

# Acts 10:1-11:18 The Word to the World

According to Acts 1:1 this book is the second volume written by Luke. Both volumes are written to give us 'certainty' about the gospel message (Luke 1:1-4). In Luke's Gospel we see the Kingdom established, then in Acts we see the Kingdom extended. Acts is the account of what Jesus continued to do in the world, after he was taken up to heaven (Acts 1:1-8). It tells the story of how the gospel message spread, extending the rule of Jesus from Jerusalem, to the surrounding areas and ultimately to Rome (See 1:8 & 28:30-31).

By chapter 9 the church has been established in Judea, Galilee and Samaria (9:31), and Saul/Paul is converted and identified as God's instrument to take the gospel to the gentiles. The scene is set for the first gentiles (non-Jews) to turn to Jesus and be included in God's people.

1. Prejudice can be a significant barrier to us sharing the gospel with some people. What groups of people are we most likely to regard as being unlikely (or unworthy) to hear and respond to the message about Jesus?
  
2. **Read Acts 10:1-11:18.**
  - a. What are the main themes of this section? (ie. What does the author seem to particularly want us to see?)
  
  - b. In what ways do we see the hand of God in this?
  
  - c. Look closely at how Cornelius is described. What is significant about his conversion?

Note: John Stott says "It is difficult for us to grasp the impassable gulf which yawned in those days between the Jews... and the Gentiles... The tragedy was that Israel twisted the doctrine of election into one of favouritism, became filled with racial pride and hatred, despised Gentiles as 'dogs', and developed traditions which kept them apart. No orthodox Jew would ever enter the home of a Gentile, or even a God-fearer. or invite such into his home." (See also Galatians 2:11-16)

3. Although Cornelius and his household turn to Christ, much of this section is about the change God brought about in Peter. Look carefully at 10:34-43. What truths persuaded Peter that God doesn't show favouritism? Notice particularly v 36 (the summary of the gospel message), v 37-41 (the facts of the gospel), and v 42-43 (the divine interpretation/implication of the gospel).
  
4. How did Peter and the Jews with him know that God had accepted the Gentiles? (See esp 10:44-48 & Acts 2:4). Do you think the sign of languages is something we should expect in every conversion? Why or why not?
  
5. Why do you think it is important that it was Peter who was the first apostle to witness and accept the inclusion of Gentiles into Christ's kingdom, and not Paul?
  
6. In what ways does this passage give us confidence to work for the progress of the gospel today?
  
7. In what ways does this passage challenge our attitudes towards people of different race, nationality, social standing, religious background, sexual orientation, etc. (What kind of people do you think may find it difficult to 'fit in' here at Jannali Anglican?) What can we do to align ourselves with the God who doesn't show favouritism?
  
8. Having heard the message of Acts 10 & 11, what would be good to pray about? Pray together.

# Acts 11:19-12:25 Persecution and Progress

## 1. Read Acts 11:19-30.

- a. You saw that Christians from the church in Jerusalem were scattered by persecution (v19 & 8:1). How might you have felt about faith in God, and his work in the world?
- b. In what ways did the persecution lead to the progress of the gospel? To whom/what is this progress attributed?

## 2. Read Acts 12:1-25.

- a. James is dead. Peter is in prison. You're an ordinary Christian meeting in Mary's house. How would you feel?
- b. You're Peter. You've been chained between two soldiers, and suddenly you find yourself in the main street. What are you thinking?
- c. You're the ordinary Christian again and you've been praying in Mary's house. What is the content of your prayers? There's a knock on the door. Who do you expect it to be? Why? How do you feel when you realize that it is Peter?
- d. James dies. Peter lives. What do you think about this? What does this teach us about God, and our trust in him?
- e. Who is the real king in this story? And, according to v24, what is the real unstoppable force? (Compare Herod in 12:21-23 with Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:11-15).

3. What things limit our trust in God, and restrict our prayers?

4. How might this passage strengthen our faith, and therefore

- a) Our prayers
- b) Our evangelism
- c) Our giving to assist others in need?

5. In what ways might this passage be particularly important for our church at this time?

6. Pray together about what you have learnt or been reminded of from God's word.

# Acts 13:1-41 The Word in Asia (Part 1)

1. If you were asked to give a summary of the gospel message, what would you say?
2. In Acts 13 and 14 Paul (with Barnabas) sets out on his first missionary Journey. Read these verses and trace where they went on the map. What did they do as they went? How was God involved? Acts 13:1-3, 13:4-6a, 13:13-14, 13:51, 14:1-7, 14:19-21 & 14:23-28.



