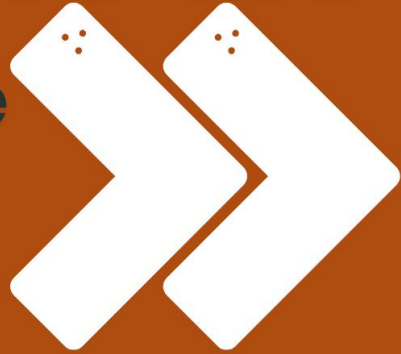




CARE GROUP BIBLE STUDY

# ACTS 13-20

the unstoppable  
advance of the  
GOSPEL



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**ACTS 13-20 – The Unstoppable Advance of the Gospel** is designed and written for the Kingston Community Church family and its associated care group ministry.

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Developed by

## KINGSTON COMMUNITY CHURCH

TO LOVE AND HONOUR GOD IN BEING

**DISCIPLES**

and helping make disciples of our

LORD JESUS CHRIST MATTHEW 28:18-20

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31 August

**ACTS 13:1-12**

7 September

**ACTS 13:13-52**

14 September

**ACTS 14**

21 September

**ACTS 15:1-21**

28 September

**ACTS 15:22-35**

5 October

**ACTS 15:36-16:15**

12 October

**ACTS 16:16-40**

19 October

**ACTS 17**

26 October

**ACTS 18**

2 November

**ACTS 19**

9 November

**ACTS 20**

# INTRODUCTION

## ACTS 13-20

The book of Acts (also called Acts of the Apostles) begins where the Gospel of Luke left off. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus commissions His disciples to be His witnesses from Jerusalem to the end of the Earth (ACTS 1:8). In fulfillment of this command, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the early church expands. Acts shows what it means to be part of Jesus' mission to the world. The apostles set the example of what it means to be fully devoted to Christ and enveloped by the Holy Spirit.

### BACKGROUND

According to early church tradition, the author of Acts is Luke the physician, who traveled with the Apostle Paul. The Gospel of Luke is also ascribed to him; this makes Acts his second volume about the story of early Christianity. Four passages in Acts seem to indicate that the narrator is a firsthand witness of particular events he describes (ACTS 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16)—which is fitting with Luke being the author.

Like the Gospel of Luke, the book of Acts is addressed to Theophilus, who might have provided financial support for Luke to write both books (LUKE 1:3; ACTS 1:1). Luke's broader audience appears to have been people who were already Christians, or at least were interested in Christianity (LUKE 1:4).

Since the narrative of Acts ends with Paul's captivity in Rome, it might have been written shortly after his arrival there, in the early to mid-60s AD.

### STRUCTURE

The structure of Acts follows the outward expansion of the gospel, which spreads from Jerusalem to Judaea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth—across the world. This geographical framework takes shape in the first section (ACTS 1:1–8:3), which is set in Jerusalem. In Acts 2, Peter preaches to a

crowd of Jews from all over the world (ACTS2:9–11); in ACTS 6, Greek-speaking Jews become leaders in the church. The first major expansion comes in ACTS 8:4–12:25, with the apostles taking the gospel to other parts of Judaea and to Samaria.

In ACTS 13, another expansion occurs as Paul launches his first missionary journey. The rest of the book follows his church-planting activity through Asia Minor and Greece until he finally makes his way to Rome, the capital of the empire, and a place representative of the entire known world of the time.

Within this geographical framework, Acts also expands from the Jewish mission of the church to the Gentile mission. Peter, as head of the Jewish mission, figures prominently in the early chapters, but fades from view after Acts 12. Paul, the leader of the Gentile (non-Jewish) mission, becomes the focus in the remainder of the book.

