5 relates to how we grow. Section 6 relates to how we serve and Sections 7 - 8 to how we reach out to pre-believers and reproduce as disciple-makers.

To make use of this **GRIP** well, please note the following:

1. We encourage a sincere honesty and ‘sober judgement’ before God to “know where I am as a disciple.”
2. In **Part II**, we encourage you to review the questionnaire and plan simple action steps in order to help you grow.
3. We encourage you to share these action steps with other mature Christian(s), who can pray for you and keep you accountable.
4. **GRIP does not** measure how spiritual you are. It is not designed to be an exhaustive or conclusive spiritual “thermometer.” It is meant to be used as a tool and guide to ascertain where we have grown or need to grow. It is also a helpful tool for monitoring your own spiritual development and growth when you look back at your previous GRIPs.

We invite you to commit this process to the Lord in prayer. Please begin when you are ready.

Part I INVENTORY EXERCISE: Taking Stock

Instruction: Go through the questions and rate yourself between the score of 1 to 5. In order to have a true assessment of yourself, try not to take more than 10 seconds to answer each question.

- 1 Never true of me
- 2 Seldom true of me (*just beginning*)
- 3 Sometimes/ occasionally true of me
- 4 Often/ usually true of me (*getting going*)
- 5 Always true of me (*well developed*)

1. Surrenders and submits to God in worship	Score
1. I constantly evaluate my life and submit every area to Christ as my Lord and Master.	
2. I live daily with the assurance that God the Father loves me and will provide for me.	
3. I worship God daily through personal adoration and praise of Him.	
4. I attend the weekly worship service on Saturday/ Sunday.	
5. I give a portion of my income to God cheerfully and sacrificially as part of worship.	
6. I am conscious of my brokenness and regularly examine myself to repent of my sins.	
7. I seek to obey God by doing what He wants me to do, even when it is not my wish.	
Total	

2. Studies and applies God's Word	Score
1. I read the Bible and journal what God says through the Word daily.	
2. I meditate on and memorize God's Word regularly.	
3. I systematically study and conscientiously apply the Scriptures regularly.	
4. I have a good grasp of the books of the Bible (in both Old & New Testament).	
5. I know what I believe (doctrines) about the Christian faith.	
6. I am often challenged by Scriptures to live faithfully to God in the world.	
7. I take comfort/ instructions from Scriptures when I face struggles/ concerns of life.	
Total	

3. Relies on God in prayerfulness	Score
1. I rely on God daily through time in prayer for myself, others and the church.	
2. I thank God frequently for His faithfulness and answers to prayer.	
3. I pray regularly with other Christians, including at CG or church prayer meetings.	
4. I listen to God through the practice of extended silence and solitude weekly.	
5. I understand and practise Sabbath-keeping weekly.	
6. I understand and practise the principles of spiritual warfare.	
7. I pray according to the Spirit on different occasions with different requests.	
Total	

4. Grows interdependently in community	Score
1. I feel cared for by the church community (e.g. connecting through visits and calls.)	
2. I feel comfortable to share my personal issues with someone in the church.	
3. I am regular in attendance at a CARE Group.	
4. I visit or connect with a few other believers regularly to encourage them.	
5. I am able to resolve conflicts biblically and lovingly within my CARE Group.	
6. I am prepared to or do speak truth lovingly into the lives of my spiritual friends.	
7. I welcome others to speak truth into my life or ask about my mental health.	
Total	

5. Lives out life's vocation faithfully	Score
1. I put God's calling for me as a spouse, parent and/ or child as first priority over work.	
2. I pray for and/ or with my family every week.	
3. I spend extended personal time with my spouse, kids and/or parents every week. *	
4. I spend time teaching my children about God every week. *	
5. I enjoy what I do at my workplace/ school as God's intended station for me. **	
6. I seek to contribute positively to my workplace/ school through Christian values. **	
7. I seek to reach out to my colleagues/ schoolmates through my conduct and speech.	
Total	

6. Serves joyfully within and without the church	Score
1. I know my spiritual gift(s) and preferred area(s) of ministry.	
2. I regularly exercise my spiritual gift(s) to serve within or without the church.	
3. I feel refreshed and connected with God through my service.	
4. I am committed to serve in 1-3 areas in the church. #	
5. I serve joyfully and humbly, as an expression of love for God.	
6. I am well equipped with needed skills to be effective in my area(s) of service.	
7. I am willing to step out of the comfort zone to serve in any area of need.	
Total	

if you are not serving or serving in more than 3 areas in the church, your score should be low as you may be over-extending yourself, which may lead to burn out.

7. Relates winsomely to pre-believers	Score
1. I am conscious about having a good testimony with pre-believers.	
2. I am praying for the salvation of a few pre-believing friends/ family members.	
3. I know how to share the Gospel and/ or my personal testimony in a simple way.	
4. I share the Gospel with non-Christians when opportunity arises.	
5. I am actively involved in our church's outreach in the Good Neighbour Initiatives.	
6. I am able to nurture a new believer to grow spiritually.	
7. I am regularly involved in praying, giving and/or going for missions work overseas.	
Total	

8. Seeks to make other disciples intentionally	Score
1. I meet with a peer or mentor regularly to be discipled and to seek spiritual guidance.	
2. I have learnt/ am learning to disciple others personally.	
3. I pray for the people I am helping to grow and nurture as disciples.	
4. I spend time regularly helping one or a few disciples grow in Jesus Christ.	
5. I encourage and challenge these disciples to in turn, nurture other disciples of Christ.	
6. I help them work through questions and difficulties in their disciple-making process.	
7. I help these disciples become intentional in helping others make other disciples.	
Total	

EVALUATION KEY

The questions you have answered cover eight characteristics of a disciple's life. The score of these areas will indicate what action(s) you need to take for each area. Besides the absolute scores, you may also want to compare each category with the Scores of the **GRIP** you have done previously to see how you have grown. *You are encouraged to share with or get assistance from any one of the church staff team members, church leaders, CARE Group leaders.*

1. Surrenders and submits to God in worship

Score: 28-35 Thank God that you seem to have put Christ as the Lord of your life and it is expressed by constant surrender to and worship of the Lord in your daily life.

Score: 21-27 You have committed yourself to the Lord but there is room for growth. You may want to work on one aspect of this area in the coming year.

Score: 0-20 The worship and lordship of Christ in your life seems to be weak. Examine your life in this area and start working on one weak aspect in this area. Be sure to keep a regular daily devotional time with God.

If you are not sure of your salvation or whether you have been saved, we encourage you to talk to an older Christian about your assurance of faith in Christ

2. Studies and applies God's Word

Score: 28-35 Wonderful! You are knowledgeable in the Word and know how to handle it well. You are also living out the truths of the Word in your life. Keep up your love for God's Word! Consider deepening your knowledge of the Word through courses, investing in Bible study tools and reading the Bible with a younger believer.

Score: 21-27 You have a fairly regular habit of reading God's Word, understanding what it means and applying it into your life. Time to go deeper! Consider using one of the resources to broaden your understanding and deepen your application of the Word.

Score: 0-20 Regular reading and understanding of God's Word is a growth area for you. Start small by getting into a regular habit of reading and reflecting on the Word. Use one of the resources below to guide you and get the process started.

3. Relies on God in prayerfulness

Score: 28-35 Be encouraged that there is a deep dependence on God. Consider encouraging others in their prayer lives by praying with them, especially new disciples, to help them grow in this area.

Score: 21-27 There is some room for improvement in this area. You can work on one aspect of your prayer life. You can start by keeping a personal prayer journal or start attending CG or Church Prayer Meetings regularly.

Score: 0-20 It is likely you have not been consistent in your prayer life. You may want to make plans to spend regular time each day in prayer. Look out for resources such as Prayer Cards that will be made available from time to time.

4. *Grows interdependently in community*

Score: 28-35 Celebrate that God has given you a wonderful community! Do encourage others to grow with you, especially those who have yet to find deep spiritual friendships.

Score: 21-27 You are on the way to experiencing great community! It takes risks and courage but be encouraged to explore going deeper with your CARE Group.

Score: 0-20 To grow as a healthy disciple, you need to be in Christian community, where you are blessed by and blessing others, all at the same time. Consider some of the following suggestions in the community toolbox.

5. *Lives out life's vocation faithfully*

Score: 28-35 We are so glad that you have taken God's calling for you seriously. Continue to depend on God as you seek to fulfil God's purpose for your life, especially in your family and vocation.

Score: 21-27 You are beginning to enjoy God's calling for you in your roles. Persevere in growing in your roles as spouse, parent, child and/ or employer/ employee or student.

Score: 0-20 Perhaps you need to re-assess your commitment to your family and your work. Are there any issues in the home or the vocation that are bothering you? Please feel free to seek help from your spiritual friends or any staff or leaders.

6. *Serves joyfully within and without the church*

Score: 28-35 Praise the Lord for your willingness to serve Him. Keep up the good work but be careful of burnout through over-extension! Watch your own devotional life.

Score: 21-27 We encourage you to consider serving actively in an area of your giftedness in the church. Seek to find your area of passion. For assistance, talk to any of the church staff or CARE Group leaders.

Score: 0-20 You may need to understand better the importance of service and to have some practical help to know where and how to serve. Consider the following suggestions in the Toolbox.

7. *Relates winsomely to pre-believers*

Score: 28-35 Keep up the good work! Continue to reach out to pre-believers for Christ and watch how God is going to impact the lives of those you are reaching.

Score: 21-27 Is there an aspect you can improve on? Do not be discouraged and keep pressing on in. Consider joining an evangelism workshop/training in church to help you improve your outreach skills.

Score: 0-20 We are all called to reaching the lost. It can start with the people around you, including your family members, colleagues, friends. Consider the following suggestions in the Toolbox and begin the exciting journey of leading others to Christ.

8. *Seeks to make other disciples intentionally*

Score: 28-35 Thank God that He has enabled you to obey the command of Christ to make disciples. Keep up the great work as a disciple maker! Encourage others who are also seeking to grow in this area. We would love to hear your story and experience in nurturing others.

Score: 21-27 Persevere in the Great Commission of making disciples of Jesus. We encourage you to continue to seek Him in this call. Consider one or two areas in the Toolbox that will deepen your practice of disciple-making. Feel free to connect with and seek help from other disciple makers or any pastoral staff members.

Score: 0-20 Fully developed spiritual maturity involves obeying the Great Commission to make other disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to consider the following suggestions in the Toolbox.

Part II

PLANNING EXERCISE: Goal Setting

Important note: As you consider growing in the eight areas described in this inventory, it is important to focus on 1-2 areas at a time, so as not to be overwhelmed. In these 1-2 areas, pick out 1-2 suggestions in the Toolbox that may interest and help you, and persevere in them. You are encouraged to share with or get assistance from any one of the church staff team members, church leaders, CARE Group leaders.