3. In Acts 13:16-41 we have a record of Paul's sermon in the synagogue Antioch (the one in Pisidia). It was probably preached around AD46-48. This is the first recorded sermon of the apostle Paul, and the first recorded Christian sermon outside of Israel. Presumably it is recorded here to give us the content of the "message" Paul preached in synagogues throughout his missionary trip. **Read Acts 13:16-41.** Try and analyse the sermon...
  - a. What are the main themes/points made in each section?
  - b. Who is the sermon primarily about and what is said about him?
  - c. What is the application/implication of the sermon?
  - d. How would you summarize the message of the sermon?
4. (If time permits) Look at these 3 passages quoted by Paul in their original contexts. How does each confirm/add to/deepen Paul's message about Jesus? Psalm 2:7-9, Psalm 16:9-11 & Isaiah 55:1-7.
5. Why do you think Paul's sermon here draws so deeply from the Old Testament? Although we, and those around us, are (mostly) not Jews steeped in the Old Testament, how might Paul's sermon help us to better understand, summarize and explain the gospel today?
6. How might a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the Old Testament help us in the Christian life?

# Acts 13-14 The Word in Asia (Part 2)

In the last study we began looking at Paul's (with Barnabas) first missionary trip, and we focused on the content of the message he preached. In this study we will think about what the text tells us about why and how the message spread so rapidly.

1. Read Acts 13:1-3. How was the first missionary journey initiated in (Syrian) Antioch?
2. Read what happened in each city and complete the table.

Passage	Place	What did P & B do	Problems Encountered	Who Believed	Outcome
Acts 13:4-12	Cyprus				
Acts 13:42-52	Antioch (Pisidian)				
Acts 14:1-7	Iconium				
Acts 14:8-20	Lystra				
Acts 14:21a	Derbe				

3. Now stand back and think about the patterns you have seen. Can you summarize the main themes of this section? I.e. How did the gospel spread? What happened as it did?

4. Read Acts 14:21b-28. Why do you think Paul and Barnabas returned the way they came, instead of taking the shortest way home (and through Tarsus – Paul's home town)?



5. What could we learn here about local & world mission and the role of local churches?

6. What implications might flow from this section for our church?

7. How might you respond to God in prayer as a result of reading Acts 13 & 14? Pray together.

# Acts 15:1-16:5 When Christians Disagree

1. Sometimes significant disputes and divisions occur in churches. To what extent do you think these can hinder the spread of the gospel? Have you seen any examples of this?
  
2. In Acts 13-14 the church in (Syrian) Antioch was leading the way in God's mission to the Gentiles. In chapter 15 an important issue arises that threatens to hinder the progress of the gospel. Read Acts 15:1-11.
  - a) What is the heart of the problem with the teaching described in verses 1 & 5?
  
  - b) Why might this teaching be powerful?
  
  - c) What argument does Peter use to refute the teaching?
  
  - d) Why was this such a big deal at the time? What was at stake?
  
3. In what ways do we see the message of salvation by grace alone coming under threat today? (ie. What rules/rituals/religion might **we** be tempted to think or imply will secure our Christian identity, assurance or greater maturity?)
  
4. Read Acts 15:12-35. Having just established that salvation is by grace and not by law keeping, why are the gentiles asked to abstain from certain things (v19-21)? Why seems to be the underlying principle being applied? What was the outcome?
  
5. Now read Acts 15:36-16:5. Two significant things happen here...
  - a. Why did Paul and Barnabas 'part company'? Did this hinder the gospel?
  
  - b. Having just established that gentiles don't need to be circumcised, why did Paul circumcise Timothy? Is this inconsistent? What seems to be the underlying principle?
  
6. As you reflect on this whole passage, what can we learn about how to respond when Christian disagree – both over 'gospel issues' and personal differences?
  
7. What would be good to pray about after reading this passage?

# Acts 16:1-17:15      The Word in Europe

1. What (in general) gives people courage and motivates them to make sacrifices?
2. Following the resolution of the Council in Jerusalem, Paul returned to Antioch, and together with Silas, set out on his 2<sup>nd</sup> great missionary journey. **Read Acts 16:1-17:15.**

As it is a long passage stop after each section to check the map and discuss

- a) How is God at work here?
- b) What do we learn here about Paul's message and his method?
- c) What patterns do you notice (eg. similar activities or outcomes)
- d) What strikes you as important or interesting?



