



ACTS 11-18

THE GOSPEL SPREADS

(5 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION APPLICATION
BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

We will approach these chapters in Acts by thinking primarily about the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys and look at his ministry in five different places. Paul had a strategy of developing leaders wherever he went –sharing both the gospel and a vision for disciple-making. This is how Paul multiplied his efforts because he worked in such a way that those he invested in would be able to invest also in the next generation. Paul nearly always travels with others; namely the people he is training up. We find him investing time and effort in local leaders (e.g. Ephesian elders in Acts 20:13-35) and more mobile leaders like himself (e.g. Timothy). Paul puts this well to Timothy saying;

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. **2 Timothy 2:2**

In these verse we see four generations of workers; Paul (1) asks Timothy (2) to entrust all that he had heard to reliable people (3) who would also be qualified to teach others (4). His strategy to reach the lost was worked out through generations of workers.

After his conversion in Damascus Paul spent time in Jerusalem, Tarsus and Antioch. Paul (with Barnabas) are commissioned by the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3) and sent out on what is known as the **1st journey**. Paul & Barnabas head for Cyprus, Pamphylia and Pisidian Antioch before venturing down to Lycaonia and visiting Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. They spent a “long time” back in Antioch (during which they travelled to Jerusalem for the apostles council). For the **2nd journey** Paul chose Silas and began revisiting the places Paul had been during the 1st journey; Phygia and Galatia before heading to Troas. God led Paul to Macedonia (using a vision) before they headed down to Achaia and worked in Athens and Corinth. After that they went to Ephesus from where they sailed back to Antioch. The **3rd journey** begins rather like the 2nd with Paul revisiting the churches again in Galatia and Phrygia. This time Paul heads straight from there to Ephesus where a riot started and caused him to revisit Macedonia, Greece, Troas and then Miletus. From there Paul sailed to Caesarea and then on to Jerusalem. Paul spent some time in Jerusalem and Caesarea where he met with the elders before being arrested and put on trial before Felix, Festus and King Agrippa. Finally Paul **sails for Rome** under arrest and is ship wrecked. He visits Malta and is then put under house arrest in Rome.

As far as possible, Paul tried to *preach the gospel in the regions beyond* where it had never gone before (2 Cor 10:16) and to *preach the gospel where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation* (Rom 15:20). Paul travelled at least 15,000 miles and preached to thousands, but his written words have been read by millions. As part of his strategy Paul sought to;

- **First Jews then Gentiles:** Seek out a Jewish synagogue to begin his ministry, first to the Jews and then to God-fearing Gentiles. The informal nature of the service allowed visitors to speak; though usually Paul got kicked out within a few weeks and he formed a church with believing Jews and the many welcoming Gentiles.
- **Location:** Strategically evangelise the great metropolitan centres, with the thought that these dozen influential cities would evangelise the surrounding areas that were less populated. He especially concentrated on great cities (e.g. Rome, Athens, Philippi, Ephesus & Corinth) & particularly the major seaports (e.g. Troas, Thessalonica & Antioch). Establishing churches in such cities would establish a platform for taking the gospel throughout the world.

- **People:** Gather more and more disciples who he could trust to act on his behalf in the work of evangelism. His ministry in these great cities seemed to reach people of special ability or opportunity to influence others, such as the philosophers at Athens, the businesswoman Lydia at Philippi, the proconsul at Paphos, the honourable women of Berea, the school of Tyrannus at Ephesus. The list of travelling companions and co-workers is quite extensive!
- **Churches:** Strategically establish self-governing churches under older / abler men who could preserve and develop the fruit. As the spiritual father of these churches, Paul wanted to oversee these churches by way of a personal visit, sending a representative, or a letter. For example Timothy is sent to follow up on the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3), Timothy & Ephaphroditus are sent to Philippi (Phil 2:19-30), Tychicus is placed in Ephesus (Eph 6:21-22), Epaphras, Justus and Onesimus in Colossi (Col 1:7-8, 4:7-9) and Urbanus in Rome (Rom 16:9).