We have added a brand new toolbox for each of the 8 areas, with resources that will be helpful for your growth. These toolboxes can be accessed by scanning the QR code.



Look through all the above areas that need improvement and ask yourself these questions:

1. What are one or two areas in the above Inventory exercise that I am most encouraged/ affirmed by?

2. What are the one or two areas I am concerned about from this Inventory exercise?

3. What are the areas that you would like to trust God to help you grow in for the coming season? How are you going to do it?

Characteristic	Goal (Be specific and measurable)	Date to complete

4. Write a prayer to God. It could include thanksgiving to God for helping you grow, or your desire to grow in specific areas – both your faith and work goals. This is a record of your commitment to and faith in God to grow spiritually.

Study 2

Acts 1.1-3.26

GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

Acts 1.8 tells us about the spread of the gospel of Jesus from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.



Together, Studies 2 and 3 (Acts 1.1-6.7) give us a glimpse of beginning - the spread of the good news of Jesus in Jerusalem by the apostles. Study 2 examines the impact of the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, and Study 3 looks at the growth of the church in Jerusalem despite ongoing persecutions and trials.

I. Personal study

1. Acts 1.1-26

This chapter deals with the four events which occupied the apostles during the fifty days between the first Easter and Pentecost:¹

1. The apostles receive their commission

¹ Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Acts: the Spirit, the church & the world* (pp. 38–39). InterVarsity Press.

2. They see Jesus go into heaven
3. They pray for the Spirit to come
4. They replace Judas with Matthias as an apostle

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Who was the writer of Acts writing to and what was his former book about (1.1-3)?
2. What was Jesus' command to the disciples in Acts 1.4-8 and why?
3. What did the apostles do after they returned to Jerusalem (1.12-26)?
4. How did the apostles choose Matthias?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Why must Jesus ascend into heaven?
2. What do you think is the apostles' idea of the *kingdom of God* (1.3-8, cf. Lk 24.21)??
3. What is Jesus' idea of the *kingdom of God* and the disciple's role in this kingdom?
4. What is Luke trying to tell us through Acts 1?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. How may the commands in Acts 1.7-8 be applicable for us today?
2. What or where are your “Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and ends of the earth?”
3. How may or may not church leaders be selected today based on how Matthias was chosen?

2. Acts 2.1-47

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What happened on the Day of Pentecost (2.1-13)?
2. Who were present when the Spirit came upon the disciples (2.8-11)?
3. What are the essential parts of Peter’s address in Acts 2.14 -21, 22-28, 29-36, 37-39?
4. What was the outcome of Peter’s preaching (2.37-41)?
5. What did the new converts do after they were saved (2.42-47)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What is the purpose of the tongues that were spoken (2.5-6), and why they were spoken (2.14-21)?
2. What is the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?
3. Summarise the impact of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples (2.1-47).

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. Should we expect the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the same way today (2.1-13)?
2. What may we learn from Peter when we share the gospel of Jesus Christ (2.14-41)?
3. In what ways can we emulate the early church in Acts 2.42-47?
4. How does Acts 2 shape your understanding of the ministry and mission of the church today?

3. Acts 3.1-26

Acts 3.1-10 described the healing of a beggar who was crippled from birth. While we cannot assume that God would heal all diseases all the time, nonetheless we need to remember that God does act supernaturally according to his sovereign will. In this case, the healing of the lame gave Peter the opportunity to testify and preach to those who were astonished (v.11), to confirm and authenticate the gospel message which Peter preached to his fellow Israelites (3.12-26).

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What was Peter and John doing in Acts 3.1?
2. Describe the exchange between Peter, John and the lame beggar (3.2-5).
3. What was the outcome of their exchange (3.6-8)?
4. What was the reaction of the people as a result of the healing of the lame beggar (3.9-11)?
5. What did Peter say to these people who ran to them? (3.12-26)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What do you think was Luke's purpose in recording this episode?
2. What was Peter trying to point out to his fellow Israelites through his sermon?
3. How would you connect this passage with Acts 2?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What may we learn from Peter and John in their readiness to preach (3.1-11)?
2. How may we also share the gospel like Peter in Acts 3.12-26 that is relevant to our times and audience?

II. Group Discussion Questions

1. What was Jesus' command to the disciples to in Acts 1.4-8 and why? In what ways would these instructions be applicable for us today as well? If it is applicable, what do you discern to be your "Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and ends of the earth"?

2. What happened on the Day of Pentecost (2.1-13)? How should we understand this phenomenon of the tongues—what do they symbolise (2.5-6)? What is the significance of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the Israelites (2.14-21; 22-36)?

3. What was the outcome of Peter’s explanation/ preaching regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2.37-47)? How would you describe the church in Acts 2.41-47? How does Acts 2 instruct and inspire you about our mission and ministry as a church? To what extent are we such a church?

Notes:

“For the Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit who created a missionary church. As Harry Boer expressed in his challenging book *Pentecost and Missions*, the Acts ‘is governed by one dominant, overriding and all-controlling motif. This motif is the expansion of the faith through missionary witness in the power of the Spirit. . . . Restlessly the Spirit drives the church to witness, and continually churches rise out of the witnessing. The church is a missionary church.

From these earliest believers in Jerusalem, we can learn three vital lessons about local church evangelism. First, the Lord himself (that is, Jesus) did it: *the Lord added to their number*. Secondly, what Jesus did was two things together: he *added to their number . . . those who were being saved* (the present participle *sōzomenous* either being timeless or emphasizing that salvation is a progressive experience culminating in final glorification). He did not add them to the church without saving them (no nominal Christianity at the beginning), nor did he save them without adding them to the church (no solitary Christianity either). Salvation and church membership belonged together; they still do. Thirdly, the Lord added people *daily*. The verb is an imperfect (‘kept adding’), and the adverb (‘daily’) puts

the matter beyond question. The early church's evangelism was not an occasional or sporadic activity."²

4. Acts 3.1-10 describes the healing of a beggar who was crippled from birth. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter was able to heal the cripple. While we cannot assume that God would heal all diseases all the time, we should remember that God does act supernaturally according to his sovereign will. However, healing and miracles (in the case at the Pentecost) per se must be accompanied by faithful preaching and witness.

What was the context and content of Peter's preaching in Acts 3.11-26 and Acts 2.14-36? John Stott says, "Our struggle today is how to be faithful to this apostolic gospel, while at the same time presenting it in a way which resonates with modern men and women."³ What are some lessons we can glean from this passage regarding how we may share the gospel to others, in our own context?

²Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Acts: The Spirit, the church & the world* (p. 86). InterVarsity Press.

³Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Acts: The Spirit, the church & the world* (p. 79). InterVarsity Press.

5. What are some key lessons about the Holy Spirit, outreach and/ or prayer that are instructive for you? How will you put these lessons into practice?

Study 3

Acts 4.1-6.7

GROWTH DESPITE GROWING PERSECUTIONS AND PAINS

I. Personal study

1. Acts 4.1-31

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. In connection to Peter's preaching in Acts 3, what was the reaction of the Sadducees (4.1-3) vis-à-vis that of the people who heard the message (4.4)?
2. Describe the exchange between the religious leaders and Peter and John (4.5-12)?
3. What astonished the religious leaders and how was Peter able to testify in this way (4.13)?
4. What did the religious leaders decide and instruct Peter and John, and what was the apostles' response (4.14-22)?
5. Upon Peter's and John's release and report, what were the believers' response and prayer (4.23-30)?
6. What happened after the believers prayed (4.31)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What was Luke trying to tell us through the account of the apostles' imprisonment, testimony and reaction?
2. What do you think the believers were thinking and feeling when Peter and John reported to them the events?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What may we glean from Peter's and John's attitude and posture throughout the ordeal?
2. What can we learn from the believers, including especially their prayer?

2. Acts 4.32-5.11

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What were the characteristics of this faith community in Acts 4.32-37?
2. How was this community able to be so unique or unusual?
3. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.1-11?

4. What was the effects of these events (5.11)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What do you think was Luke's intention in writing Acts 4.32-37?
2. Why did Luke report about Ananias and Sapphira?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. In what ways should we imitate or emulate this community in Acts 4.32-36?
2. What warning must we heed from Acts 5.1-11?

3. Acts 5.12-6.7

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What was the reputation and impact of the believers among the people in Jerusalem (5.12-16)?
2. What were the miracles that Luke mentioned in this passage and what were their significance (5.12-18)?
3. What happened to the apostles in Acts 5.17-28 because of the miracles and message (5.12-16)?
4. In Acts 5.29-32, what was the apostles' response and attitude towards the Sanhedrin's orders?
5. How was Gamaliel instrumental in saving the apostles and in the work of the gospel (5.33-42)?
6. What growing pains did the disciples encounter in those days (6.1)?
7. How was the problem resolved and what impact was seen thereafter (6.2-7)?



Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. How was the work of God in Jerusalem done or furthered throughout this passage (5.12-16; 5.17-42; 6.1-7)?
2. What were the principles that guided the apostles in the selection of the seven deacons (6.1-7)?
3. What is the significance of Acts 6.7?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What lessons may we glean about the apostles' attitude and posture with regards to their safety vis-à-vis the work of the gospel?
2. In Acts 5.33-39, Gamaliel stated a principle that "*if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.*" How sound or unsound is this principle to guide us in our decision-making and why?

II. Group Discussion Questions

1. In Acts 4.1-4, Peter and John were jailed by the Sadducees. Despite the opposition, the number of men who believed grew to five thousand. When Peter and John were opposed by the Sanhedrin, what was their response (4.8-12; 19-22)? How were they able to resist the religious establishment? How are you instructed and inspired by Peter and John in this episode?

2. Upon their release, Peter and John reported back to the believers what had happened. What was their response and how did their response reflect their posture and attitudes? What can we learn from them, especially through their prayer?

3. What were the characteristics of this faith community in Acts 4.32-37 that was being formed and transformed? What are the similarities and contrasts between Acts 4.32-37 and Acts 5.1-11? From this passage (4.32-5.11), what lessons must we heed?

4. What was the significance of the signs and wonders that Luke mentioned in this passage (5.12-42)? In this passage, the apostles were jailed, then interrogated by the Sanhedrin for defying their orders not to teach in Jesus' name. What was the apostles' response and attitude? How does or should the apostles' example inform and influence the way we live?

Additional notes on signs and wonders:

In this and the previous studies, we saw two specific miraculous acts in Acts 3.1-10 and 5.1-11. Should we expect these miracles to be everyday common occurrences today, or do they cease to happen anymore? In other words, how should we understand signs and wonders?

The following is extracted from John Stott's commentary, which will help in our understanding of signs and wonders:⁴

Perhaps the three most notable features of Luke's narrative in Acts 3 and 4 are (i) the spectacular healing miracle and the prayer for more, (ii) the Christ-centred preaching of Peter, and (iii) the out-break of persecution. Because Peter's testimony to Christ has already been considered in some detail during the exposition, and because we will revert in the next chapter to the subject of persecution, we will concentrate now on the other topic of miracles.