As time permits...

3. What were the various charges laid against Paul and Silas? What were the real problems people had with them? In what ways do we see this kind of reaction to the gospel today?
4. In what ways do you see the new Christians responding in practical ways? In what ways do we see this kind of response today?
5. What can we learn from the example of the Bereans? How might this attitude be applied in our listening to sermons?
6. Why do you think Paul and Silas had such courage, and even joy, in the face of great opposition and physical persecution? How might we cultivate a similar courage and joy?  
(Can you see any clues in the passage itself? You might also like to consider Acts 9:11 & 14:22, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).
7. Why do you think Luke has recorded these things in the way that he has? (ie. What impact(s) do you think he wants his writing to have on us?)
8. What would be good to pray as a result of reading and discussing this passage?

# Acts 17:16-34 The Word in Athens



## Read Acts 17:16-34.

1. Why do you think what Paul saw in Athens moved him so deeply? What did this lead him to do?

2. What idols (god substitutes) do we see in our city today? How do you feel about these? What can we learn from Paul's response in Athens?

*"There were innumerable temples, shrines, statues and altars. In the Parthenon stood a huge gold and ivory statue of Athena... Elsewhere there were images of Apollo, the city's patron, of Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Bacchus, Neptune, Diana and Aesculapius. The whole Greek pantheon was there, all the gods of Olympus"*

John Stott (BST Commentary, page 277)

3. Paul is invited to speak in the Areopagus.

a. What do you think might be an equivalent setting today?

b. What does Paul's speech teach about

i. God?

ii. People?

iii. Idols?

c. What is the logic of the "therefore" in verse 30? (ie. how do verses 30 & 31 follow from verses 22-29?)

d. According to Paul, what does the resurrection of Jesus prove? What does it mean people should do?

e. What is the main message of the sermon? How would you summarize it?

4. What is similar or different to the way we have seen Paul preaching to Jewish people? (See for example 17:2-3).

5. What can we learn from this sermon about communicating the gospel to the different people around us today?

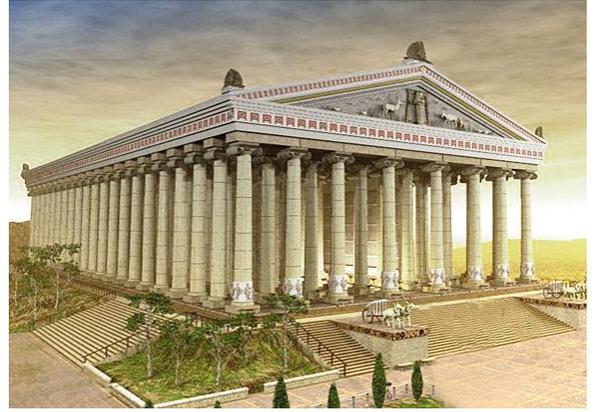
6. What has particularly 'struck you' from reading this passage? Pray together about these things.



# Acts 19 The Word in Ephesus

In Acts 19 Paul is on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey. He travels from Syrian Antioch, visiting existing churches (18:22-23), and overland to Ephesus (19:1). He had previously visited Ephesus on the return leg of his second journey, but didn't stay long (18:18-21). This time he stays for about 3 years.

Ephesus was a big commercial capital, and was famous for its religion. It boasted the temple of the Artemis – one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It was a city where all kinds of superstitions and occult practices flourished (perhaps accounting for the emphasis on powers and spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6?)



## Read Acts 19.

1. What impression do you get of the city of Ephesus? In what ways does it seem similar or different to Sydney?
2. What different activities and events led to the advance of the gospel, or growth in Christian discipleship? How does this encourage or challenge you?
3. Some parts of this chapter raise questions for readers today. If time permits you may want to reflect on these...
  - a. The 'disciples' who only knew of John's baptism in v1-7. Some argue that this teaches that we can experience a 'second baptism of the Holy Spirit', evidenced by speaking in 'tongues. Is this how we should understand this passage? Why or why not? (See also Rom 8:9-11 & Eph 1:13-14).
  - b. The miracles that accompanied Paul (v 11-12). Do you think we should expect this today? Why or why not? Notice what Paul himself says about these 2 Corinthians 12:12 & Romans 15:18-19?
4. In what ways does the gospel impact on the commerce and culture of the city? Do you think this is a good thing?
5. As in 18:12-17, once again we see the governing authorities protecting the Christians and enabling the gospel to continue to advance. Why do you think Luke records the incident with the silversmiths (19:23-41) at such length and detail? What does it teach us?
6. Paul spent a long time in Ephesus discussing (=arguing/reasoning) and persuading people about the things of the Kingdom of God. For 2 years he taught in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. The impact was powerful (v 10). What do you think we could learn about reaching our city and state with the message about the Lord?
7. Pray together about what you have discussed.