We saw in the studies on the earlier chapters of Acts that Luke (who also wrote Luke's gospel) was the author of the book of Acts. Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14) and also a travelling companion of Paul. At points the pronoun *we* tells us that he was with Paul on his journeys (e.g. 16:10–17, 20:5-21:18, 27:1-28:16). Some believe Acts to be written in 63AD (soon after the events of Acts 28) while others argue for a date of 70AD. The fact that no details are given of what happened to Paul (who was such a key player in the book) would seem to support the case for the earlier date. Acts (as was Luke's gospel) was written to Theophilus. Little however is known about him but these verses from the start of Luke's gospel tell us much about what Luke sought to achieve with his accounts:

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke 1:1-4

Luke's writing is full of detail and employs a large vocabulary. Much of what he has written we are able to cross reference with what we know from history and archeology (e.g. times, places, cultures, descriptions and so on). Luke is a great story teller and loves to record events both with accuracy but also conveying the drama of what had happened: he really brings it to life. In the earlier section of Acts (most of chapters 1-12) which you can find in my other Acts study guide), the focus is really on Peter. The remaining chapters (13-28) focus largely on Paul. As a whole the book of Acts demonstrates how the gospel, through the early church and mobile operators like Paul and his travelling teams, spread from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). It's rarely an easy ride and there are many obstacles on the way but we see how nothing and no-one could halt the spread of the gospel as Jesus turned the world upside down.

Steve McClure
Spring 2019

STUDY 1 – ACTS 11 ANTIOCH (BARNABAS)

INTRODUCTION: At Antioch we find people scattered by the persecution that had broken out when Stephen was killed. The gospel was being declared here to both Jews and Greeks. Many believe and Barnabas is sent to investigate this new church; he encourages them and calls in the help of Saul.

WHO IS BARNABAS? What can we learn from Acts 4:32-37 and 9:26-30 about him; consider how the name he is given and the boldness he demonstrates reflect his character? What can we deduce from the details we are given here in Acts 11 (encourager, good man, full of the Spirit and faith)?

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SENT TO INVESTIGATE: Why do you think that the disciples want to send someone to Antioch (see also Acts 8:14)? Why was Barnabas a good person to send here (see 4:36 and 11:20)? What was the relationship between the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch (11:22, 27-29)?

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MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT (11:22-23): How do you imagine that Barnabas' ministry of encouraging the believers to 'remain true to the Lord with all their hearts' would have looked like in practice? How might you be an 'encourager' when you see what the grace of God has done in others?

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IMPORTANCE OF TEAMWORK: What made Barnabas travel 150 miles to Tarsus to find Saul (11:25)? Why was the 'team ministry', that Barnabas and Saul enjoyed in Antioch for the next year (11:26) such an important step in taking the gospel to the gentiles? (See also 12:25-13:3)

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NB: During the period since Acts 9, some argue that Paul experienced some of the sufferings detailed in 2 Cor 11:23ff and also the pain of being disinherited by his family alluded to in Phil 3:1-8. If this is so that makes it all the more encouraging that Barnabas remembered him and brought him to Antioch.

ANTIOCH RESPONSE: Amidst the multi-cultural diversity present in Antioch why do you think that there was such a positive response (11:24,26)? Why do you think that the 'Lord's hand was with them' (11:21)? What is the significance that the believers were first called Christians (probably a term of ridicule) at Antioch (only other references are Acts 26:28, 1 Pet 4:16)?

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COMMISSIONING (12:25-13:4): Why was the diversity of the leadership team in Antioch so crucial (men from Cyprus, Africa, Cyrene in N. Africa and Tarsus)? What would you say was the relationship between mission and worship (note that the Spirit spoke during a time of worship and fasting)?

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God takes the initiative in mission; how should we understand the Spirit's directive to 'set apart...' for the work to which I have called them'? What are the implications for mission today? How do you think that they would have been received in Antioch (in Syria) by their sending church (Acts 14:27-28)?

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DISAGREEMENT (15:36-41): Why do you think Paul (see Acts 13:9) and Barnabas disagreed over whether to take John Mark? How do you assess the way that they work out the issue? What were the benefits of this temporary solution (see also 2 Tim 4:11)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share what and whom most encourages you and think about how you might be an encouragement to one another. Pray that God would help each of you to be 'an encourager'. Ask God to help you deal with conflict in your relationships and/or ministry.