The current controversy over signs and wonders should not lead us into a naïve polarization between those who are for them and those who are against. Instead, the place to begin is the wide area of agreement which exists among us. All biblical Christians believe that, although the Creator's faithfulness is revealed in the uniformity and regularities of his universe, which are the indispensable bases of the scientific enterprise, he has also sometimes deviated from the norms of nature into abnormal phenomena we call 'miracles'. But to think of them as 'deviations from nature' is not to dismiss them (as did the eighteenth-century deists), as 'violations of nature' which cannot happen, and therefore did not and do not happen. No, our biblical doctrine of the creation, that God has made everything out of an original nothing, precludes this kind of scepticism. As Campbell Morgan put it, 'granted the truth of the first verse in the Bible, and there is no difficulty with the miracles'.³³ Moreover, since we believe that the miracles recorded in the Bible, and not least in the Acts, did happen, there is no *a priori* ground for asserting that they cannot recur today. We have no liberty to dictate to God what he is permitted to do and not to do. And if we have

⁴ Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Acts: The Spirit, the church & the world* (p. 100). InterVarsity Press.

³³ Morgan, p. 91.

hesitations about some claims to ‘signs and wonders’ today, we must make sure that we have not confined both God and ourselves in the prison of Western, rationalistic unbelief.³⁴

The popular exponent of ‘signs and wonders’ teaching today is John Wimber of the Vineyard Fellowship in California. He and Kevin Springer have summarized his position in *Power Evangelism* (1985) and *Power Healing* (1986). Although it is impossible to do justice to it in a few sentences, its leading ideas are (i) that Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God, demonstrated its arrival by signs and wonders, and means us similarly both to proclaim and to dramatize its advance; (ii) that signs and wonders were ‘everyday occurrences in New Testament times’ and ‘a part of daily life’,³⁵ so that they should characterize ‘the normal Christian life’ for us too; and (iii) that church growth in the Acts was largely due to the prevalence of miracles. ‘Signs and wonders occurred fourteen times in the book of Acts in conjunction with preaching, resulting in church growth. Further, on twenty occasions church growth was a direct result of signs and wonders performed by the disciples.’³⁶

John Wimber argues his case with sincerity and force. But some unanswered questions remain. Let me ask three, especially in relation to our study of the Acts. First, is it certain that signs and wonders are the main secret of church growth? John Wimber supplies a table of fourteen instances in the Acts in which, he claims, signs and wonders accompanied the preaching and ‘produced evangelistic growth in the church’. One or two cases are indisputable, as when the Samaritan crowds ‘heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did’ and so ‘paid close attention to what he said’ (8:6, 12). In a number of other cases, however, the connection between miracles and church growth is made by John Wimber not by

³⁴ John Wimber, to whom reference is made in the rest of this chapter, is right to warn us in both *Power Evangelism* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1985; chapter 5, ‘Signs and Wonders and Worldviews’) and *Power Healing* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1986; pp. 28 and 30) against ‘the pervasive influence of a secularized western worldview’, lest we become ‘caught in the web of western secularism’.

³⁵ *Power Evangelism*, p. 117.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Luke. For example, to take the only two cases he gives from the chapters we have so far considered, there is no evidence in the text that the Pentecostal phenomena of wind, fire and languages (2:1–4) were the direct cause of the three thousand converts of verse 41, nor that the healing of the congenital cripple (3:1ff.) was the direct cause of the increase to five thousand (4:4), as John Wimber's Table claims. Luke seems rather to attribute the growth to the power of Peter's preaching. In this sense all true evangelism is 'power evangelism', for conversion and new birth, and so church growth, can take place only by the power of God through his Word and Spirit.³⁷

Secondly, is it certain that signs and wonders are meant by God to be 'everyday occurrences' and 'the normal Christian life'? I think not. Not only are miracles by definition 'abnorms' rather than norms, but the Acts does not provide evidence that they were widespread. Luke's emphasis is that they were performed mostly by the apostles (2:43; 5:12), and especially by the apostles Peter and Paul on whom he focuses our attention. True, Stephen and Philip also did signs and wonders, and perhaps others did. But it can be argued that Stephen and Philip were special people, not so much because the apostles had laid hands on them (6:5–6) as because each was given a unique role in laying the foundations of the church's world-wide mission (see 7:1ff. and 8:5ff.). Certainly the thrust of the Bible is that miracles clustered round the principal organs of revelation at fresh epochs of revelation, particularly Moses the lawgiver, the new prophetic witness spearheaded by Elijah and Elisha, the Messianic ministry of Jesus, and the apostles, so that Paul referred to his miracles as 'the things that mark an apostle'.³⁸ There may well be a situation in which miracles are appropriate today, for example, on the frontiers of mission and in an atmosphere of pervasive unbelief which calls for a power encounter between Christ and Antichrist. But Scripture itself suggests that these will be special cases, rather than 'a part of daily life'.

Thirdly, is it certain that today's claimed signs and wonders are parallel to those recorded in the New Testament? Some are, or seem to be. But in his public ministry by turning water into wine, stilling a storm, multiplying loaves and fishes,

³⁷ *E.g.* 1 Cor. 2:1–5; 1 Thes. 1:5.

³⁸ 2 Cor. 12:12.

and walking on water, Jesus gave a preview of nature's final, total subservience to him—a subservience which belongs not to the 'already' but to the 'not yet' of the kingdom. We should not, therefore, expect to do these things ourselves today. Nor should we expect to be miraculously rescued from prison by the angel of the Lord or to see church members struck dead like Ananias and Sapphira. Even the healing miracles of the Gospels and the Acts had features which are seldom manifested even in the signs and wonders movement today.

Let me come back to the Acts to illustrate this, and take the healing of the cripple as my example. It is the first and longest miraculous cure described in the book. It had five noteworthy characteristics, which together, indicate what the New Testament means by a miracle of healing. (i) The healing was of a grave, organic condition, and could not be regarded as a psychosomatic cure. Luke is at pains to tell us that the man had been a cripple from birth (3:2), was now more than forty years old (4:22), and was so handicapped that he had to be carried everywhere (3:2). Humanly speaking, his case was hopeless. Doctors could do nothing for him. (ii) The healing took place by a direct word of command in the name of Christ, without the use of any medical means. Not even prayer, the laying on of hands or anointing with oil were used. True, Peter gave the man a helping hand (3:7), but this was not part of the cure. (iii) The healing was instantaneous, not gradual, for 'instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong', so that he jumped up and began to walk (3:7–8). (iv) The healing was complete and permanent, not partial or temporary. This is stated twice. The man had been given 'this complete healing', Peter said to the crowds (3:16), and later stood before the Council 'completely healed' (4:10, 1978 edition of niv). (v) The healing was publicly acknowledged to be indisputable. There was no doubt or question about it. The crippled beggar was well known in the city (3:10, 16). Now he was healed. It was not only the disciples of Jesus who were convinced, but also the enemies of the gospel. The as-yet-unbelieving crowd were 'filled with wonder and amazement' (3:10), while the Council called it 'an outstanding miracle' which they could not deny (4:14, 16).

If, then, we take Scripture as our guide, we will avoid opposite extremes. We will neither describe miracles as 'never happening', nor as 'everyday occurrences', neither as 'impossible' nor as 'normal'. Instead, we will be entirely open to the

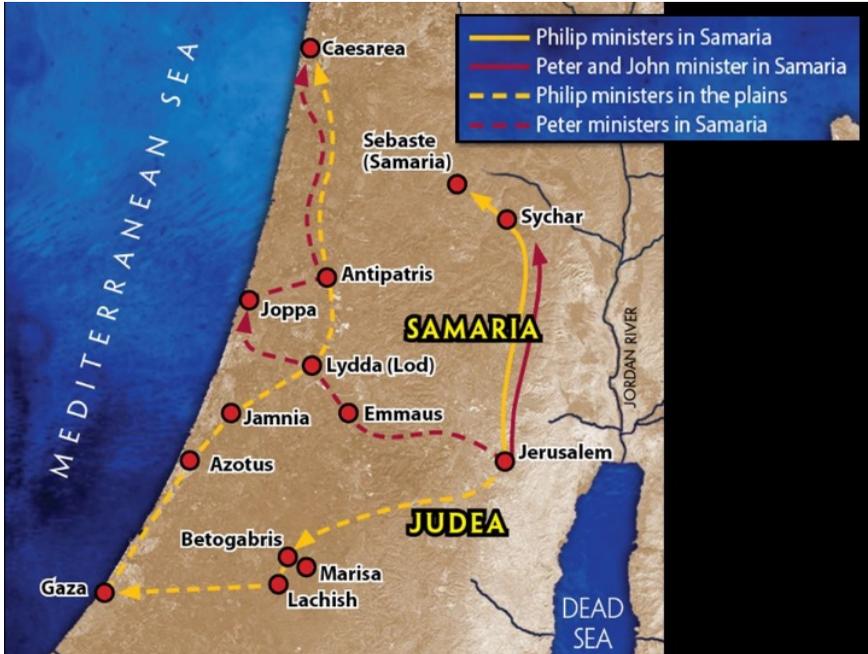
niv The New International Version of the Bible (1973, 1978, 1984)

God who works both through nature and through miracle. And when a healing miracle is claimed, we will expect it to resemble those in the Gospels and the Acts and so to be the instantaneous and complete cure of an organic condition, without the use of medical or surgical means, inviting investigation and persuading even unbelievers. For so it was with the congenital cripple. Peter took his miraculous healing as the text of both his sermon to the crowd and his speech to the Council. Word and sign together bore testimony to the uniquely powerful name of Jesus. The healing of the cripple's body was a vivid dramatization of the apostolic message of salvation.

Study 4

Acts 6.8-9.31

TO JUDEA AND SAMARIA



This study focuses on the movement of the gospel to Judea and Samaria through various faithful disciples like Stephen, Philip and Peter.

I. Personal study

1. Acts 6.8-7.60

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. How did Luke describe Stephen (6.8-15)?

2. How did Stephen get arrested and interrogated before the Sanhedrin (6.11-15)?
3. In his defence, how did Stephen witness to the Gospel (7.1-16; 17-43; 44-50; 51-53)?
4. How did the members of the Sanhedrin react upon hearing Stephen's testimony (7.54-58)?
5. What did Stephen do or say at his dying moments (7.59-60)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What was the Stephen's intent as expressed in his preaching (7.2-53)?
2. What was the impact of Stephen's testimony for himself, other believers and the gospel?
3. What are the implications of the witnesses laying their coats at the feet of Saul?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What are the features of Stephen's testimony that impress you or resonate with you?
2. How should we understand suffering and martyrdom in relation to doing God's work and being filled with the Spirit?