## OUTLINE

- The church in Jerusalem (1:1–8:3)
- The church in Judaea and Samaria (8:4–12:25)
- Paul’s missions to the Gentiles (13:1–21:16)
- Paul in Jerusalem (21:17–26:32)
- Paul’s journey to Rome (27:1–28:31)

## THEMES

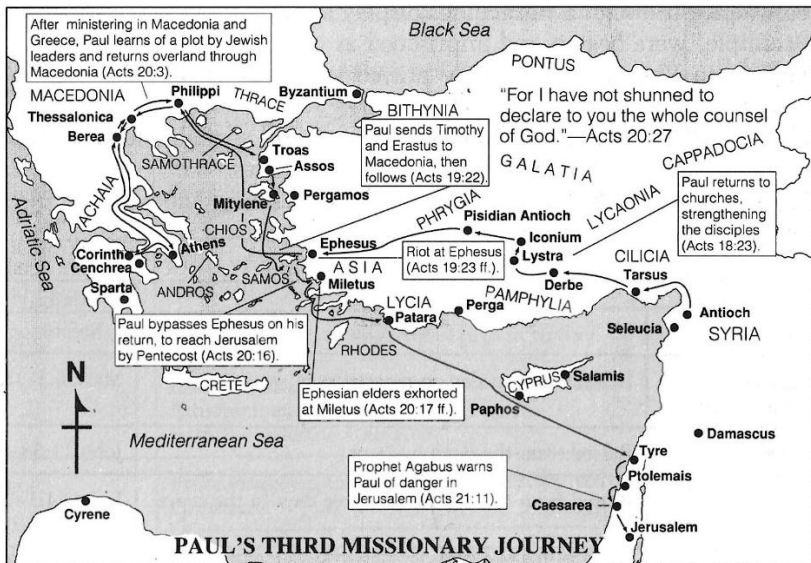
Acts repeatedly demonstrates that the gospel involves unexpected reversals. The scene at Pentecost (ACTS 2)—with its depiction of people from various languages understanding the good news of Jesus in their own tongues—reverses the confusion of human language at Babel (GEN 11:7). And it is Paul the Pharisee, the leading persecutor of the church, who becomes known as the apostle to the Gentiles. And it is the Gentiles who themselves are a surprise inclusion in God’s people (ACTS 10:45; 11:18). Salvation through Jesus is not just for Jews; it’s for everyone.

Acts broadly depicts the rapid outward movement of the gospel to people from an incredible array of races, languages, social ranks, and religious backgrounds. In tandem with the depiction of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel, Acts

demonstrates that Jesus is the culmination of world history: He is what the world needs. Acts shows how Jesus continues His work in the world through His followers, by the power of the Holy Spirit in them.

Instead of providing a fully detailed account of the early church's expansion and leadership structure, Acts focuses on specific moments, showing in broad strokes the gospel's rapid expansion. Acts is meant to inspire us to be part of God's work in the world.

The work of bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth is far from finished—as God's people today we are called to continue the effort.



# ACTS 13:1-12

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

Our series begins with Barnabas and Paul's return from an errand to Jerusalem. They have John Mark with them. He will accompany them on their first missionary journey.

The leaders of the church in Antioch are as cosmopolitan as the city itself. Barnabas is from Cyprus, Simeon is from Africa and Lucius is from North Africa. Manaen was brought up with Herod Antipas, and Paul is from Tarsus in Cilicia. Barnabas we already know for his generosity and diplomacy. Simeon may be Simon of Cyrene, who carried the crosspiece for Jesus on the way to Golgotha. Manaen apparently comes from a privileged background, having been a childhood companion to a royal prince. Paul is a pedigree Jew who has trained as a rabbi and is now awesomely committed to Christ.

As the church prays and fasts, the Holy Spirit guides them. They are to commission Barnabas and Paul for a special task. When Jesus sent out his disciples in twos, it is good to think that he paired them carefully. Barnabas and Paul are very different from each other, but with complementary gifts. Paul is active, single-minded and intellectually sharp. Barnabas is a more relaxed and accepting character, generous and affirming. They make a good team—but will fall out over John Mark.

This is the Holy Spirit's mission. Paul and Barnabas begin by crossing the sea to Cyprus, and journey through the island from east to west—about ninety miles. To begin with, they preach in synagogues, where fellow Jews will welcome them and be able to judge their message.

A leading Gentile called Sergius Paulus, who is the Roman governor of the island, hears the gospel willingly. However, he has an attendant—a sorcerer named Elymas—who proves a cunning enemy. Paul confronts Elymas in the power of the Holy Spirit and condemns him to a period of blindness. It is at this point that Luke tells us Paul is also called Paul. Paul is a Jew by birth, but he is also a Roman citizen. As

he is now travelling among Gentiles, it is natural for him to use his Roman name, which is Paul.