MEMORY VERSE: ACTS 11:23

ANTIOCH (in SYRIA)

It is the 1st century AD and the Roman Empire controls all the cities mentioned in this study series. Though there is ongoing warfare and occasional internal strife the Empire is mostly stable and will not break up for several hundred years to come. However it is Greek culture and ideas which still dominate this part of the world. This Greek way of thinking was well established and had been spread further by Alexander the Great's conquest of these cities about four hundred years earlier. So it shouldn't surprise us that the New Testament (including Acts) was written entirely in Greek, except for the occasional quote.

To maintain rule and order the Empire was divided into Provinces. Antioch lay in the province of Syria, to the north of Israel (see [map A](#) at the back of this booklet) and had coastal access via the nearby port of Seleucia. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire at this point, with possibly 500,000 inhabitants. You may notice that the place-name Antioch appears quite often. In fact, many locations had been renamed "Antioch". The Antioch we are talking about this week had the highest status of all its namesakes, so when "Antioch" is referred to in Acts it usually will mean this one. Try not to confuse it with another city located near the region of Pisidia (mentioned in Acts 13). If it helps, think of this as Syrian Antioch and the other one mentioned in Acts 13 as Pisidian Antioch.

As the studies have suggested, the city was home to people of a wide range of different ethnicities. It had large numbers of Macedonians, Greeks and Syrians living there, and also Jews. In fact, at this time Syria may have had the largest number of resident Jews outside of Israel. Large numbers of Jews had been scattered from their homeland since the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the 6th Century B.C. (2 Kings 17:1-6, 25:8-12). This resulted in the establishment of numerous Jewish communities around the Levant (the Eastern Mediterranean). The existence of Jewish communities further west and around the Roman Empire can be attributed to the frequent invasions which the area suffered at the hands of assorted Kingdoms. This gives us a glimpse of the mindset of the Antiochene Jews. They are living outside of their homeland amongst all kinds of 'pagans' (many of whom worshipped the various Greco-Roman Gods and Goddesses). In this situation they sought to preserve their sense of national and religious identity by eagerly protecting their traditional Jewish customs.

In the midst of this Antioch became a significant mission base for the early Church. Paul and Barnabas frequently returned there in between their travels. While there they taught the Church and encouraged the believers but also would have been encouraged themselves. There is even a theory that the book of Matthew was written in Antioch, for the benefit of the local populace.

We receive many clues about who Barnabas was. The Levites were one of the twelve tribes of Israel named after Jacob's son Levi (Genesis 29:34). During the exodus this tribe was dedicated to serve as priests for the rest of the Israelites (Numbers 3) and continued to do so up to and after the time of Jesus. The fact that Acts tells us he owned a field shows he was by no means a poor man.

Based on "In the Steps of Saint Paul: An Illustrated Guide to Paul's Journeys" by Peter Walker, Lion Hudson Plc © 2008

ICONIUM, LYSTRA & DERBE

These passages take place in what is now the country of Turkey. Chapter 14 takes place during what is known as “Paul’s first missionary journey” in which he sets off with the purpose of telling hearers about Jesus. Paul and Barnabas journeyed here from Antioch via the Island of Cyprus. From Cyprus they sailed to the region of Pamphylia, then travelled overland, crossing the Taurus mountains to reach Pisidian Antioch. Paul and Barnabas are initially well received there, but eventually arouse the jealousy of some of the local Jews. The prominent men and women of the city were convinced that Paul and Barnabas should be expelled and this is what prompts them to head east to Iconium.

This study focuses on what are actually 3 small towns. Iconium, Lystra and Derbe were all located within the province of Galatia, deriving its name from the Gauls who had inhabited it long before. But they also were part of the smaller region of Lycaonia. So whilst these places had Roman occupiers, Jewish settlers and people who might even consider themselves Gauls, the local populace was primarily “Lycaonian” with their own native language.

Iconium was a junction between 2 major roads. It has now been built over with the city of Konya. Little remains today of Lystra and Derbe, even the exact location of Derbe is uncertain. These were clearly remote places, a marked contrast to the important city of Antioch and cities with such rich heritages as Athens and Jerusalem.

Nevertheless these areas mattered a great deal to Paul. In fact they lie not so far from his home of Tarsus in Cilicia. He wrote back to them later in the book of Galatians and he met his companion Timothy for the first time in Lystra. Timothy became a great asset to the Church, which we learn from the two letters to him (1 and 2 Timothy) and he was with Paul when he wrote Philippians, Colossians 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon.