2. Acts 8.1-40

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. How were the disciples persecuted and to what effect (8.1-3)?
2. In response to the persecution, how did God use Philip (8.4-8; 9-13; 26-40)?
3. What did Peter and John do in Samaria (8.14-25)?
4. Why did Peter and John have to pray for the new believers in Samaria to receive the Holy Spirit?
5. Why and how did the apostles' rebuke Simon the sorcerer (8.18-23)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. How does this great persecution shape your understanding of God's ways, works and purpose?
2. Why did Luke record for us the ministry of Philip, Peter and John?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. When it comes to sharing the gospel with others, what would you consider as outside your comfort zone?
2. What can you learn from the ministry and example of Philip?
3. To what extent may we emulate the ministry of Peter and John in praying for others to receive the Holy Spirit?

3. Acts 9.1-31

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What was Saul determined to do in Acts 9.1-2?

2. Describe his divine encounter on the road to Damascus (9.3-9).
3. What did God tell Ananias to do and what were his responses (9.10-19)?
4. What happened to Saul in Damascus when and after Ananias ministered to him (9.17-25)?
5. In Jerusalem, how was Saul received and what did he do (9.26-30)?
6. How did Luke describe the church at that time in Acts 9.31?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Why do you think Jesus spoke to Saul on the road to Damascus?
2. What contributions did Ananias make in Saul's spiritual journey?
3. What role did Barnabas play in this early stage of Saul's Christian life?
4. What is the significance of Damascus (9.1-25) and Jerusalem (9.26-29) in Saul's spiritual pilgrimage and formation?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. How should we understand the conversion experience of Saul? Should we expect this all the time?
2. If you were Ananias, how similar or different would your response to the Lord be?
3. Reflect on your own spiritual formation. Who are the Ananias and Barnabas around you? To whom may you be the Ananias and Barnabas?

II. Group Discussion Questions

1. In his defence, how did Stephen present his testimony (Acts 6.8-7.60)? What aspects of Israel did he mention before the Sanhedrin and why? What impact did Stephen's testimony possibly have on the subsequent events? What are the features of Stephen's testimony that impress you or resonate with you, and in what ways are you instructed or inspired by him?

2. Acts 8.1 tells us that a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. How were the disciples persecuted and to what effect? As a result of persecution, how was Philip used by God (8.4-13; 26-40)?

3. How does this passage (Acts 8.1ff) instruct you about the “problem of persecution”? What can you learn from the ministry and example of Philip? If persecution may be considered similar to challenges and trials, what can we as the church and individual disciples learn from the disciples in Acts?

5. Looking at what transpired in Acts 6.8-9.30, how did the church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria grow in numbers and strength during this time? How would you pray for and serve in the church today for us to experience similar growth?

Study 5

Acts 9.32-11.18

CONVERSIONS

Studies 4 and 5 (Acts 9.32-12.24) examine the first movement of the gospel to the Gentiles such as Cornelius, coupled with the change in mindset for Peter and the Jewish believers and the growth of the church in Antioch.

I. Personal study

1. Acts 9.32-43

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What did Peter do in Lydda (9.1-35)?
2. What happened at Joppa and how did Peter end up there (9.36-38)?
3. What did Peter do in Joppa (9.39-43)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What was Luke's reason to include the healing of Aeneas in Lydda?
2. Why did Luke also include the raising of Tabitha in Joppa (including any possible connection to chapter 10)?

3. How are we to understand the miracles that were performed in Lydda (cf. Mark 2.3-12, Luke 5.17-26) and Joppa (cf. Mark 5.21-43, Luke 8.40-56)?
4. What is implication when the text tells us that Peter stayed with a tanner?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. How do these miracles inform and inspire us in our Christian life and ministry?

2. Acts 10.1-48

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Where did this episode take place and how near was it to Joppa where Peter was staying (v.1)?
2. Describe Cornelius (vv.1-2).
3. What was he instructed to do and why (vv.3-6)?
4. What did he do in response (vv.7-8)?
5. Where was Peter and what did he do in the narrative (vv.9-23)?
6. Outline the exchange between Peter and Cornelius (vv.24-33).

7. What did Peter share in his sermon/ testimony (vv.34-48)?
8. What did the Holy Spirit do in this passage (vv.1-48)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What was God doing among the gentiles?
2. What was God doing in and through Peter?
3. What may we learn from Peter about the way we share the gospel with those around us?
4. What was the prevailing tradition and religious taboo (10.28-29)? How did God bring Peter to re-calibrate his mindset?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What can we learn about Peter's experience and response in this passage?
2. How are you instructed and inspired through the work of the Holy Spirit demonstrated here in the text?
3. What encouragement do you draw from this chapter?

3. Acts 11.1-18

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Why did Peter go up to Jerusalem (11.1-3)?
2. What did Peter do in Jerusalem (vv.4-17)?
3. What was the outcome of Peter's testimony (v.18)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. In this passage, what was God doing for the disciples in Jerusalem?
2. Whose and what kinds of conversion(s) do we see in this study (10.1-11.18) and why? How did it/these happen?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. When it comes to issues that we are uncomfortable with, how similar would your reaction be as compared to that of the Jews in Jerusalem?
2. How does this passage encourage you in your own attempts to persuade others in the things and ways of God?
3. What traditions, practices or mindsets do you still hold on to that God is leading you to rethink or recalibrate?

II. Group Discussion Questions

1. What do you think was Luke's reason for including the healing of Aeneas in Lydda (Acts 9.32-43), as well as the raising of Tabitha in Joppa (including any possible connection to chapter 10)? What implication was there when the text tells us that Peter stayed with a tanner?

2. In Acts 10.1-48, what was the prevailing taboo that existed between the Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10.28-29)? How did God bring Peter to recalibrate his mindset?

3. What qualities did Peter possess that allowed him to be convinced and be used in God's salvation plan for the Gentiles? Have you, in the past, also needed to re-calibrate any prejudices and biases in the light of God's word and work? How do you know if God is speaking to you about any prejudice and bias and how open would you be?

4. Why did the circumcised believers in Jerusalem criticize Peter, and how did he explain to them what God is doing (11.2-18)? How does this inform you about our own reactions when it comes to issues that we are uncomfortable with? What was the Jews' eventual response and how does it encourage you in your own attempts to persuade others in the things and ways of God?

5. Whose and what kinds of conversion do we see in this study? How did it/these happen? What traditions, practices or mindsets do you still hold on to that God is leading you to rethink or recalibrate?

Study 6

Acts 11.19-12.24

PARTNERSHIPS AND POWER

I. Personal study

1. Acts 11.19-30

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Where did the believers who were persecuted go to and do (11.19)?
2. How did the church in Antioch come about (11.20-21)?
3. What did the Jerusalem church do when they heard about the developments in Antioch?
4. How was Barnabas described in Acts 11.22-30 and 4.36-37?
5. What did Barnabas and Saul do in Antioch?
6. Who was Agabus and what did he do (11.27-28)?
7. What did the church in Antioch do as a result (11.29-30)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Why did Luke tell us about Antioch?
2. What was Barnabas' role vis-à-vis the church in Antioch?

3. What is the significance of Barnabas' actions towards Saul?
4. What was God doing in and through Antioch?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. How might Barnabas serve as an example for us?
2. What lessons can we learn from the church at Antioch?
3. What might we glean from this relationship between the Jerusalem and Antioch churches in our mission and outreach efforts?

2. Acts 12.1-24

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. How and why were the believers persecuted in Acts 12.1-5?
2. How did Peter escape and return safely to the disciples (12.5-10, 11-17)?
3. What did Peter realise through his escape (12.11)?
4. What happened to Herod in Acts 12.19-23?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What was the significance of Peter's escape from prison?
2. What was the role of the church in Peter's escape (12.5, 12-13)?
3. What was the problem with Herod?
4. What do you think was Luke's intent in describing Herod's death in Acts 12.21-24?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What can we learn from Peter's miraculous escape vis-à-vis Herod's miserable death?
2. What lessons can you glean from this episode?

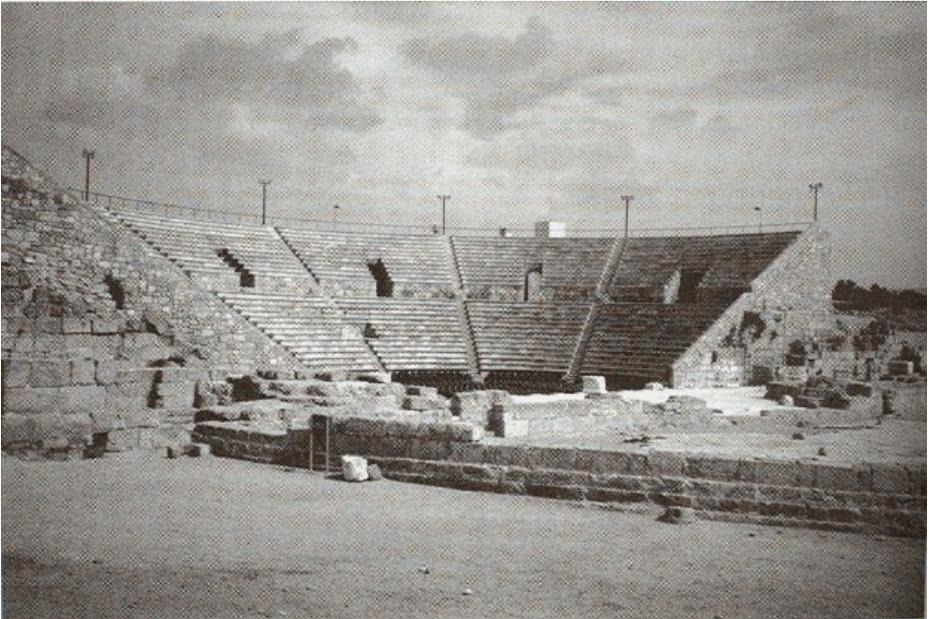
II. Group Discussion Questions

1. How did the church in Antioch come about in Acts 11.19-30? What was the relationship and partnership between the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch? What might we glean from their relationship and partnership in our mission and outreach efforts?

2. How was Barnabas described in Acts 11.22-30 and 4.36-37 and what was his role vis-à-vis the church in Antioch and Saul? How might Barnabas serve as an example for us? What should we learn from the Antioch church?

3. In Acts 12.1-24, we are told that King Herod persecuted some believers in Jerusalem (verses 1-5), including James, the brother of John who was killed. Peter was also put into prison. Despite Herod's power and the high security, how did Peter escape? What was the role of the church in his escape? What can we learn from this miracle?

4. What do you think was Luke's intent in describing Herod's death in Acts 12.21-24? What lessons can you glean from this episode?



