

Light to the Nations

ACTS 9-15

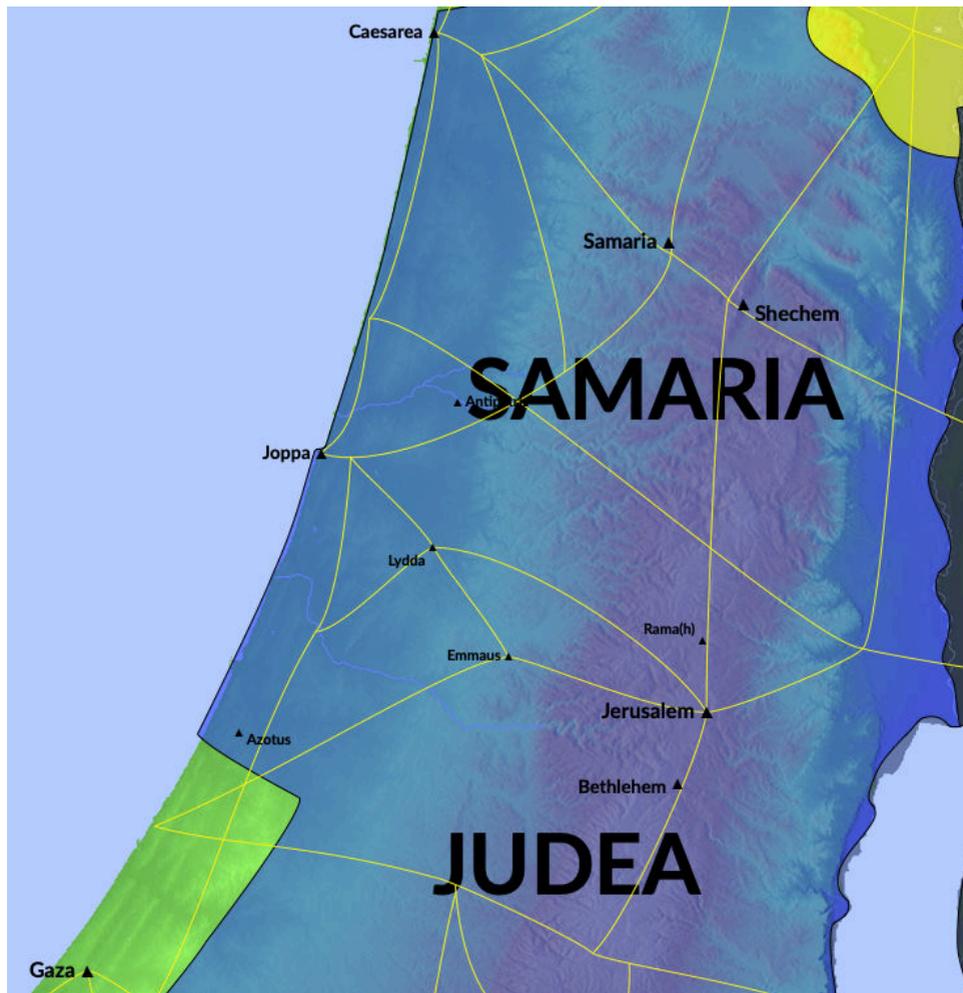


Bible Study Guide
Term 4 2020



Study 1: Acts 9:32-43

Welcome back to the adventure story that is the book of Acts! In this section of Acts (9:32-15:35) we will see the gospel message spread out to new places and new audiences - with accompanying controversy.



Recap the story so far

1. Divide up the following key verses between your group. Look up the context of each quote to work out who is speaking and what's going on. Report back to the group to recall some key moments in the story so far.

Passage	Who is speaking? What is going on?
<i>Acts 1:8: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”</i>	
<i>Acts 2:7-8: “... how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?”</i>	
<i>Acts 3:16: “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong...”</i>	
<i>Acts 8:1: “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria”</i>	
<i>Acts 9:4: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”</i>	
<i>Acts 9:31 “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers”</i>	

Read Acts 9:32-35

2. Why did Peter go to Lydda? What do you think he wanted to achieve?

3. Aeneas was presumably a believer and member of the church at Lydda. What do you make of the fact that he had not been healed already?
4. How does Peter achieve this healing?
5. Why would Aeneas be told to “make your bed” (ESV) or “roll up your mat” (NIV)?