The Lystrans’ behaviour might seem peculiar to us. Why did they think Paul and Barnabas were Greek Gods? This is probably explained by a local legend (recorded by the poet Ovid) which tells that the Gods visited a city but were not welcomed and so punished the people. Barnabas was mistaken for Zeus (known as Jupiter to the Romans), the God of thunder and father of the family of Gods, whilst Paul was mistaken for Hermes (also known as Mercury), who is the messenger of the Gods.

Chapter 16 took place after time spent in Antioch and Jerusalem. Paul had revisited Lystra and Iconium on his route back to Antioch. However, once armed with a letter from Jerusalem for the new Churches (see chap 15 and study 3) he set off, overland this time, making for Galatia once again. Paul and the others attempted to visit some of the neighbouring provinces, however they eventually end up in Troas on the coast with the Aegean sea, with Greece lying the other side ([see Map B](#)). Here, they acquired Luke, who was probably from Philippi.

Based on “In the Steps of Saint Paul: An Illustrated Guide to Paul’s Journeys” by Peter Walker, Lion Hudson Plc © 2008

STUDY 2 – ACTS 14:1-25, 16:1-10 GALATIA

INTRODUCTION: In chapters 13, 14 and 16 Paul spends an extended period of time in Galatia and especially in Lystra (where Paul is almost stoned to death), Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. What is striking is that Paul returns to these places a number of times to strengthen and encourage them.

ICONIUM (14:1-7): Why do you think that the gospel proved to be so divisive amongst the Jews in Iconium? What do you think we should conclude from the 'effectiveness' (v1) and boldness (v3) of their preaching and the fact that the Lord confirmed the message 'by enabling them to perform signs and wonders' (v3)? What is the message of His grace (v3)?

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LYSTRA & DERBE (14:8-21a): What do we learn about the beliefs of the uncultured pagans at Lystra? What is the content of the message shared with this gentile audience and how does it differ to the previously Jewish (v15-17)? In what ways has God not left himself without testimony (v16, Rom 1:18-20)? What can we learn about how to communicate the gospel to people where they are at?

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Why do you think that the healing miracle has such a profound impact upon those at Lystra? Why do you think Paul and Barnabas react so strongly when they realise what is happening? What do v19-20 tell us about Paul's character and sense of calling (see also 2 Cor 11:24, Gal 6:17, 2 Tim 3:11)?

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STRENGTHENING AND ENCOURAGING (14:21b-25): From Derbe Paul and Barnabas return to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13) to strengthen and encourage the believers; what do you imagine this follow-up ministry to have looked like? How do you respond to Paul's challenge that they would face hardships (v22)? Why was the installation of leadership in these places so important?

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CULTURAL CUSTOMS: TIMOTHY (16:1-5): Despite Paul's experiences at Lystra why is it so striking that it is described as the place where a disciple named Timothy lived (v1)? What was Timothy's background and why did Paul have him circumcised? How might non-circumcision have distracted?

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In the spirit of the flexibility with which Paul lived his life, what might being 'all things for all people' (1 Cor 9:19-23) mean for us in our context? What hard choices/decisions might we make for the sake of the gospel? What was the response to the gospel in their subsequent visits in Galatia?

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OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S CALL (16:6-10): What principles for guidance do we see in these verses? How are we to understand the Spirit's roadblocks preventing them from entering Asia or Bithynia (did they not need the gospel too)? Why no to these specific places? How was this refusal expressed?

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Contrast the vision of 'a man of Macedonia' with other forms of guidance so far in Acts (e.g. casting lots, laying on of hands, consulting others, concerns, prophetic messages, angel of the Lord etc). What is so striking about their resulting obedience to the guidance? How does God tend to guide you?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share your experienced of being strengthened, encouraged and disciplined by others and think about ways you could serve others in this way. Ask God to help you know His voice and to help you trust and obey Him.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

STUDY 3 – ACTS 15:1-35 JERUSALEM (THE COUNCIL)

INTRODUCTION: Having heard about gentiles coming to faith in Antioch, visitors come from Judea and start teaching that circumcision is essential to salvation. Paul and Barnabas oppose them and a sharp dispute follows and culminates in a full-scale debate to settle the matter in Jerusalem.