*Caesarea Maritima: The Herodian theater in which Herod Agrippa I was stricken.*⁵
(Acts 12.21)

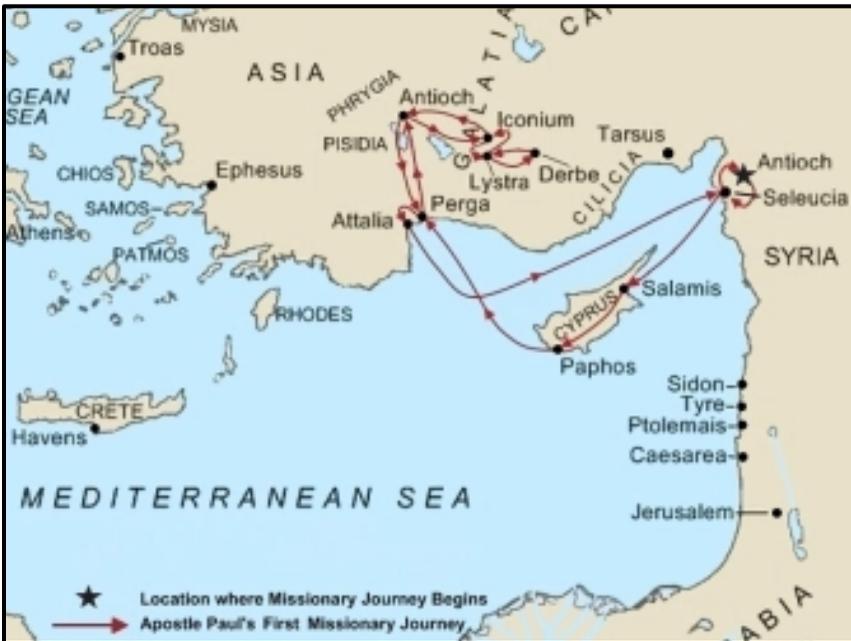
⁵ Witherington, B., III. (1998). *The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary* (p. 384). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Study 7

Acts 12.25-14.28

FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY & FIRST COUNCIL

Studies 6 & 7 (Acts 12.25-16.5) narrates the spread of the gospel from Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8), specifically to Asia, through Paul's first missionary journey. Particularly, as the gospel gets into gentile territory, these chapters address the challenge of including the Gentiles into the church of God despite their racial and cultural differences from the Jewish Christians, culminating in the first ever church council at Jerusalem.



I. Personal study

1. Acts 12.25-13.52

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What was the process through which Barnabas and Saul were sent on their first missionary trip (Acts 13-1-5)?
2. In Acts 13.4-52, who sent Barnabas and Saul and where they sent to?
3. What did they do in Salamis (v.5)?
4. Where did the two men go in Cyprus?
5. What miracle did Paul perform in Paphos and for what purpose (vv.6-12)?
6. In Pisidian Antioch, where did Paul and Barnabas first go and what did they do (vv.14-15)?
7. How did Paul share the gospel in Acts 13.16-41?
8. When they faced opposition, how did Paul and Barnabas respond (Acts 13.44-47)?
9. What was the outcome of Paul and Barnabas' ministry (13.48-52)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Why did Paul and Barnabas speak the word of God to the Jews first (13.46)?
2. What was Luke's intent in recording this passage for us?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. How does this process and call of Barnabas and Saul instruct us in our fulfillment of the great commission and mandate in Acts 1.8?
2. Applying Paul's discourse in Acts 13.16-41), what are the essential elements to be included in our gospel sharing?
3. How might this passage inspire and challenge you in your spiritual life, service and outreach?

2. Acts 14.1-28

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. How did Paul and Barnabas evangelise in Iconium (14.1-6)?
2. When they fled to Lystra, how did Paul and Barnabas get to share the gospel (14.8-18)?
3. What made them go from Lystra to Derbe eventually and what was their missionary outcome there (14.19-20)?

4. On their return trip to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, what were their main purpose and ministry?
5. Where else did Paul and Barnabas preach at/in after Pisidia Antioch (14.24-26)?
6. How does their ministry inform the way we should minister in our mission endeavours?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What is the role of preaching vis-à-vis miracles in the conversion of the inhabitants of these places that Paul and Barnabas went?
2. What was Paul and Barnabas' approach or attitude towards opposition and persecution during their missionary endeavour (14.1-28)?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. How are you inspired and instructed by Paul and Barnabas in their responses to opposition, dangers and persecutions?
2. How does this passage encourage (or discourage) you in obeying the call of God to preach and share the gospel with the lost?

II. Group Discussion Questions

GRIP Sharing

As we are half way through the bible studies, it is a good time to take a pitstop to evaluate your GRIP progress. Take some time to journal, share and celebrate with one another your areas of growth, and pray for each other as you continue to persevere in your spiritual journey.

Continue to encourage each other to press on!

2. In Pisidian Antioch, where did Paul and Barnabas first go and why? How did Paul share the gospel (Acts 13.16-41)? Applying Paul's discourse, what are the essential elements to be included in our gospel sharing? When they faced opposition, how did they respond and what was the outcome (Acts 13.44-52)? How is their response applicable (or not) in our culture?

3. What kinds of difficulties and setbacks (besides those mentioned in Pisidian Antioch) did Paul and Barnabas face during this missionary journey (cf. Acts 13.6-11; 14.4-7; 14.8-20)? What were their responses? As we are challenged to get out of our comfort zone, how are you inspired and encouraged by their response?

4. What is the role of preaching vis-à-vis miracles in the conversion of the inhabitants of the places that Paul and Barnabas went? Are miracles always necessary and helpful in outreach?

5. On their return trip to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, what were Paul and Barnabas' main purpose and ministry? How does Paul and Barnabas' ministry in Acts 13.1-14.28 inform us about the way we should serve and reach out in our mission and ministry endeavours?

Study 8

Acts 15.1-16.5

RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS

I. Personal study

1. Acts 15.1-35

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What was the disagreement and problem at hand in Acts 15.1-5?
2. Why did the Antioch church send Paul and Barnabas and what was their posture as they went to Jerusalem (15.3-4)?
3. How did the Jerusalem church help in the way they received Paul and Barnabas (15.12)?
4. How did the Jerusalem church resolve the matter (15.6-34)?
5. How did Peter (vv.6-11) and James contribute to the resolution of the issue?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. In their letter, the Jerusalem church requested that the Gentiles abstain from four things (some term these as “James’ clauses”, Acts 15.20, 29; cf. 21.25). Why these four?
2. Why do you think Luke included this unpleasant disagreement in the book of Acts?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What principles and lessons can you learn from the church, Paul and Barnabas regarding conflicts and disagreements between groups of believers in the church over church doctrines and practices (for personal disagreement, refer to Matthew 18.15-19 as well)?
2. Do the prohibitions in the letter from Jerusalem council still apply to us today? Why or why not?
3. Can you think of situations today where these lessons can be applied appropriately?

2. Acts 15.36-16.5

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. In Acts 15.36-41, what did Paul and Barnabas agree and disagree about?
2. What was the outcome of their disagreement?
3. What was the primary intention of Paul and Silas when they made the trip?
4. What did Paul and Silas do in Derbe, Lystra and Iconium?
5. Why do you think Paul wanted to bring Timothy along (16.1-2)?
6. What did Paul make Timothy do before he could travel with him and why (16.3)?
7. What did Paul, Silas and Timothy do and what was the outcome of their ministry (16.4-5)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Regarding the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, who do you think is right and who would you support?
2. Since Paul opposed the men from Judea in Acts 15.1 about circumcision, do you think he has double standards by circumcising Timothy?
3. What does Acts 15.36-16.5 tell us about Paul's idea of discipleship and ministry?
4. Why did Luke include this unresolved disagreement between Paul and Barnabas in this passage?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What can we learn from Paul and Barnabas' disagreement that will help us in our own ministry disagreements?
2. What can we learn about Paul's view of leadership and ministry?

II. Group Discussion Questions

1. What was the dispute at the Antioch church (Acts 15.1-5)? Why did the Antioch church send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem and how did they help solve the conflict? What lessons can you learn from the church, Paul and Barnabas if you (as a group) have any major disagreement with another group over doctrines or practices (for personal disagreement, refer to Matthew 18.15-19 as well)?

2. How did the Jerusalem church resolve the matter (Acts 15.6-34)? What principles can we learn from the way they resolved the matter and came to an agreement? How did Peter and James contribute to the resolution of the issue?

3. In their letter, the Jerusalem church requested that the Gentiles abstain from four things (some term these as “James’ clauses”, Acts 15.20, 29; cf. 21.25). Why these four, and are we also bound by it today?

4. After the Jerusalem church managed to work out an agreement, Luke interjects the narrative with an ironic disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (15.36-41). What was this disagreement between Paul and Barnabas and why? How does the texts in 1 Cor 9.6; Phm 24; Col 4.10; and 2 Tim 4.11 deepen your view of Paul? What can we learn from this episode that will help us in our own ministry disagreements?

5. After Paul and Barnabas separated, Paul took Silas and set off to visit the churches he went to during his first trip, to see how they were doing and to strengthen them (Acts 15.36, 41). They also travelled from town to town and delivered the decisions made by the Jerusalem Council for people to obey (16.4).

At Lystra, why and how did Paul recruit Timothy? In circumcising Timothy, do you think Paul has double standards, since he was the one who opposed the men from Judea in Acts 15.1 about circumcision? What may we learn from this matter?

6. What does this passage in Acts 15.36-16.5 teach us about ministry partnerships, discipleship and leadership? How should this affect your view of leadership and ministry?

I. Personal study

1. Acts 16.6-16.40

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. How did Paul come to the conclusion that God has called him to go to Macedonia to preach the gospel?
2. Where did Paul and company go in Macedonia (16.11-13) and what did they do (16.13-15)?
3. Describe Lydia (16.14-15).
4. How did Paul and Silas end up in jail (16.16-24) and how did they get out (16.35-39)?
5. What was the outcome of their “jail time”? (16.25-34, 40)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What do you think Luke is teaching us about the work of the Lord through Acts 16.6-10?
2. What was the impact of Paul and Silas’ ministry in Macedonia (16.11-40)?
3. Why do you think Paul and Silas refused to leave the prison quietly (16.37-40)?
4. What do you think was the Spirit’s purpose of allowing Paul and Silas to be put into prison?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What may we glean about God's work from the joys and travails of Paul's missionary endeavour in Phrygia, Galatia and Macedonia?
2. How are you encouraged and inspired by Paul and Silas' actions and ministry in this passage?

2. Acts 17.1-15

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Where did Paul go in Thessalonica and what did he do (17.1-4)?
2. What was Paul's primary gospel message and what was the impact of his preaching (17.4-6)?
3. What happened to Jason and why (17.5-9)?
4. What was the ploy of the jealous Jews in Thessalonica (17.5-8)?
5. How did Paul escape (17.10)?
6. What did Paul do once he was in Berea (17.11-12)?