## **Open in prayer**

## **Opening question**

How would you describe your experiences with mission trips?

## **Read scripture**

ACTS 13:1-12

## **Provide opportunity to share**

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

## **Use the following questions to guide your discussions**

- In Acts 13:1-5, Barnabas and Paul met with the elders in the church at Antioch. What were they doing collectively when the Holy Spirit spoke to them?
- Based on ACTS 13:1-5, how could Barnabas and Paul's sending out on their first missionary journey an example for the church to follow?

- Why might Paul and Barnabas have started proclaiming the gospel in Jewish synagogues when they were in Gentile territory?
- Put yourself in Elymas' place. Why and how would you oppose these missionaries?
- Why do you think the procounsul responded the way he did to the events of ACTS 13:9-12
- With what types of people do you feel most comfortable talking about you faith? Why?
- How do you deal with the pressure of your faith being challenged?

## Prayer

# ACTS 13:13-52

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

Paul, Barnabas and Mark leave the island of Cyprus and cross the sea to the southern coast of Asia Minor (ACTS 13:13–52). Today this is Turkey.

On the sabbath day, Paul and Barnabas attend the service in the synagogue. This is the quickest way to meet people of their own kind, who read the Jewish scriptures and worship the one true God. Perhaps Paul is dressed as a teacher or rabbi. He is invited to speak. Paul preaches a sermon which is suitable for his Jewish listeners. He talks of how God chose the people of Israel, rescued them from Egypt, looked after them in the desert and gave them the land of Canaan.

God also gave his people a great king, David—a leader in tune with God. He promised to David a descendant who would be the Holy One, the immortal king, the Messiah. Now this Messiah has appeared, just as God promised. He is Jesus, the longed-for Saviour of his people.

Paul tells how the Jewish leaders had Jesus executed, but God raised him to life. He explains how Jesus is a Saviour—not a military leader defeating their enemies, but a perfect sacrifice paying for their sins. Paul ends his sermon. He urges his hearers to receive the forgiveness that Jesus offers, or, will they laugh at this good news and reject God's saving love?

Paul's message excites great interest. Some want to hear him again, while others are hostile. On the following sabbath, the leading Jews publicly reject Paul. As a result, Paul and Barnabas resolve to take their message to the Gentiles.

As Paul and Barnabas are expelled from the region, they shake its dust from their feet. This is what Jews used to do after crossing Samaria on their way from Galilee to Jerusalem. To shake the dust

from your feet and clothes is to reject a place and its people. If the people want nothing to do with God, so be it. It's their choice.

## **Open in prayer**

## **Opening question**

What if any political speech sticks in your mind?

## **Read scripture**

ACTS 13:13-52

## **Provide opportunity to share**

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

## **Use the following questions to guide your discussions**

- What is significant about Paul's audience? ACTS 13:16
- From ACTS 13:17-23, list all the things Paul says God has done.
- How do God's actions in ACTS 13:17-22 prepare the way for Paul to speak about Jesus in ACTS 13:23?
- What things about Jesus is Paul emphasising by the use of the three quotes in ACTS 13:33, 34, and 35?

- What does Paul present as the central meaning of the resurrection for his listeners? ACTS 13:38-39
- Why do you think Paul and Baranabas received the variety of responses they did? ACTS 13:42-51
- How does knowing the Old Testament help us understand and share our faith better?

## Prayer

# ACTS 14

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

Paul and Barnabas travel on foot to Iconium, some ninety miles from Pisidian Antioch (ACTS 14:1–7). There they speak in the synagogue and again cause a hot debate. Although the power of their message is proved by many miracles, they have to flee to avoid being stoned.

In Lycaonia, they visit the out-of-the-way towns of Lystra and Derbe. At Lystra they receive a rapturous welcome. The superstitious folk of Lystra were on the lookout for visiting gods! When Paul heals a lame man, they hail him as Hermes, the messenger god. Barnabas, who is older, they take to be Zeus. Let the sacrifices begin!

Urgently, Paul explains that they are merely human. There is a true and living God. His power is seen in creation. His love is seen in the blessings of nature. The Lystrans are confused. When Jews arrive from Antioch and Iconium with news that Paul and Barnabas are frauds, Paul is very nearly killed. They have to leave as soon as possible.