THE ISSUE AT STAKE (v1-4): What characterised the issue that arise in Antioch? Who was and who wasn't in conflict (note earlier disagreement between Paul and Barnabas in Gal 2:11-14)? What are the issues today which challenge the notion that faith in Christ alone is sufficient for our salvation?

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What conclusions do you draw from how the church did or didn't go about trying to resolve the conflict (i.e. debating the issue, sending a delegation to Jerusalem)? What does the fact that they share news of the recently converted gentiles along the way to Jerusalem teach us about this conflict?

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DISCUSSION: THE CASE FOR THE GENTILES (v5-12): What seems to be the argument put forward from those in the Pharisee party (v5)? What reasons does Peter put forward for supporting the Antiochene position (v6-11, see also Acts 10-11)? Imagine what this assembly would have been like: why might the assembly become silent when Barnabas and Paul are sharing (v12)?

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ALL NATIONS ARE RECEIVED (v13-21): What might people have expected James to say given his Jewish background (see also Gal 2:11-12)? How does the OT quotation (Amos 9:11-12) support the notion that the gospel was for all?

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THE VERDICT: How would you summarise James's judgement / conviction (v19-21)? How do you understand the initial contradiction between not wanting to make it difficult for the Gentiles turning to God but instead writing to ask them to abstain from certain things? To what extent are these essential Christian practices or a concession to the Jewish converts? What is the spirit of the recommendations?

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Some argue Paul could never have agreed; what light do 1 Cor 6:9 (Immorality), 1 Cor 10:25-28 (meat & idols), Rom 14 (meat & blood) and 1 Cor 9:19ff (all things to all men) shed on the matter?

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CONVERT OR PROSELYTE: According to the council what was and what isn't necessary for salvation? What is the difference between a convert and a proselyte (note that gentiles had always been integrated into the Jewish faith)? Why then was this judgement so revolutionary? What expectations and requirements do we place on people joining our churches or Christian communities?

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SPELLING OUT THE DECISION (v22-35): How did they communicate the judgement to the various churches and communities? Why was it so important to back up the letter face to face? How do you respond to v28 which says that "it seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit"? To what extent do you think this was the turning point or watershed of the gospel going to the gentiles?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Ask that God would help us to trust Him alone for our salvation and that we would not be guilty of imposing anything on others that would make it difficult for them to turn to God. Pray for one another and for NAVS as a ministry that we would handle conflict well.

MEMORY VERSES: EPHESIANS 2:8-10

Jerusalem

Here we are looking at the disciples in a very different context. They were not in a pagan land, with its own deities and customs but in their native Israel. The people of Judea may have been ruled over by the Romans but it was their homeland nonetheless. Here the Jews worshipped their God Yahweh in the ways their ancestors had done for hundreds, even thousands of years, and still do today.

Jerusalem is a very old city. It had originally belonged to the Jebusites and Amorites until Joshua had defeated them and captured it (Joshua 15). After the Monarchy had been established, King David had made it the Kingdom's capital city and location of his palace. Yet, its prestige rose even higher with the construction of the temple. David's son, Solomon, undertook this vast project. Solomon's temple housed the Ark of the Covenant, the place God would dwell and meet his people. It had been destroyed by the Babylonians, but rebuilt by Ezra with the permission of the Persians (Ezra 6:15).

All these ties to significant events in Israel's past gave this place a key connection to the religious identity of the Israelites. It served as a meeting point to celebrate many of the people's major festivals -think of Jesus going up to Jerusalem for the Passover (John 11:55). The temple remained standing until AD 70 when it was burned down by the Romans in retaliation against a nationalist Jewish revolt.

If Antioch represented a diverse city with strong ties to Rome, then Jerusalem and its temple remained a symbol of Jewish heritage and observance of the law. Prayer and animal sacrifices continued to be held there and it was the meeting place of the Sanhedrin, the religious council. Even after Jesus' death and resurrection his believers also offered sacrifices and prayers there (Acts 3:46). Jesus had declared that he had not come to abolish the law of Moses (Matt 5:17-20). So for a faithful Jew who now believed in Jesus, these customs took on a new meaning testified to Jesus' fulfilment of God's promises.