7. How did Paul describe the Bereans and what was their response to Paul (17.11-12)?
8. What did the Thessalonian Jews do and how did the disciples respond to them (17.13-15)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. How would you describe Paul's ministry approach or mindset based on Acts 17.1-15?
2. What were the similarities and differences between Paul's ministry in Thessalonica and that in Berea (e.g. ministry approach, reaction of the citizens, outcome etc.)?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What can we learn from the Thessalonian and Berean believers?
2. Who among the Bible study group do you think exhibits qualities of the Bereans? What makes you say that?

3. What may we glean from Paul's ministry approach and mindset?
4. In what ways are you challenged to be more effective in missions and evangelism?

II. Group Discussion Questions

Due to the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, we now have two missionary teams—one by Barnabas and John Mark sailing for Cyprus, and the other by Paul and Silas traveling by land through Syria and Cilicia, modern day Turkey. Luke however, records for us only the journey made by Paul and Silas.

Acts 16.6-40 Troas and Philippi

1. From the start of this missionary journey to Philippi in Macedonia (modern day Greece), how did the Lord guide and direct the team in terms of their itinerary, divine appointments and even misfortune? How did Paul and Silas respond? How are you instructed and inspired by Paul and Silas in this passage (16.11-40)?

Acts 17.1-15 Thessalonica and Berea

2. What were the similarities and differences between Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica and that in Berea in Acts 17.1-15 (e.g. ministry approach, reaction of the citizens, outcome etc.)? What can we learn from them?

3. How did Paul describe the Bereans? Who among your Bible study group do you think exhibits qualities of the Bereans? In what ways can you grow to be more like the Bereans?

4. In what ways are you challenged by Paul's approach and mindset towards missions and evangelism in Acts 16.16-17.15 (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2.1-12)?

Study 10

Acts 17.16-19.20

FROM ASIA TO EUROPE (ATHENS AND CORINTH)

I. Personal study

1. Acts 17.16-34

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What did Paul see in Athens that made him distressed and what did he do (17.16-17)?
2. Where and to whom did Paul preach the gospel in Acts 17.18-21?
3. What was Paul's line of argument in his preaching (17.22-34)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What does Acts 17.16-19 tell us about Paul's outreach approach or strategy?
2. What principles can we derive from Paul's gospel presentation or argument in Acts 17.22-34?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What can we emulate about from Paul's response in Athens?
2. What lessons may we glean from Paul's approach and argument for ourselves when sharing the gospel?
3. To whom are you seeking to share the gospel and do you know their worldview or beliefs?

2. Acts 18.1-22

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. After Athens, where did Paul travel to and whom did he meet (18.1-2)?
2. Where, how and how long did Paul minister in Corinth (18.3-11)?
3. What opposition did Paul encounter and how did he overcome them (18.9-17)?
4. After Corinth, where did Paul travel to and who did he meet before he arrived at Antioch (18.18-22)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What was Paul's approach and attitude when it comes to preaching to the Jews and Gentiles?
2. What should we understand the role or purpose of vision from this episode (18.9-17)?
3. How effective was Paul's ministry in Corinth?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What can we glean from Paul's approach and attitude towards preaching and outreach?
2. How are you instructed or encouraged from this passage with regards to your service or leadership in the midst of difficulties and even opposition?

3. Acts 18.23-19.20

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Acts 18.23 describes the start of what most commentators understood as Paul's 3rd missionary journey. Where did Paul travel to and why?
2. Who was Apollos and how did Priscilla and Aquilla and the disciples in Ephesus help him?
3. How did God use Apollos in Achaia (including Corinth, 19.1)?
4. While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul came to Ephesus. Who did Paul introduce the Ephesians to and what was the outcome (19.1-7)?
5. What did Paul do in Ephesus and what did God do through him (19.8-13)?
6. What did the seven sons of Sceva, the Jewish High priest do and what happened to them (19.13-16)?
7. What was the result after the incident involving the seven sons of Sceva (19.13-20)?



Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Why do you think Luke highlighted Apollos (18.24-28; cf. 1 Cor 1.12)?
2. In Acts 19.20, Luke tells us, “In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power (19.1-20).” What does “In this way” refer to?
3. What would you ascribe the effectiveness of Paul’s mission in Ephesus to?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What may we learn from this passage?

II. Group Discussion Questions

Acts 17.16-34 Athens

1. What did Paul see in Athens and why was he distressed? What then did he do (17.16-21)? What can we learn from his response?

2. Where and to whom did Paul preach the gospel in Athens? What does it tell us about Paul's approach or strategy? What was Paul's line of persuasion (Acts 17.22-34)? What lessons may we glean from his approach and apologetics?

Some background information:

“The Epicureans, or ‘philosophers of the garden’, founded by Epicurus (died 270 BC), considered the gods to be so remote as to take no interest in, and have no influence on, human affairs. The world was due to chance, a random concourse of atoms, and there would be no survival of death, and no judgment. So human beings should pursue pleasure, especially the serene enjoyment of a life detached from pain, passion and fear. The Stoics, however, or ‘philosophers of the porch’... founded by Zeno (died 265 BC), acknowledged the supreme god but in a pantheistic way, confusing him with the ‘world soul’. The world was determined by fate, and human beings must pursue their duty, resigning themselves to live in harmony with nature and reason, however painful this might be, and develop their own self-sufficiency. To oversimplify, it was characteristic of Epicureans to emphasize chance, escape and the enjoyment of pleasure, and of the Stoics to emphasize fatalism, submission and the endurance of pain. In Paul’s later speech to the Areopagus we hear echoes of the encounter between the gospel and these philosophies, as he refers to the caring activity of a personal Creator, the dignity of human beings as his ‘offspring’, the certainty of judgment and the call to repentance.”⁶

Acts 18.1-22 Corinth

3. After Athens, Paul travelled to Corinth and ministered there for a year and a half (18.11). How did he minister in Corinth and how was he sustained and protected during that time?

⁶ Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Acts: The Spirit, the church & the world* (p. 281). InterVarsity Press.

4. How are you instructed or encouraged from this passage with regards to your service or leadership in the midst of difficulties and even opposition?

Note:

In **Acts 18.23-28**, we see the start of what most commentators describe as Paul's third missionary journey. Paul travelled from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen the disciples. It is likely that he did this in order to teach and guard the disciples from false teachers and to encourage them in the faith since they were facing opposition to their faith in their cultures. It is possible also that Paul wanted to see how these churches were doing in his absence.

Luke also mentioned Priscilla and Aquila as well as Apollos (cf. 1 Cor 1.12; 3.6), a native of Alexandria, who came to Ephesus and taught about Jesus accurately. Evidently, the gospel work was done in continuum, and not just by Paul. The Holy Spirit was also raising and using different people, besides Paul and his companions, to strengthen the disciples. The work at Ephesus was contributed by many people, even though the teaching seemed inadequate initially, since Paul had to later teach about baptism in Jesus, not just baptism in John. It is with this understanding that Paul would later in 1 Cor 1.12; 3.5-9 say that God was the one who gave the increase and growth, while different ones like himself and Apollos did their work.

Stay tuned:

Acts 19.1-20 & 19.21-41 tells us about Paul's ministry in Ephesus on his onward journey towards Europe from Asia. Then in **Acts 20.1-38**, we see his meeting with and ministry to the Ephesus elders on his return trip from Europe to Jerusalem. We will discuss this passage of Acts 19.1-20.38 as a whole in the next study.

Study 11

Acts 19.21-21.16

GOSPEL IN EPHEBUS

In Studies 10-12, we will examine the final section in Acts 19.21-28.31. These chapters tell “how Paul (the apostle to the Gentiles) finally got to Rome (the capital of the Gentile world) with the good news—but he did so, Luke reminds us, by way of Jerusalem through a series of trials very much like those of Jesus.”⁷



⁷ Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. K. (2002). *How to read the Bible book by book: a guided tour* (p. 297). Zondervan.

I. Personal study

1. Acts 19.21-41

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What did Paul decide to do after what happened in Ephesus (19.21-22)?
2. Why was there a great disturbance (19.23-28)?
3. Who were implicated in this great disturbance (19.29-34)?
4. How did the city clerk pacify the crowd (19.35-41)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What was the impact of the gospel in the city of Ephesus?
2. How did the gospel become a threat to the silversmiths?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What can we learn from the great disturbance that happened in Ephesus?
2. What can we learn from this text about evangelism that can be contextualized in our culture?
3. How may the gospel make a similar impact in our society today?
4. What kinds of opposition can we expect or anticipate when the gospel is making an impact?

2. Acts 20.1-38

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Where did Paul go after he left Ephesus and who was he with (20.1-6, 13-16)?
2. What ministry did Paul undertake while he was in Troas, even for just a week (20.7-12)?
3. What did Paul say to the Ephesian elders when they came to him (20.17-35)?
4. Describe the farewell between Paul and the elders (20.36-38).

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What did Paul want to impress upon the Ephesian elders or warn them about (20.17-35)?
2. What can we tell about Paul and his ministry based on Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders (19-17-20.38)?
3. Describe Paul's relationship with the elders.

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. How are you instructed and inspired by Paul's example based on his farewell and speech (20.17-38)?

3. Acts 21.1-16

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Where did Paul and his companions travel to after they left Miletus and who did they meet (21.1-19)?
2. What did the Spirit reveal to the people who met Paul (21.4, 10-11)?
3. What was Paul's response to those who tried to dissuade him to go to Jerusalem and why (21.12-14)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Paul seemed to seek out the disciples in each city or town he visited. Why?
2. Why did Paul insist on going to Jerusalem?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. Based on the passage, how should we understand the purpose of visions and prophecies?
2. What may we learn from Paul about his response to those who were dissuading him from going to Jerusalem?

II. Group Discussion Questions

Preamble:

In the three years that he was in Ephesus (20.31), Paul did a few things (Acts 19.1-12):

- a. He continued with what Apollos had done and taught them about the baptism in Jesus as well as in the Holy Spirit. Through him, the Ephesian Christians received the Spirit.
- b. As usual he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, arguing about the kingdom of God.
- c. After he experienced stubbornness from the Jews, Paul left with the disciples to the lecture hall Tyrannus to have daily discussions. These lectures and discussions could have lasted between 11 am to 4 pm.
- d. After two years, all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord.
- e. God did many extraordinary miracles through Paul (19.11-12).

Acts 19.1-20.38 Ephesus

1. What strategy did Paul employ in an urban center like Ephesus (Acts 19.8-10)? What special work was God doing through Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19.11-12)? Why do you think this was so? What can we learn from Paul regarding evangelism in our culture?

Note:

Extracted from Darrell Bock: “**Artemis**, Ephesus’s major goddess, was known as a goddess of fertility and as ‘mistress of the wild beasts,’ a daughter of Zeus and Leto, and a sister of Apollo. In Roman religion she was known as Diana. In this cult she was a virgin who helped women in childbirth, a huntress with bow and arrow, and the goddess of death. Her role in Ephesus paralleled the role of the great Anatolian mother goddess Cybele, since Artemis had become the product of syncretism...