Paul and Barnabas then visit Derbe, where the gospel makes many converts (ACTS 14:21–28). Then, instead of going straight on home to Syrian Antioch, they retrace their entire journey.

They visit and encourage the groups of new believers in each town and city. In every church, they appoint elders. They warn them that the Christian way is tough. They commission them with fervent prayer and fasting. It is hard to imagine greater bravery and faith than is shown by these first church-planters.

Finally, Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch in Syria, and to the people who first commissioned them. They have many adventures to relate, but the headline news is this: that God has opened a way for the Gentiles to receive the gospel. The Christian church is becoming a multinational community with a worldwide faith.

## Open in prayer

### Opening question

What has been the hardest consequence you have experienced in standing for your faith?

### Read scripture

ACTS 14

### Provide opportunity to share

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

### Use the following questions to guide your discussions

- How would you describe religious life in Lystra? ACTS 14:1-18
- Why do you think the people are divided? ACTS 14:1-4
- What does Paul emphasize about God in his speech? ACTS 14:15-17
- How does Paul's speech in Lystra (ACTS 14:15-17) differ than this speech in Antioch (ACTS 13:16-41)?

- How have people you have shared the gospel with, heard it through their own prejudices or beliefs?
- What motivated Paul and Baranabas to make a return trip through these centres? ACTS 14:21-25
- What do Paul and Baranbas identify as most important as they strengthen and encourage the believers in these centres? ACTS 14:22-23
- What's something you can do to encourage another believer this week?

## Prayer

# ACTS 15:1-21

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

The church at Antioch is rejoicing that Gentiles (non-Jews) are becoming Christians. But some Jewish Christians arrive from Jerusalem, with hardline teaching on circumcision. They insist that Gentile Christians must also become Jews. They must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses (ACTS 15:1–4).

They are confronted with the facts of the gospel. We aren't saved by being circumcised or keeping the law. If we could be saved that way, Jesus need never have died.

The question of whether Gentile Christians must also become Jews threatens to split the church. Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem to discuss the crisis with the apostles. This is the Council of Jerusalem (ACTS 15:5–21).

When Peter speaks, he points out that God makes no difference between Jews and Gentiles in the way they are saved. With both, God looks at the heart, not at ritual. He saves by grace, through faith. It is only faith that counts.

Next, the Council hears about the Gentile mission from Paul and Barnabas. They listen with close attention to the astonishing evidence that God is reaching out to non-Jews.

Then James speaks. He is the leader of the church in Jerusalem. James lifts the Gentile story to the light of scripture. He makes a momentous proposal, releasing Gentile Christians from the clutches of the Pharisees.

James' guidelines deal with the Gentile customs which most offend Jews. It asks them to respect the way Jewish Christians feel, so that the two communities can now become one church.

## Open in prayer

### Opening question

How does your family decide when there's disagreement?

### Read scripture

ACTS 15:1-21

### Provide opportunity to share

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

### Use the following questions to guide your discussions

- Why are the Jewish believers making such a point of circumcision and the law? ACTS 15:1, 5
- What was at stake in this debate?
- What part does experience, tradition, scripture, and reason play in this debate? ACTS 15:6-18
- What shaped their final decision? ACTS 15:19-21

- In what ways do you, or the church, add on to the gospel when relating to not-yet-Christians?
- Paul later writes in GALATIANS 5:6 a summary of this decision. How is this helpful?

## Prayer

# ACTS 15:22-35

## SERMON NOTES

## **SMALL GROUP STUDY**

After debate and discussion, the council agrees to James' proposal. The guidelines are written in a letter and sent with specially chosen messengers (ACTS 15:22–35). One of them is Silas, who will become a close colleague of Paul.

There is great relief among the Christians at Antioch when they receive the letter. The 'circumcision group' has no official backing from the church in Jerusalem. New believers need not be circumcised after all!

### **Open in prayer**

### **Opening question**

How do you tend to view other Christians whose worship or lifestyles are historically different from yours?