The city had been the place of Jesus' crucifixion and the starting point of the newly created church (Acts 1:11-14, 2:1-11). Leadership of the Christian church here seems to have fallen to James, one of Jesus' brothers. He faced a critical dilemma. So far following Jesus had remained a mostly Jewish phenomenon. Now that more and more believers who didn't have this Jewish background were being added, were they obliged to take upon themselves the identity and ritual of Israel as well?

It had further ties still to Paul. His teacher, Rabbi Gamaliel, served on the Sanhedrin. Thus, it follows that Paul had spent some of his youth in the city studying. All in all this lent itself to a highly charged atmosphere when the council met, with much at stake.

Based on "In the Steps of Saint Paul: An Illustrated Guide to Paul's Journeys" by Peter Walker, Lion Hudson Plc © 2008

Thessalonica, Berea, Athens

This study follows an important moment. Paul and his companions had crossed over from the Anatolian peninsula and entered Europe. Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man asking for help and so they crossed the Aegean Sea into the province.

The Province of Macedonia was large and had been around for a long time. In 168BC the area had been subdued by the Romans and divided into 4 districts. It had then been given full provincial status in 148BC. Through centuries of Roman rule it had become more heavily Latinized than other parts of the Empire (like the cities so far). In this way it was probably quite a culture shock for Paul, who, though a Roman citizen, had thus far been fairly removed from Roman culture and lifestyle.

Thessalonica was the province's capital. It was a large city and the synagogue was likely to have been quite sizeable. The city lay on the 'Via Egnatia', a paved road and major route running east to west through the Empire. It was lined with plenty of places to trade or rest. Berea was a town located 12 miles south of the road. Paul, Silas and Timothy escaped to this quieter location whilst the heat from Thessalonica died down.

In the words of Peter Walker, Athens was the "historic centre of the ancient classical world". 500 years before Paul arrived Athens had been the world leader in architecture, sculpture, philosophy and literature (including drama, poetry and history). Its rich philosophical tradition included the great thinkers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The large numbers of religious icons Paul encountered were not unique to Athens. For many cities in the Empire, civic community revolved around assorted temple rituals, replete with altars and statues. Nevertheless, Athens had a religious culture which was the envy of other cities. For instance, the Parthenon: the huge temple to Athena (the Goddess of heroism) sat atop the tall acropolis hill. Overlooking the city it would certainly have had an imposing presence upon all visitors to the city.

We also know plenty about Athenian life. The market place Paul wandered about was known as the Agora and was a place not only to trade but also to meet people and chat about anything and everything, much like our city centres today. The Areopagus which Paul attends was the Athenian parliament from which democracy had been born. However it had lost some of its influence under Roman occupation and now served primarily as a religious council, with a much smaller political role. It usually met on Mars hill, but in particularly hot weather they would retreat to the Agora.

We shouldn't underestimate the huge difference between Paul's Jewish mindset and that of the Greeks. Paul's speech, which we receive an outline of, would have challenged many of the deeply held assumptions of his audience. The fact that they are reported as saying "he seems to be advocating foreign Gods" (note the plural), suggests they thought he was referring to two separate deities, one called Jesus, the other: the resurrection. Some even believed in a 'demiurge', a second, lower God responsible for creation, a task which a higher God would be unfit to involve him/her-self in. Furthermore, whilst many Athenians believed in the immortality of the soul, many philosophers had long rejected the notion of any kind of physical resurrection.

Based on "In the Steps of Saint Paul: An Illustrated Guide to Paul's Journeys" by Peter Walker, Lion Hudson Plc © 2008

STUDY 4 – ACTS 17:1-34 THESSALONICA, BEREIA AND ATHENS

INTRODUCTION: Paul and his companions are travelling westward and stop at the port city of Thessalonica, before heading south to Berea and then sailing to Athens. Paul encounters a vastly different audience and response in each city.

SETTING THE SCENE: What kinds of people, culture and world-views do we encounter in our day to day lives? In what ways do we tweak how we share the gospel based on where people are at?

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THESSALONICA: REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES (v1-9): What strategies did Paul employ in the strategy city of Thessalonica (note the verbs *reasoning, explaining, proving, persuaded*)?

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What was the content of his message and how did this compare with other presentations Paul makes on this second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)? How was the message received (v4-10)? Why does the gospel provoke such different and diverse responses in its hearers?