...There was a whole array of commerce built around her. She was worshipped in many locales, since we know of thirty-three shrines to her, but the major site for her worship in Asia Minor was at Ephesus. Here the **temple** to her was four times the size of the Parthenon. It had pillars 60 feet high and was about 425 feet by 225 feet, much larger than a football field... It was the largest building in the Greek world. The temple was a mile and a half northeast of the city. Eunuchs and female cultic slaves served it. The cult of Artemis was one of the most widely followed in the Greco-Roman world. Statues depict her as wearing a zodiac necklace, showing her authority over the stars and events. A weeklong

festival to her, known as Artemision, took place each spring. Her shrine in Ephesus was a major site, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. She was a major attraction for the city.”⁸

2. What challenges or opposition did Paul encounter (Acts 19.13-34)? How were these challenges resolved or used by God? What were the effects of the gospel—positive and negative—in the city of Ephesus? How should we appreciate and respond to any resistance? (For Paul’s other challenges and hardships, see 1 Cor 15.32; 2 Cor 1.8; 4.9-12; 6.4-10; 2 Cor 11. 23).

3. Based on Paul’s speech to the Ephesian elders, how did Paul conduct his ministry (Acts 20.17-38)? Describe Paul’s relationship with the elders. How are you instructed and inspired by Paul’s example in this text?

⁸ Bock, Darrell L. *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), p.607-08.

Acts 21.1-17 Towards Jerusalem

4. How did Paul respond to the prophecies (21.4-6; 21.10-14) about him going to Jerusalem? Why? What are we to make of such prophecies and visions? What can we learn from Paul's response?

5. As we examine Paul's ministry in this study, how have you been instructed and inspired? What take-home lessons has God deposited in your heart?

Study 12

Acts 21.17-23.35

TESTIFYING IN JERUSALEM

While we see Paul taking the gospel from Asia to Europe in Acts 13-20 through his missionary journeys (Studies 6-10), we now see Paul bringing the gospel to Rome in Acts 21-28 through a series of trials and hardships. In Studies 11 and 12, we will examine “Paul’s trials before the same three tribunals that tried Jesus:

1. The Jewish Sanhedrin (Luke 22.66-71/ Acts 22.30-23.10),
2. The Roman procurator (Luke 23.1-5, 13-25/ Acts 24.1-27), and
3. One of the Herods (Luke 23.6-12/ Acts 25.23-26.32).”⁹

I. Personal study

1. Acts 21.17-40

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. After Paul and company arrived in Jerusalem, who did they meet and what did they do (21.17-19)?
2. What did James and the elders in Jerusalem advised Paul to do and why (21.20-25)?
3. How did Paul respond to their advice (21.26)?
4. Who were the people who opposed Paul and what did they do (21.27-32)?
5. What impact did these troublemakers have on Paul (21.30-36)?
6. How did Paul managed to speak to the crowd (21.37-40)?

⁹ Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. K. (2002). *How to read the Bible book by book: a guided tour* (p. 296). Zondervan.

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Why did Paul go along with the advice of the church leaders in Jerusalem in Acts 21.26?
2. How did God protect and use Paul at the same time in this very volatile situation?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What may we learn from Paul in his response to the James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem?
2. What can we learn from Paul about his passion and fervour for the gospel (21.27-40)?

2. Acts 22.1-23.11

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Summarise in essence, what Paul said in his defence (22.1-21).
2. When the crowd reacted against Paul, what did the commander do (22.22-30)?
3. Describe the exchange between Paul and the Sanhedrin (23.1-8).
4. In order to protect Paul, what did the commander do (23.9-10)?
5. What did the Lord say to Paul the following night (23.11)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Why did Paul share these details of his background and conversion (22.1-21)?
2. Why did Paul stir up the disagreement between the Pharisees and Sadducees?
3. What was God's purpose for Paul in Jerusalem and beyond?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. How does Paul's example in Acts 22.1-21 challenge you to be ready to share your own testimony?
2. What may we learn from Paul in the way we defend our faith or seek to reach others with the gospel?

3. Acts 23.12-35

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Who opposed Paul and what did they plot to do (23.12-15)?
2. How was the plot uncovered by the commander and what did he do in response (23.16-32)?
3. What was the commander's assessment of the accusation against Paul (23.27-20)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. How was Paul saved from his enemies?
2. How did God protect Paul and enabled him to fulfil his commission?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. How does this passage encourage you with regards to the work and mission that God has placed in our hands?
2. This was the third time since going to Jerusalem that Paul's life was threatened. How does Paul's devotion to the gospel inspire or instruct you, if at all?

II. Group Discussion Questions

1. In Acts 21.17-40, why did Paul take the advice of the Jerusalem elders and take the men and purify himself along with them since he believed that salvation does not depend on religious cleanness (Acts 21.26)? Would you not consider him a hypocrite? What lessons should we learn from Paul?

2. In Acts 21.27-40, Paul was accused of teaching people everywhere to oppose the Jews, the Jewish laws and the temple (v.28). He was also accused of defiling the temple by bringing Gentiles into the holy place. All these, Paul did not do. He was even thought by the Roman commander to be the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists into the desert (v.38).

Despite being beaten unreasonably, what was Paul's all-consuming desire and passion that we see in Acts 21.40-22.1? How did Paul "defend" himself (Acts 22.1-21)?

3. How did Paul defend his beliefs about the gospel before the Sanhedrin and still protect himself (Acts 22.30-23.11)? What may we learn from Paul in the way we defend our faith or seek to reach others with the gospel?

4. Acts 23.12-35 is the beginning of Paul's journey to Rome, in fulfillment of what the Lord told Paul in Acts 23.11. Of course, instead of a smooth and problem-free journey, it would be one filled with perils and oppositions. Yet, in the divine mystery and providence of God, because Paul went to Rome as a prisoner, and not part of a missionary team, he was able to gain access to the highest echelon of the Roman authorities.

What danger did Paul face? How did God intervene to spoil the plot to kill Paul? What kinds of opposition may we expect today? How should we respond to such opposition?

5. How does this episode juxtapose the religious establishment and the Roman civil authorities? Are there any lessons or warnings we need to heed?

6. What are some take-home lessons for you from this study? In this study, Paul's life was threatened three times since he went to Jerusalem. Yet these were not unexpected, according to earlier prophecies (eg. Acts 20.22-24; 21.10-14). How does Paul's devotion to the gospel inspire or instruct you, if at all?

Study 13

Acts 24.1-26.32

TESTIFYING IN CAESAREA

I. Personal study

1. Acts 24.1-27 *In Caesarea - Trial before Felix*

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Who were the religious leaders who went down to Caesarea to bring their charges against Paul (24.1-4)?
2. What did the religious leaders accuse Paul of (Acts 24.5-8)?
3. How did Paul make his defence to refute the charges against him (24.10-21)?
4. Why did Felix keep Paul under guard, but with some freedom and welfare (24.22-27)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. In Acts 24.25, Luke describes Felix as being “afraid.” Why do you think Felix was afraid?

2. What do you think was Paul's posture during these two years of imprisonment when Felix sent for him frequently (Acts 24.27)?
3. What do you surmise as God's purpose in keeping Paul in prison?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What are some reasons why our contemporary listeners might also be "afraid" of hearing the gospel? As such, how should we present the gospel?
2. If you are in Paul's shoes, how would you feel being incarcerated for such a long time in Caesarea?
3. How can Paul's experience inform and inspire you in fulfilling God's purpose, especially in the midst of frustrating and difficult circumstances?

2. Acts 25.1-26.32 Caesarea - Trial before Festus & Agrippa

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. What did the religious leaders do after Festus arrived at the Jerusalem and what was his response to them (25.1-5)?
2. What was Paul's defence before Festus and why did he appeal to Caesar (25.6-12)?
3. How did King Agrippa and Bernice get involved in Paul's case (24.13-22)?
4. What was Festus' introduction and intention in the trial of Paul (25.23-27)?
5. How did Paul testify of the gospel in his defence before Agrippa (26.1-32)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. What was Festus' assessment of Paul's culpability of a crime (24.18-21, 25.25)?
2. What are the common threads between these three trials—what he was accused of and how Paul defended himself?
3. What was Paul's intention or consuming desire (25.25; 26.27-32)?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What lessons do you glean from this passage?

II. Group Discussion Questions

Acts 24.1-27 Trial before Felix

1. In Acts 24.1-27, where Paul was tried before Felix, the religious leaders accused Paul of (1) being a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world, (2) being the ringleader of the Nazarene sect, and (3) trying to desecrate the temple (Acts 24.5-8). How did Paul defend himself against these charges (24.10-21)?

2. We are told that Felix kept Paul imprisoned for two years (Acts 24.27), because he wanted Paul to bribe him. During this period, Felix had many private audiences with Paul, but in Acts 24.25, Luke describes Felix as being “afraid.” Why do you think Felix was afraid? What are some reasons why our contemporary listeners might also be “afraid” of hearing the gospel? As such, how should we present the gospel?

Acts 25.1-26.32 Trials before Festus and Agrippa

3. After Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, the Jewish leaders attempted but failed to convince Festus to try Paul in Jerusalem. Instead, Paul was tried again in Caesarea by Festus, during which many serious charges were brought but could not be proven against him. During this trial, Paul maintained his innocence—that he had done nothing wrong against the Jewish law, or the temple or Caesar. However, wanting to do the Jews a favour, Festus considered sending Paul to stand trial in Jerusalem. Knowing that he would not get a fair trial in Jerusalem, Paul appealed to the Roman justice system—directly to Caesar.

Shortly after, King Agrippa and Bernice visited Festus in Caesarea, and they got involved with Paul’s trial. How did Paul testify of the gospel in his defence before Agrippa (Acts 26.1-32)? What was Paul’s intention or consuming desire that was evident in his testimony (Acts 25.25; 26.27-32)?

4. What are the common threads between these three trials (before Felix, Festus and Agrippa)—what he was accused of and how Paul defended himself (Acts 24.1-26.32)? What lessons can you glean from these episodes?

Study 14

Acts 27.1-28.31

TESTIFYING IN ROME

I. Personal study

1. Acts 27.1-44

From Caesarea to Malta



Source: <https://understandyourbible.org/info/pauls-travels-rome>

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Trace the route of Paul using the map above (27.1-20; 27.39-28.1; 28.11-16).
2. What was Paul's response in the face of the storm (27.21-26; 31-38)?
3. How was Paul's life preserved during the shipwreck (27.39-44)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. How was God using Paul throughout this ordeal of a storm and a shipwreck?
2. How was Paul fulfilling God's purpose (23.11) in this episode?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. What take home lessons can you draw from this passage?
2. How does this passage encourage you when you face obstacles in your endeavour to fulfill your God-given mission?