### **Read scripture**

ACTS 15:22-35

### **Provide opportunity to share**

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

### **Use the following questions to guide your discussions**

- Why would a letter and representatives from the Jerusalem church be a good way to communicate the apostles' decision? ACTS 15:22-23

- How would you describe the tone of the letter? ACTS 15:23-29
- What are the main points communicated to the readers in...  
...ACTS 15:24?  
...ACTS 15:25-27?  
...ACTS 15:28-29?
- How is unity revealed in the responses of ACTS 15:30-33?
- From the debate, the letter, and the way it was delivered, what can we learn about how to resolve disagreements among Christians?

## Prayer

# ACTS 15:36-16:15

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

When spring arrives, Paul suggests that he and Barnabas revisit the churches they founded in south Galatia. Barnabas wants to take John Mark with them again—but Paul hasn’t forgiven the young man for deserting them the last time (ACTS 13:13). They argue and decide to split up (ACTS 15:36–41).

Barnabas and John Mark sail to Cyprus, which is home ground for the cousins. Paul chooses Silas as his new colleague. Leaving Syrian Antioch, they travel on foot through the Taurus mountains to Cilicia.

Paul likes working with a team. At Lystra he finds a new junior partner in Timothy—a young man with a Jewish mother and a Greek father (ACTS 16:1–5). Paul circumcises Timothy. Since the Council of Jerusalem, no one needs to be circumcised, but Paul wants Timothy to be able to mix freely with Jewish groups.

Paul, Silas and Timothy journey through Asia Minor (ACTS 16:6–11). Paul hopes to turn south-west, but somehow their progress is blocked. Luke says the Holy Spirit prevents them.

Turning north, but again, says Luke, their path is closed—by the Spirit of Jesus. In the end they take the only remaining route, the north-west coast of Asia Minor at the port of Troas.

Paul has a vision of a man begging or beckoning for help. From his dress, he is from Macedonia—the Roman province across the Aegean Sea from Troas. This is where God is leading! They end up in Philippi.

There is no synagogue in Philippi, so Paul can’t start their mission by preaching to Jews. Instead, they join a group of women who are praying by the river on the sabbath. One of the women is Lydia (ACTS 16:12–15). Lydia is a businesswoman. She deals in expensive purple cloth—the choice of emperors. Amazingly, she comes from Thyatira—

one of the cities in Asia which Paul has been trying to visit! Now the good news will travel there with trade.

Lydia is converted, not by Paul's words alone, but by the Lord opening her heart to welcome the gospel. She and her household—her family and servants—are all baptized.

## **Open in prayer**

## **Opening question**

What has been your hardest break up ever?

## **Read scripture**

ACTS 15:36-16:15

## **Provide opportunity to share**

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

## **Use the following questions to guide your discussions**

- How should we understand this disagreement between Paul and Baranabas; as a failure on the part of the apostles, or as a natural part of human relationships? ACTS 15:36-41
- Given the council's decision in ACTS 15, why did Paul turn around and circumcise Timothy? ACTS 16:1-5
- When have you given up your personal rights in order to better represent Christ to others?

- How is this closed door the team experienced, pivotal in the spread of the gospel? ACTS 16:6-10
- What do you understand it to mean, “the Lord opened her heart,” when it comes to Lydia becoming a follower of Jesus? ACTS 16:14
- How did the Lord open your heart to respond to the gospel?

## Prayer

# ACTS 16:16-40

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

Over many days, Paul and Silas are harassed by a fortune-teller (ACTS 16:16–40). She is a slave girl whose owner makes a lot of money from her demon possession. In the end, he releases her in the name of Jesus Christ.

The slave girl's owners are furious. They drag Paul and Silas before the city magistrates. They accuse them of being Jewish troublemakers who are trying to promote an illegal religion. They make no mention that their fortune-telling racket has been ruined.

Paul and Silas are brutally flogged and chained up in a prison cell. Bloody and in great pain, they sing hymns until midnight. Suddenly, there was an earthquake. The prison is wrecked, and the prisoners are free. Assuming his charges have escaped, the jailer prepares to commit suicide by falling on his sword. But Paul calls out that all is well.

The jailer—a tough Roman veteran—is a changed man. He puts his trust in Christ, welcomes Paul and Silas into his home and gently washes their wounds. Before daylight, he and his family are baptized. The following day the order comes for Paul and Silas to be released. But Paul has a point to make. He and Silas are Roman citizens. They have been tried, flogged and imprisoned illegally. They demand, and receive, an official apology!