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BEREA: EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES (v10-15): Why do you think that Paul and Silas visited Berea (a 50m detour, see also 1 Thess 2:17-18, 3:10-11)? Why were the Bereans of 'more noble character' (v11)? What would it look like for us to examine the scriptures with 'great eagerness'?

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Why is the response at Berea (there is no hint of hostility towards Paul) so different to some of the Thessalonians who were jealous and stirred up trouble both in Thessalonica and Berea?

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ATHENS: AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS (v16-21): What kinds of people and what kind of culture does Paul find in Athens? How often are we '*greatly distressed*' by the idols we see in our culture? What moves us to action? What is Paul's approach in this place to the different kinds of people? What would be the equivalent of the synagogue and the market-place today?

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NB: The Epicureans believed that the gods had no influence on human affairs and that the world was due to chance. The Stoics acknowledged a supreme god, the world's soul who determined and acted in everything. Fate therefore reigned and life was best pursued by accepting it as it is.

ATHENS: A SERMON FOR THE COUNCIL (v22-34): What does Paul argue in his speech to the Areopagus? How does this relate to what he has seen in Athens? How can we start to communicate the gospel from 'points of truth' (affirmation is key) that we observe and experience in the culture around us? In doing this, how do we avoid the danger of watering down the gospel?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How do we see what it means to 'be all things to all people' (1 Cor 9:19-23) in Athens? To what extent are we willing to give up our freedom in order to win others (e.g. Acts 16:1-3)? Where do we need to draw the line between engaging with culture and being led into sin?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Discuss the kinds of ideas you might have about how you can communicate the gospel to your friends through aspects of culture (music, film, art, philosophy etc). Pray for one another as you seek to communicate the gospel, reasoning, persuading, proving and explaining.

MEMORY VERSES: 1 CORINTHIANS 9:22B-23

STUDY 5 – ACTS 18:1-19:1a CORINTH & EPHESUS (PRISCILLA, AQUILA, APOLLOS)

INTRODUCTION: After Athens Paul heads to Corinth the capital city of Achaia. As was Paul's custom he began by visiting the synagogue every Sabbath. He was still on his own (waiting for Silas and Timothy) to catch up) and he finds friendship and accommodation with Priscilla and Aquila.

WHO ARE PRISCILLA & AQUILA (18:1-4)? What do we learn about them here (see also Rom 16:3-4, 1 Cor 16:19, 2 Tim 4:19)? Do you think that they were already Christians (see also Acts 2:8-11)? What do you think motivated Paul to live and work with this couple?

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ARRIVAL OF SILAS & TIMOTHY (18:5-8): Why did Silas and Timothy's arrival lead to Paul dedicating himself to full-time ministry? How would their reassuring report from the churches in Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:6-10), Berea and Philippi (nb: gift of money Phil 4:15, 2 Cor 11:8-11) have encouraged Paul?

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Contrast the response of the Jews in Corinth (v4-6) to that of Crispus and his household (v7-8). Why do you think Paul reacts so strongly to the Jews (v6)? How did this set-back lead to much blessing?

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PROMISES AMIDST OPPOSITION (18:9-17): Why do you think Jesus chose that moment to comfort Paul with the promises of v9-10? How would you describe these promises and what impact did they have on his ministry? What does Jesus mean in saying that He had many people in this city (v10)?

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We are not sure when the subsequent opposition happened but Paul stays for some time in Corinth (v11 & 18); how significant was this extended time Paul spent in Corinth?

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WHO IS APOLLOS? What can we imply about Apollos from Luke's description of him in v23-28 (see also 1 Cor 1:12, 3:4-6, 22, 4:6, 16:12, Titus 3:13)? Where do you think he stood in relationship to God?
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(nb: the text says that he had been instructed in the way of the Lord, no mention of subsequent baptism, speaking with fervour in the spirit, he knew only the baptism of John, was his teaching incorrect or incomplete)?