2. Acts 28.1-31

From Malta to Rome

Observation

What do you observe in the text? You may use the following questions as a guide:

1. After the shipwreck, how did God protect, provide for, and use Paul on Malta and to Rome (28.1-16)?
2. Why did Paul assemble the leaders of the Jews (28.17-20)
3. How and what did he testify about the gospel (28.20-31)?

Interpretation

What does the text mean or what do you think the author is trying to say to the original audience?

1. Why did Paul cite Isaiah 6.9-10 in Acts 28.26-28?
2. Why do you think the Jews started leaving when that happened (28.25)?

Application

How can you apply the meaning of the text into your life?

1. Do you think that the two years spent under house arrest (Acts 28.30), not forgetting another two years in Caesarean prison (Acts 24.27) were setbacks and wasted years? Why or why not?
2. How does this inform or inspire you in the way you perceive your own setbacks in life?

II. Group Discussion Questions

Acts 27.1-28.31 From Caesarea to Rome

1. In Acts 27.1-44, what assurances did Paul receive from the Lord throughout the ordeal of the storm and shipwreck (Acts 27.23-24)? What was Paul's response in the face of the storm (Acts 27.21-26; 31-38)? How does this encourage you when you face obstacles in your endeavour to fulfill your God-given mission?

2. In Acts 28.1-31, it is evident that God continued to intervene after the shipwreck to ensure that Paul was protected and provided for (see article below on God's providence) until he reached Rome. Paul and company reached safely on the shores of Malta and were welcomed by the islanders who were unusually kind to them. Even after being bitten by a viper, Paul did not die. These led the people to think that he was a god, instead of a murderer. Paul and company were welcomed by Publius, the chief official of the island, who hosted them for three days. Paul was able to heal Publius' father after praying for and placing his hands on him. All the sick on the island also came and were cured. As a result, the islanders honoured them and provided them with the supplies they needed for their voyage to Rome.

After they set sail from Malta, they were granted favourable wind conditions. When they arrived at Puteoli in Italy, Paul and his companions were hosted by some brothers for a week. When they arrived in Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. Why did Paul assemble the leaders of the Jews? How was Paul able to preach and testify about the gospel in Rome?

3. Why did Paul cite Isaiah 6.9-10 in Acts 28.26-28? Why do you think the Jews started leaving when that happened?

4. Do you think that the two years spent under house arrest (Acts 28.30), not forgetting another two years in Caesarean prison (Acts 24.27) were setbacks and wasted years? Why or why not? How does this inform or inspire you in the way you perceive your own setbacks in life?

GRAND SHARING

1. How do you see the hand of God at work in the book of Acts, particularly in the light of the key verse in Acts 1.8?

2. What is the mission that God has entrusted to you or the purpose that God has called you to? How does this book encourage you to understand and live out this mission or purpose? What does it mean for you to go “out of your comfort zone” in fulfilling God’s mission for you?

Notes:

*The following is extracted from John Stott's commentary, which is helpful to our understanding of the **providence of God**:*

What, then, is the major lesson we are intended to learn from Acts 27 and 28? If concerns the providence of God, who 'works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will', declares that 'no wisdom, no insight no plan ... can succeed against the Lord',⁵⁶ and engineers even evil 'for the good of those who love him'. This providential activity of God is seen in these chapters in two complementary ways, first in bringing Paul to Rome, his desired goal, and secondly in bringing him there as a prisoner, his undesired condition. It was an unexpected combination of circumstances: what lay behind it?

First, Luke intends us to marvel with him over the safe conduct of Paul to Rome. It is not so much that Paul had said 'I must visit Rome' (19:21), as that Jesus had said to him 'You must testify in Rome' (23:11). Yet circumstance after circumstance seemed calculated to make this impossible. Paul had expressed his intention to proceed straight from Jerusalem to Rome. Instead, he was arrested in Jerusalem, subjected to endless trials, imprisoned in Caesarea, threatened with assassination by the Jews, and then nearly drowned in the Mediterranean, killed by the soldiers and poisoned by a snake! Each incident seemed to be designed to prevent to him from reaching his God-planned, God-promised destination. Since Luke concentrates on the storm, we need to remember that the sea, reminiscent of the primeval chaos, was a regular Old Testament symbol of evil powers in opposition to God. It was not the forces of nature (water, wind and snake) or the machinations of men (schemes, plots and threats) which were arrayed against Paul, but demonic forces at work through them. Scripture is full of examples of the devil seeking to thwart God's saving purpose through his people and his Christ. He tried through Pharaoh to drown the baby Moses, through Haman to annihilate the Jews, through Herod the Great to destroy the infant Jesus in Bethlehem, and through the Sanhedrin to stifle the apostolic witness and smother the church at its birth. And now through the storm at sea he attempted to stop Paul bringing his gospel to the capital of the world.

But God obstructed his purpose. Luke increases the excitement of his story by letting us into his secret, namely that Jesus had promised Paul in advance that he would reach Rome (23:11). So we know from the beginning that he will get there. But as the narrative proceeds and the storm becomes ever more

violent, until all hope is lost, we wonder how on earth he will be rescued. Will he make it? Yes he will! He does! For he was rescued by the divine overruling, which Luke makes clear by his repeated use of the vocabulary of 'salvation'.

So by God's providence Paul reached Rome safe and sound. But he arrived as a prisoner! Christ's promise that he would testify in Rome had not included that information. How was this compatible with the providence of God? It seems to me legitimate to argue that the apostle, who was brought to Rome to witness, found his witness expanded, enriched and authenticated by his two-year custody in the city.

First, his witness was expanded, not only because of the constant flow of people visiting him, but especially because he witnessed to Christ in the presence of Caesar. This has, of course, been questioned. Although 'down to the time of Nero', Sherwin-White writes, 'the emperors themselves heard the cases that fell under their *cognitio*', yet in his early years 'Nero avoided personal jurisdiction, and then only accepted a case for special reasons'. Instead, he normally delegated the trial of capital cases, even though 'the sentences were confirmed by him afterwards'. So was the case of Paul one of the exceptions? I think we should argue that it was. Leaving aside the possibility that Paul's deliverance 'from the lion's mouth' was a reference to his release by Nero,⁶¹ the strongest argument is Jesus' promise to Paul on the ship, 'You must stand trial before Caesar' (27:24). If his first promise to Paul (about reaching Rome) was fulfilled, is it likely that Luke would have included his second promise (about standing before Caesar) unless he knew that it too was fulfilled? I think not. In this case we are permitted to imagine that the prisoner who stood before Felix, Festus and Agrippa, stood before Nero also, and that in the world's most prestigious court, to the world's most prestigious person, he faithfully proclaimed Christ. Yes, Nero himself, that artistic but bloodthirsty genius, heard the gospel from the lips of the apostle to the Gentiles. That would not have been possible if he were not a prisoner on trial.

Secondly, Paul's witness was enriched by those two years. It is difficult for us to conceive how such a congenital activist as Paul managed to endure nearly five years of comparative inactivity (two in the Caesarea prison, two under house arrest in Rome, and about six months in between voyaging from Caesarea to Rome). Were they wasted years? Was he champing at the bit and pawing the ground like a restless and rebellious horse? No, his prison letters breathe an

atmosphere of joy, peace, patience and contentment, because he believed in the sovereignty of God. Moreover, however much he longed to get out and serve the contemporary church, yet, as a result of his two years' partial withdrawal in Rome, he has bequeathed to posterity in his four prison letters an even richer spiritual legacy. Probably Paul neither knew nor understood this. But we do.

Of course, Paul did not write all his letters in prison. He wrote to the Galatians in the heat of theological debate on his way up to Jerusalem for the Council; he wrote both letters to the Thessalonians within weeks of his mission in their city; and he wrote to the Corinthians and Romans in the midst of a relentlessly busy ministry. So he did not find it necessary to have a spell in gaol in order to get his writing done! Nevertheless, I maintain that in God's providence there is something distinctive and special about those prison letters. It is not only that he had more time now to reflect and to pray; it is also that the substance of these letters owes something to his prison experience. He was facing trial and possible death, but knew that he had already risen with Christ. He was awaiting the emperor's pleasure, but knew that the supreme authority to whom he bowed was not the Lord Caesar, but the Lord Christ.

So then (the Holy Spirit using his custody to clarify and enforce this truth), the three main prison letters (to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians) set forth more powerfully than anywhere else the supreme, sovereign, undisputed and unrivalled lordship of Jesus Christ. The person and work of Christ are given cosmic proportions, for God created all things through Christ and has reconciled all things through Christ. The fullness of the Godhead, which dwelt in Christ, had also worked through him. Christ is the agent of all God's work of creation and redemption. In addition, having humbled himself to the cross, God has highly exalted him. All three prison letters say so. God has given him the name or rank above all others. All things have been put under his feet.⁶³ It is God's will that in everything he might have the supremacy. Was it not through his very confinement that his eyes were opened to see the victory of Christ and the fullness of life, power and freedom which is given to those who belong to Christ? Paul's perspective was adjusted, his horizon extended, his vision clarified and his witness enriched by his prison experience.

Thirdly, his ministry was authenticated by his sufferings. Nothing proves the sincerity of our beliefs like our willingness to suffer for them. So Paul had to suffer, and be seen to suffer, for the gospel he was preaching. It was not only that

in Isaiah the servant who brings light to the nations must suffer, that the vocations to service and to suffering are intertwined, that the witness and the martyr are one (*martyrs*), and that the seed which multiplies is the seed which dies. It is also that Paul was suffering for 'his' gospel,⁶⁶ for the 'mystery' revealed to him that Jews and Gentiles were equal members of the body of Christ. That is why he could write of 'my sufferings for you', and could describe himself as Christ's prisoner 'for the sake of you Gentiles'. Paul's arrest, imprisonment and trials were all due to his uncompromising espousal of the Gentile cause. It was because of his witness to the Gentiles that the Jews rose up in such fury against him. Paul paid dearly for his loyalty to the freeness and universality of the gospel. But his appeals to the churches to live a life worthy of the gospel were all the more authentic because he was himself a prisoner on account of the gospel.⁶⁹ He was ready to die for it; they must live to adorn it.

Was Paul released after the 'two whole years' Luke mentions (30)? He clearly expected to be. And the Pastoral Epistles supply evidence that he was, for he resumed his travels for about two more years before being re-arrested, re-tried, condemned and executed in ad 64. By then he could write that he had fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith. Now the next generation must step into his shoes and continue to work. Just as Luke's Gospel ended with the prospect of a mission to the nations,⁷² So the Acts ends with the prospect of a mission radiating from Rome to the world. Luke's description of Paul preaching 'with boldness' and 'without hindrance' symbolizes a wide-open door, through which we in our day must pass. The Acts of the Apostles have long ago finished. But the acts of the followers of Jesus will continue until the end of the world, and their words will spread to the ends of the earth.¹¹

¹¹ Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Acts: The Spirit, the church & the world* (pp. 401–405). InterVarsity Press.



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