As Paul and Silas move on from Philippi, they leave behind a curious mix of believers. A businesswoman, a slave girl and a jailer—now united in the shared life of Christ, and the nucleus of a local church.

### Open in prayer

### Opening question

When discouraged, what type of music do you like to listen to?

## **Read scripture**

ACTS 16:16-40

## **Provide opportunity to share**

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

## **Use the following questions to guide your discussions**

- What influence do you think the girl's true statement might be having on Paul & Silas' missional effectiveness? ACTS 16:16-18
- Why did Paul call the spirit out, "in the name of Jesus"? ACTS 16:18
- What were the nature of the charges brought against Paul & Silas? ACTS 16:19-21
- If you were falsely accused, severely beaten, and thrown into jail, would you still trust God's call to go to that place? ACTS 16:22-24

- In what way does the jailer express his new faith in Jesus?  
ACTS 16:29-34
- Why might Paul insist on his rights as a Roman citizen? ACTS 16:35-39
- Notice that Paul and Silas turned to both prayer and singing during a difficult situation. What is your pattern when faced with challenges or hardship?

## Prayer

# ACTS 17

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

Paul, Silas and Timothy journey 100 miles south-west, from Philippi to Thessalonica (ACTS 17:1–9).

On three successive sabbaths, Paul teaches the Jews and God-fearers about Jesus. He explains that Jesus, who suffered, died and rose from death, is the Messiah. He is the One for whom the Jewish scriptures hope, and to whom they point. As so often, Paul's message causes first an argument and then a riot. Some Greeks believe—and the Jews are jealous. Public order is threatened by this message that Jesus is a new kind of king, greater than Caesar. If this idea wins supporters, it will bring down the empire. Jason and some other believers are arrested.

Paul and his two companions are smuggled away from Thessalonica under cover of darkness. They travel to Berea, some fifty miles to the south-west (ACTS 17:10–15).

At Berea Paul again teaches in the synagogue, and meets with a more open response. The Berean Jews are willing to search their scriptures, to check if indeed the Messiah should suffer. Luke tells us that many people put their faith in Christ—both Jews and Greeks. Unfortunately, some Jews come all the way from Thessalonica to cause trouble. Paul's new friends have to help him escape. They take him to the coast and then 300 miles by sea—to Athens.

Paul is alone in Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him (ACTS 17:16–34). As a Jew and a Christian, everything about Athens appalls him. Here is a high culture with low morals. Here is a centre of learning, which is littered with idols!

Paul gets to work. He reasons with Jews in the synagogue. He argues with the speakers in the marketplace. Soon he is discovered by the rival Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

Paul is invited to speak to the assembly. He begins with his impressions of Athens. He goes on to describe the living God—the creator of heaven and earth. Then Paul quotes a Greek poet. Finally, Paul puts it to his hearers: Why are you insulting this almighty creator-Father-God by making idols of metal and stone?

Paul has preached to thirty of the finest intellects in the world. He started where they were, with their idols and writers. He challenged their superstition and spiritual ignorance. He spoke clearly of the one and only God, and of Jesus the risen Lord and judge. And some of his hearers have become Christians as a result—including a member of the Council, and a woman named Damaris.

## **Open in prayer**

### **Opening question**

What is your view of philosophy?

### **Read scripture**

ACTS 17

### **Provide opportunity to share**

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

### **Use the following questions to guide your discussions**

- Since his conversion, this is the sixth time Paul had been forced to leave an area because of persecution. How would you feel about ministry if that happened to you?

- How did Paul view his repetitive persecution?  
Cf: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-6
- Compared with the Thessalonians (ACTS 17:2-4), how did the Bereans receive the gospel? ACTS 17:11-12
- What do you see as the general attitude of these philosophers? ACTS 17:18-21
- How does Paul use his familiarity with their culture to help them see the error of how they relate to deity? ACTS 17:22-31
- What distresses you spiritually about the people around you where you live?

- How might you introduce them to the gospel?

## Prayer

# ACTS 18

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

Paul moves from Athens to Corinth—from the intellectual centre of Greece to its commercial heart (ACTS 18:1–17).

Corinth is the capital of the province of Achaia. It is famous for its trade. The temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, stands high above the city. What does Paul have to offer this busy, wealthy, vice-ridden metropolis?