Read Acts 9:36-42

6. How does Peter achieve this healing?
7. What are we told about Tabitha/Dorcas? Why would Luke have bothered to tell us both of her names?
8. Read Mark 5:37-43. Can you see some similarities? What do you make of them?

Consider the two episodes together

9. What's the impact of each healing on the surrounding community?
10. How do we see Acts 1:8 being fulfilled here?

Notes and Prayer Points

Study 2: Acts 10:1-48

Warmer question:

1. When have you felt separated from people because of cultural or racial differences? How did that affect your communication with each other?

Acts 10 tells us about one of the great turning points in the history of the church.

Read Acts 10:1-8

2. What can you find out about the town of Caesarea, centurions and the Italian Regiment? Locate Caesarea on a map. What might be a modern equivalent of a centurion?

3. What are we told about Cornelius' background?

4. How did God prepare Cornelius to meet Peter?

Read Acts 10:9-23

5. What Jewish cultural practices did Peter have to overcome to minister to Cornelius? See Leviticus 11.

Read Acts 10:23b-48

6. How did Peter explain the gospel to Cornelius and his relatives and friends? Write down the main points of what he said (verses 34-43).
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
7. What outward signs did the Lord give to show that Cornelius' conversion was genuine? (verses 44-48).
8. What new lessons did Peter learn from this? Why was his encounter with Cornelius so significant for the early church?

Pray and ask the Lord to help us be more open and flexible to the changes he desires to bring about in our lives, and to enable us to share the gospel with people of other cultures when the opportunity arises.

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 3: Acts 11:1-30

Warmer question

1. Have you ever been criticised for doing what you believed to be right? What was that like for you?

In this chapter we see how the church is progressing from a Jewish church to a Jewish-Gentile fellowship.

Read Acts 11:1-18

2. What was the reaction from the religious leaders in Jerusalem when they heard that Cornelius and his household had come to believe in Jesus? Why do you think they reacted like this? Explain their change of heart.

3. Peter says: “Who was I to think that I could oppose God” (11:17). What signs of new life in Christ had Peter witnessed in Cornelius’ house? What evidence of conversion should we see in the lives of new believers today? See 2 Cor. 5:17.

Read Acts 11:19-26

Antioch, about 12000km north of Jerusalem, and now part of southern Turkey, was the third largest urban centre of the Roman empire (after Rome and Alexandria) with between 100,000 and 600,000 residents. Rome granted it the status of a “free city” so that it mostly governed itself. It was known for its cultural and religious diversity including a significant Jewish element. The church in Antioch is very significant in the next few chapters of Acts.

4. As a result of the persecution after the death of Stephen (Acts 7:59-60 and 8:1), the gospel is rapidly spreading to the Gentiles (sometimes called Greeks). How did the main church in Jerusalem respond to this?

5. Barnabas has been mentioned earlier – read Acts 4:36-37 and 9:26-27.
 - a. How would you summarise him as a character?

 - b. What are his previous dealings with Saul/Paul? How did he nurture him in the faith?

6. Barnabas works hard to find Saul and bring him to Antioch to help in the ministry. Why would he have seen Saul as such a valuable partner?

Read Acts 11:27-30

7. How did the new Christians respond to the famine? What should be the relationship between faith and good deeds for us today?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 4: Acts 12:1-24

Warmer question

1. Have you had a dream that you thought was real? Or a real experience that you thought was a dream?

As the flourishing church in Antioch dispatch their famine-relief gift (11:29-30), we see what was happening in Jerusalem under the rule of king Herod.

Several different Herods ruled in Palestine in the first century. This one was Herod Agrippa the elder. By AD41 he was ruling Judea, Galilee and several neighbouring provinces. All the Herods were viewed with some degree of mistrust by the Judeans because of their mixed ethnicity, and were therefore anxious to please their constituents and stay on the throne.