MINISTRY OF THE ALONGSIDER (18:18-26): Why do you think that Paul took Priscilla and Aquila with him from Corinth (v18) and then left them at Ephesus (v19)? How do you respond to their strategy of inviting Apollos back to their home rather than correct him publically?
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What do you imagine it would have looked like for Priscilla and Aquila to invite Apollos back and explain the word of God more adequately? How can we learn from their example of drawing alongside people (*behind the scenes making use of their home*) and helping them to know God and His word?
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SIGNIFICANCE OF DISCIPLE-MAKING MINISTRY (18:27-19:2): How would you describe the subsequent ministry of both Priscilla & Aquila and Apollos (see also references to them outside Acts as above)? What can we learn from the diversity of personality and gifting within this ministry team of Paul, Apollos and Priscilla & Aquila?
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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Pray for God to use you as alongsiders; those exercising Godly influence on those around us for the good of the Kingdom. Pray that God would multiply your efforts and help you work and make your contribution amongst teams with different personalities and giftings.

MEMORY VERSES: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:7-8

Corinth, Ephesus

Corinth had been the capital of the province of Achaia since 27BC. This province occupied the Peloponnese (Southern Greece) with the Aegean Sea to the east, the Mediterranean to the south and the Corinthian Gulf to the west. Corinth enjoyed a unique and useful location. The city sat inland, but it was only a few short miles from the coast of both the Aegean and the Corinthian Gulf. It had a harbour connected to each of these and thus formed a crucial relay point between them. Goods or passengers from one ship could be unloaded on one side, taken briefly overland and then loaded onto another ship, providing access to a host of important destinations. It was also the only connection between the Peloponnesian peninsular and the Greek mainland. Cenchrea described in Acts 18:18 was the name of its eastern harbour.

The city was not without its tales of scrapes with Rome. In 146 BC it had revolted against Roman rule and had been destroyed as penalty. However in 44BC it was re-founded as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar and had subsequently grown rapidly. Thus Corinth was a vibrant, young city which had taken on a more Roman identity, much like Thessalonica had. Lacking the same sense of nostalgia that Athens had, it had become a place of care-free abandon and earned a tremendous reputation for sexual immorality. For a Rabbi and Pharisee such as Paul to have been there would have been highly unusual, even to simply walk the streets of such a place would have been considered improper.

It is here that Paul met Priscilla and Aquila. Aquila is described as a Jew, so it follows that Priscilla would have been too. However her name seems to have some link to that of an ancient Roman family, so it is possible she had a gentile background. They were tent-makers, although the Greek word can also mean leather-workers. It is possible they had already become followers of Jesus whilst in Rome, though this can't be certain. It seems more likely that they would have done there, where a Christian community had been established, than in relatively untouched Corinth.

After spending time working with them, Paul took Priscilla and Aquila to Ephesus. It would have been a three to four day boat ride from Corinth. Though not the capital of the province of Asia, Ephesus was its major port. Aside from Antioch, Ephesus was probably the largest city in all of Anatolia (Turkey), with up to 250,000 inhabitants. It was famous for its theatre, trading and mystic writings. It also was the home to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world: the enormous temple dedicated to the Goddess Artemis (the Goddess of hunting and fertility, also known as Diana).

It seems Paul had been meaning to travel there for some time but had been prevented (Acts 16:6). Considering the status and importance the city held it is not surprising that Paul was eager to get there, knowing how many might hear his message as a result. Through the Church there a man named Epaphras hears about Jesus, and he takes that message back to his home town of Colossae and establishes a church there (Colossians 1:7). As time went on more churches grew up in towns throughout this province. In fact it is to these churches that the book of revelation was written (Revelation 1:4-3:22). Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos, who is from Alexandria in Egypt. This was another huge city with an important place in the Mediterranean. The fact that he and the 12 disciples Paul encounters later (Acts 19:1-7) have only heard of John's baptism show that Ephesus was a very un-Christianized area at first. It was up to Paul, Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos to proclaim Jesus to the people there.

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Paul's First Missionary Journey



Bible History Online

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



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MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1: ACTS 11:19-30, 12:25-13:6, 15:36-41 – ANTIOCH (BARNABAS)

When he [Barnabas] arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

Acts 11:23

STUDY 2: ACTS 14:1-25, 16:1-10 – CHURCHES IN GALATIA

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:58

STUDY 3: ACTS 15:1-35 – JERUSALEM (COUNCIL)

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10

STUDY 4: ACTS 17 – THESSALONICA, BEREIA & ATHENS

...I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

1 Corinthians 9:22b-23

STUDY 5: ACTS 18:1-19:1 – CORINTH & EPHESUS (PRISCILLA, AQUILA & APOLLOS)

Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8