God is with Paul, and he blesses him with two good friends—Aquila and his wife Priscilla. This is the beginning of a long and happy association between them.

Paul begins, as usual, by preaching the gospel in the synagogue every sabbath. When Silas and Timothy join him from Macedonia, they bring a gift of money from the church in Thessalonica. This enables Paul to devote himself to preaching and teaching.

As has happened many times before, some of the Jews reject Paul's message. They make it impossible for him to continue his ministry in the synagogue. In Corinth Paul has the perfect solution. He moves next door, taking the ruler of the synagogue with him! He is greatly encouraged by a vision in which the Lord speaks to him and promises to protect him. As a result, Paul decides to stay on in Corinth for a year and a half.

During this time, Paul's Jewish enemies try to get rid of him. They bring him before the proconsul Gallio and charge him with breaking religious law. He recognizes the spite and nit-picking of the Jews, refuses to hear any more from them—and throws them out. The crowd which has gathered to mob Paul gives the new synagogue ruler a beating instead.

Paul sails with Aquila and Priscilla to Ephesus, where he teaches for a short time in the synagogue. He leaves his friends there,

sailing to Caesarea, the main port of Palestine. From there he goes 'up' to Jerusalem and then 'home' to Antioch—the base from which both his missionary journeys began.

Luke tells us briefly that Paul now visits the churches in Phrygia and Galatia. Presumably he follows his familiar circuit, through Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. He has always been concerned about keeping in touch and encouraging them.

In Ephesus we meet Apollos (ACTS 18:24–28). Apollos is steeped in scripture, and a gifted speaker. But as Aquila and Priscilla listen to his eloquent teaching, they realize there are gaps in his knowledge and understanding. He knows about 'the baptism of John', but does he know about baptism 'in the name of Jesus'?

Aquila and Priscilla invite Apollos to their home and quietly complete his education. When he travels on to Corinth, he is ready to play a full part in the ministry of the church.

## **Open in prayer**

### **Opening question**

If you could make a living from one of your hobbies, which one would you choose?

### **Read scripture**

ACTS 18

### **Provide opportunity to share**

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

### **Use the following questions to guide your discussions**

- What comes across as the official Roman attitude towards Christians and Christianity? ACTS 18:2; 12-17
- How did Paul's ministry change once Timothy and Silas joined him? ACTS 18:2-5
- Given the abusive opposition from Jews to anyone associated to Paul, what would it be like for Crispus and his household to convert and be baptised? ACTS 18:6-8
- How might the vision from God encourage Paul in his weakness? ACTS 18:9-11
- When you have been at the end of your ability to cope, how has God brought encouragement to you?

- Why was it significant that Paul brought Priscilla and Aquila on this leg of his journey? ACTS 18:18
- What did Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos do well? ACTS 18:24-28
- Who are some older or more experienced Christians currently encouraging your spiritual life? Who are some younger or less experienced Christians you are encouraging?

## Prayer

# ACTS 19

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

After Apollos left for Corinth, Paul returned to Ephesus.

In Ephesus, Paul discovers some disciples of John the Baptist. They are stuck halfway between the Old and New Testaments, not realizing that the Messiah has come.

Paul explains to them that John looked forward to Jesus, and gives them Christian baptism. Placing his hands on them, Paul prays that they may receive the Holy Spirit. Like the Samaritan believers, they experience a mini-Pentecost, speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Paul returns to the synagogue in Ephesus, as he promised. He teaches there for three months, until the Jewish resistance becomes too strong. After this, he holds meetings in a lecture hall—every day for two years.

Ephesus, like Corinth, is a strong commercial centre. As Paul preaches and teaches in the hall of Tyrannus, travellers and merchants receive the gospel—and take it with them around the whole province of Asia.

Some exorcists, called the sons of Sceva, try to tap into the power of Jesus—and are badly beaten by a demonized man. This strikes fear among the Ephesian sorcerers, who make a public bonfire of their scrolls of spells. A tremendous act of witness and a sure sign of conversion!

The mission in Ephesus is now well established, and Paul plans to move on. He wants to visit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, to collect money for the poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem. After Jerusalem he hopes to visit Rome.