Read Acts 12:1-11

2. Without looking at your Bible, re-tell this story from memory while a partner looks at the Bible text. (Or write your version down and compare it with the Bible afterwards). What details did you leave out? Why might Luke have thought those details were important?
3. Who was responsible for Peter's imprisonment and forthcoming death?
4. What were the rest of the believers doing while Peter was imprisoned?
5. Does this story teach us to expect Christians will always be rescued from imprisonment and execution?

Read Acts 12:12-17

6. Repeat the re-telling exercise above. What details did Luke include that you forgot? Why might he have included those details?

7. How did Rhoda know it was Peter at the door? (Look carefully!)

8. The other believers had been praying for Peter (verses 5,12). But when he turns up at the door they don't believe it's him! What does this suggest about their prayers? Is there a lesson here for us?

9. The "bumbling servant" was a common character in ancient Greek comedies. How is this pattern reversed here? Who is the model believer in this story?

“It must be his angel” (v15) is tricky. “Angel” and “spirit/ghost” were closely related concepts (eg in Acts 23:9), and some popular Jewish traditions taught that the righteous became like angels after death. The idea that each person has an individual guardian angel doesn’t have any real biblical basis.

The James referred to in v17 is clearly not the brother of John, who had been executed in v2, but probably the James mentioned in Acts 15.

Read Acts 12:18-24

10. Luke presents Herod’s death as the work of “the angel of the Lord”. The angel of the Lord was also mentioned earlier in the chapter. How do the two cases compare?
11. The angel of the Lord is frequently referred to in the Old Testament. What is the function of the angel of the Lord in the following passages:
 - a. Isaiah 37:33-36
 - b. Psalm 34:4-7
12. With this background in view, what is Acts 12 showing us about
 - a. Herod
 - b. Peter and the other Christians

Consider the chapter overall

13. In this passage, what are the mistakes for us to avoid, and the examples for us to follow?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 5: Acts 12:25 – 13:12

Read Acts 12:25 – 13:3

1. Barnabas and Saul return from Jerusalem to Antioch. What “mission” had they been on? (Look back at 11:27-30)
2. Look carefully at the names of the prophets and teachers in Antioch. Can you spot any clues about their background?

The mention of “fasting” here makes us wonder about the relevance of that practice for today. Jesus, speaking in his Jewish context, addressed the topic of fasting on various occasions. But outside the gospels, fasting is mentioned only twice in all the rest of the New Testament – here and the following chapter.

3. Read Acts 14:23. What are the common elements in these two situations where fasting is mentioned?
4. There are many places in Acts where gospel workers are commissioned and prayed for, but fasting is *not* mentioned (eg Acts 1.24, 6.6, 13.3, 14.23). What conclusions might we draw about the place of fasting for Christians today? Is it required, necessary, wrong, or something else?

5. The church at Antioch was blessed with a bunch of gifted leaders, who no doubt did valuable ministry at Antioch. Yet God called for two of them to be sent out on a mission to other areas. Are there times when we are tempted to hold on to resources for our local church that God might want to be used elsewhere?