# Acts 20 Parting Words for the Church

In Acts 20 Paul travels from Ephesus (where he had stayed for 3 years) through Macedonia to Corinth, and back again. He is ultimately heading for Jerusalem with a collection for needy Christians there. On his way back to Jerusalem he meets with the elders of the church in Ephesus. Luke records his passionate words and the grief of his parting.



## Read Acts 20:1-16.

1. Why was Paul so committed to reaching Jerusalem (via Macedonia and Achaia)? (See Acts 19:21, 20:16, 24:17, Romans 15:25-29, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4)
2. What might we learn from the list of names in v 4-6? Why do you think these people travelled with Paul?
3. What insights do we gain from verses 7-12 about this early Christian gathering, the value placed on the apostle's teaching, and the restoration to life of Eutychus?

## Read Acts 20:17-38

4. What does Paul's speech to the elders of the church in Ephesus tell us about Paul's ministry in Ephesus? (Look especially for indications of his motives, method and message.)
5. What expectations does Paul have for the future – for himself, and for the church?
6. What therefore must the local elders do, and why?
7. Where is Paul's ultimate confidence for the future of the church?
8. From this whole passage, what should a church want its elders/shepherds/overseers to be and do?
9. How can we encourage our leaders in these things?
10. Pray together about what you have seen in God's word.

# Acts 21      Trouble in Jerusalem

In Acts 21 Paul travels from Miletus (where he met with the Ephesian elders) to Jerusalem. He is accompanied by Luke and by companions from various gentile churches. Luke tells us about the hospitality provided to him by fellow believers along the way, the warnings he received of what will happen to him, and then what actually does happen in Jerusalem. Once again, despite his best efforts, the apostle is rejected by the Jews, but protected by the gentile authorities.



## Read Acts 21:1-16.

1. Paul was repeatedly warned about what would happen to him in Jerusalem – even by the Holy Spirit – yet he kept going. Why? (see Acts 19:21, 20:22-24 & 24:17-18 & Romans 15:25-29).
2. Some people think that Paul was disobedient to 'the Spirit's leading' by continuing to Jerusalem. Do you think the text commends or condemns Paul for continuing?
3. In every town Paul is welcomed by Christian brothers and sisters (see v 4-5, 7, 8-9 and 15-16). Why do you think that Luke tells us about these people? What might we learn from this?

## Read Acts 21:17-36

4. Why does James suggest that Paul undergo a Jewish ceremonial ritual? Why would Paul go to such lengths to make himself acceptable to Jewish Christians? (See also 20:24, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 & 10:31-33).
5. What were the charges that the Jews brought against Paul? Were they true?
6. In what ways is what happens to Paul in this chapter, similar to what happened to Jesus? (See if you can find at least 5 parallels). What do you think we can conclude from noticing this?
7. In what ways would reading this chapter give the original readers of Acts 'certainty' (Luke 1:3-4) about the Christian faith? How might it encourage (or challenge) us today?
8. (If time permits) In this chapter we see Paul being both stubbornly determined, and graciously flexible. What principles can we apply to decide which approach is needed for a given issue or situation? What mistakes could we make? Can you think of examples where either approach is needed today?
9. Pray together about what you have heard from God and each other.