Paul stays in Ephesus for three years—longer than he does anywhere else. The Christian faith (or ‘the Way’) is bad for the idol trade. A silversmith called Demetrius makes his living from charms of the

goddess and her temple. As the good news of Jesus sweeps away superstition, Demetrius sees the danger to his business and the prosperity of the city. Gathering his fellow skilled workers and other traders, he stirs up a riot.

The mob seizes two of Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus. Paul wants to go to their defense, but his friends restrain him. Into this dangerous situation steps the city clerk. He quietens the chanting crowd by assuring them that the reputation of Artemis is quite safe. Gaius and Aristarchus are neither temple-robbers nor blasphemers. If Demetrius and friends have any charges to make, the proper courts are open, and the judges are waiting to hear from them. In the meantime, there is no excuse for rioting, and the people had better disperse.

## **Open in prayer**

### **Opening question**

How well do you handle it when someone tells you that you're wrong?

### **Read scripture**

ACTS 19

### **Provide opportunity to share**

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

### **Use the following questions to guide your discussions**

- What is the difference between John's baptism and Paul's baptism? ACTS 19:1-7

- What is the relationship between faith in Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit? ACTS 19:1-7
- What seems to be the signal throughout ACTS for Paul to stop teaching in the synagogue? ACTS 19:8-10
- God is doing unusual miracles through Paul. How did the people distort what Paul was doing for their own gain? ACTS 19:11-16
- What is revealed here about the nature of spiritual warfare? ACTS 19:13-20
- Success, money and independence are examples of some 'sacred idols' in our culture. What other contemporary idols come to mind? ACTS 19:23-27

- Where does the church currently pose a threat to businesses and profit centres in this country?
- How would you evaluate this city clerk in his handling of the situation? ACTS 19:35-41
- What started as Artemis-worship became Artemis-business. How might Christians fall into the same trap and make Jesus-worship into Jesus-business?

## Prayer

# ACTS 20

## SERMON NOTES

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

Paul leaves Ephesus and travels to Macedonia to visit the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. He is collecting money to help the church in Jerusalem and gathering a team to make the journey with him.

Paul and his friends are about to sail for Jerusalem from Corinth, when they realize Paul's life is in danger from hostile Jews on the ship. They change their arrangements, split the group and Paul returns to Macedonia to spend Passover (or Easter!) in Philippi. From there he sails to Troas to rejoin the others. Luke is once again travelling with Paul, perhaps as the representative of the church in Philippi.

Paul and his companions stayed a week in Troas. Their last night is a Sunday, and the believers meet in an upstairs room for a fellowship meal. Paul's sermon and the discussion which follows run late into the night. A boy called Eutychus is sitting on the windowsill. Overcome by the long talk and the stuffy room, he falls fast asleep and topples backwards to his death.

It is a tragedy, but Paul throws himself on the young man and puts his arms around him. Luke remembers all this in detail—and how Paul then declares that the boy is alive! They return upstairs to share the Lord's Supper and talk on until dawn.

Paul wants to go to Jerusalem for Pentecost, but he is already late. Paul chooses to make part of the journey overland. Paul has no time to visit Ephesus. Instead, he asks the Ephesian elders to come thirty miles to see him while his ship is at Miletus.

Paul knows that this is the last time he will see this group of pastors. He opens his heart to them as he says goodbye. He reminds them how eagerly he taught them—both Jews and Gentiles, in public and private, day and night. He never took money from them as he earned his own living and provided for his colleagues. And his message has

always been the same—repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ.

## **Open in prayer**

### **Opening question**

When have you been caught sleeping in an embarrassing moment?

### **Read scripture**

ACTS 20

### **Provide opportunity to share**

What were the main truths you heard from the message on Sunday?

### **Use the following questions to guide your discussions**

- How might Paul have encouraged the people he spoke with as he travelled? ACTS 20:1-2
- How would you describe the church in Troas from the description of ACTS 20:7-12?
- What actions and attitudes characterised Paul's ministry? ACTS 20:18-20

- What is Paul's main focus as a servant of Jesus? ACTS 20:19-24
- What is the role and responsibility of these church leaders in Ephesus? ACTS 20:28-31
- How is grace a protection for the Church? ACTS 20:32
- What steps should we take in the church today to prevent false teachers and false doctrines?
- How comfortable do you feel with expressing genuine emotions within the church? ACTS 20:36-38

## Prayer