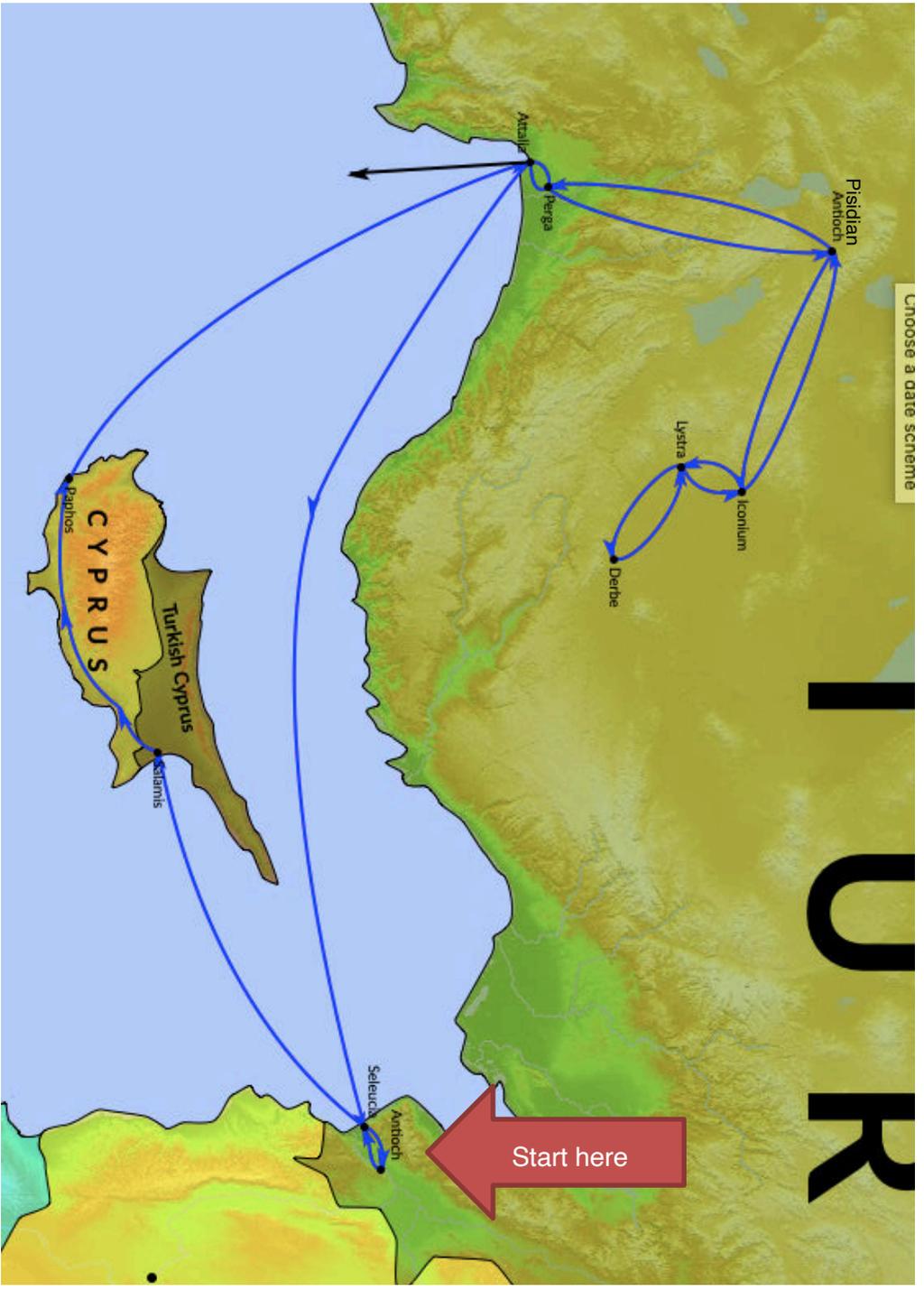
“Sent on their way by the Holy Spirit”, Paul, Barnabas and John Mark begin what has become known as “the first missionary journey” which continues until they return to Antioch at the end of chapter 14. See the map on following page.

Read Acts 13:4-12

6. When they arrived in the various towns on Cyprus, where did Paul and Barnabas first present their message? Why would they have done this?
7. In Paphos they encounter a character named “Bar Jesus”. What are we told about him?
8. What process led to the Roman proconsul believing the word of God?
9. How do you feel about Paul’s response to Bar-Jesus? Should we use this approach when we encounter opponents of the gospel? Why or why not?

10R

Choose a date scheme



Notes & Prayer Points

Study 6: Acts 13:13-52

Paul and Barnabas are travelling in what is now Turkey. (John left them in Paphos and we aren't told the reason. Paul was not pleased that he left them (Acts 15:37-38) but John later travelled and worked with Barnabas).

Pisidian Antioch (different to the Antioch they had set out from originally – see map on earlier page) was a Roman colony with a large Jewish population. The synagogue would have included God-fearers as well as ethnic Jews. Paul's practice was to begin his preaching in the local synagogue, where it was customary for travelling Rabbis to be invited to speak.

Read Acts 13:13-41

1. In verses 16-22, what key events from the Old Testament does Paul emphasise? What was the reason for going back over these events?
2. In verses 23-37 Paul talks about Jesus. What does he emphasise?
3. In verses 38-41 Paul reaches his main point of exhortation. What is the big take-home idea of his talk? What does he want his hearers to take hold of?
4. Why do you think Paul chose to finish with a quotation from Hab. 1:5?
5. How does Paul's message show sensitivity to his audience and the context he is in? In what relationships and situations do we need this same sensitivity?
6. List the different responses to the gospel that you see in this chapter (13:7-8; 42-48). How did Paul respond to those who rejected the gospel?

(vv 46 and 51). What does this tell you about Paul's missionary strategy?

7. Can you think of a time when you or someone you know was "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (v 52)? Maybe you could tell the group about it.

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 7: Acts 14:1-28

Read Acts 14:1-7

1. Locate the towns of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe on the map provided earlier. Describe the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium and its results. Why did they move on to Lystra and Derbe?

Read Acts 14:8-20

2. After you have read this story, turn it into a play. Choose people for Paul, Barnabas, the lame man, the crowd, the priest of Zeus and Jews from Antioch. Give the actors time to learn their parts then ask them stand up and re-enact this scene. Try to feel the emotions in this story.
3. Notice how Paul explained the gospel to the people of Lystra – he didn't quote from the Old Testament but rather spoke about the God of creation (14:15-17). Why would this be?
4. Based on how Paul and Barnabas responded to being seen as gods, how can we respond if this happens to us or when we are tempted to take credit for what God has done?

5. Timothy grew up in the city of Lystra. See Acts 16:1-2 and 2 Tim. 3:10-11. What effect do you think these events would have had on him?

Read Acts 14:21-28

6. There is no account of Paul's ministry in Derbe except that they won a large number of disciples. They then turned around and returned to Antioch through Lystra and Iconium. What did they emphasise to the young converts in each town along the way?
7. From there they returned to Antioch in Syria, having completed their first missionary journey. From what you have read in chapters 13 and 14 can you name the key elements in Paul's missionary strategy (that is, why did he do what he did)?
8. What can we learn from these strategies in communicating the gospel today?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 9: Acts 15:1-35

Read Acts 15:1-2

1. For the third time, the church in Antioch sends out Paul and Barnabas on a mission (see 11:27-30 and 13:2-3). What is the purpose of this journey?

Read Acts 15:3-5

2. Paul and Barnabas report how Gentiles have been turning to Christ. How do various groups react differently to this news?

3. Look back at Acts 11:1-2 and 11:15-18. How is this situation similar and different to the controversy back then?

Read Acts 15:6-11

4. How does Peter draw on his own previous experience in answering the objection of the Pharisee-Christians? What is the main point of his argument?
5. The Old Testament frequently refers to God's laws as a blessing to be treasured. In what sense can Peter describe it as a "yoke"?

6. One of the main concerns of the Mosaic law was *purity*. According to Peter, how are Jews and Gentiles actually purified?

Read Acts 15:12-21

7. How does James support Peter's argument? What do you think is the most important part of the quote from Amos 9?

8. James doesn't want to make it difficult for the Gentile Christians, or to require them to be circumcised, but then he turns around and tells them to abstain from certain things! What do you make of this? Shouldn't Peter's objections apply to James' rules also?!

Read Acts 15:22-35

9. How would you describe the tone of this letter?

10. What has been the end result of the trouble that was stirred up at Antioch by the visitors from Judea?

11. In what ways might we fall into similar errors as those Pharisaic Judean Christians? Are there ways in which we might expect to people to become 'genuine Christians' they need to become just like us? How can we avoid this error?

Series Conclusion

12. To finish the series, look back over chapters 9-15. Which passage has impacted you the most, and why? How have you been motivated to live differently as a result of these studies?

Notes & Prayer Points