# Acts 22-23      On trial before the Jews

1. In what ways do we see the legitimacy or legality of the Christian faith being challenged today?

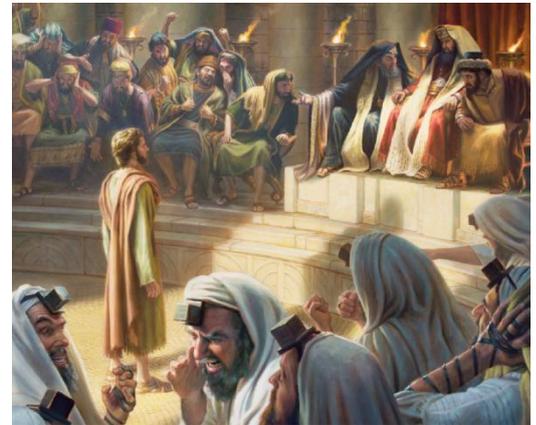
In Acts 22-26 we see the apostle Paul on trial first before Jews (Ch 22-23), then before the Romans (Ch 24-26). Before the Jews, Paul must establish that his ministry and his gospel is not an eccentric new thing, but the work of God in fulfilment of the Law and the prophets. In the face of Jewish hostility, Paul is not condemned and the Romans recognize that there is nothing against him.

2. **Read Acts 21:37-22:29.** As Paul speaks to the crowds from the temple steps...

- a. What themes does he seem most keen to emphasize?
- b. In what ways does Paul seek to 'connect' with his audience, helping them to listen to his defence? What might we learn from this for our own speaking about Jesus?
- c. Why do you think verse 21 is so offensive to the Jews? What does this reveal about their mindset?

3. **Read Acts 22:30-23:10.** The Roman commander (Claudius Lysias) tries again to understand what Paul has done wrong – sending him to be questioned by the Sanhedrin (the Jewish religious council).

- a. Do you think Paul was wrong to insult the high priest? How is Paul contrasted with him?
- b. Paul deliberately raises the issue of the resurrection from the dead. What do you think of this strategy? Was it contrary to what Paul has stood for in his preaching in Acts?



**Read Acts 23:11-35.**

4. How does this section summarize/portray consistent patterns we have seen through the book of Acts, and especially in chapters 21-23, regarding
  - a. The character of the Jews
  - b. The role of the Romans
  - c. The hand of God
  - d. The guilt or innocence of Paul
5. How would the words of verse 11 have given Paul courage and comfort? What promises of Scripture give you particular courage and comfort when things seem to be overwhelming?
6. In what different ways do chapters 22 & 23 help us to have confidence that Paul and his gospel are legitimate and legal, despite rejection by the Jews?
7. Pray together about what you have seen in God's word and discussed.

# Acts 24-26 On trial before the Gentiles

In Acts 22-26 we see the apostle Paul on trial first before Jews (Ch 22-23), then before the Romans (Ch 24-26). Through these trials there seem to be 3 main issues

1. Religious – Has Paul acted against Moses and the Prophets?
2. Political – Has Paul broken Roman law and/or been disloyal to Caesar?
3. Personal – Is Paul faithful to God and to his Lord Jesus?

This section is long, so try not to get ‘bogged down’ in one section, but be sure to move to question 4 when 10 minutes remain. For each trial (as time permits) answer these questions...

1. What accusations or questions are made or asked?
2. What is Paul’s defence/answer/tactic?
3. How does Paul use the opportunity to bear witness not just about himself, but to Jesus? What can we learn from Paul’s method and message?

## A. Read Acts 24 – On trial before Felix

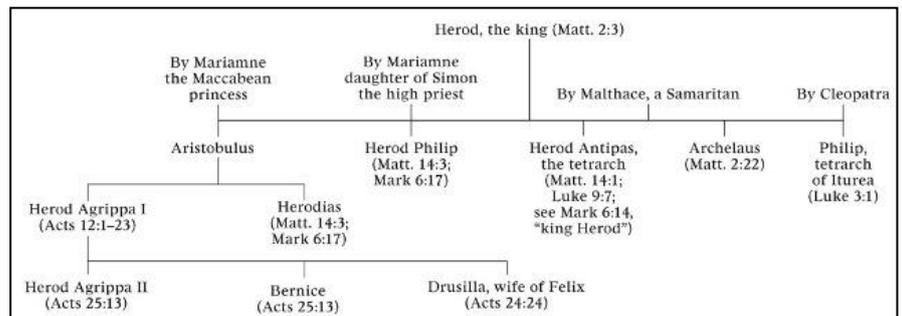
Marcus Antonius Felix was the Roman governor (or procurator) of Judea from AD52-59. His headquarters was a palace built in Caesarea by Herod the Great. He was known as a ruthless and cruel tyrant. Tacitus wrote of him “he exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave”. He married 3 times – all to daughters of Royal families. His wife in Acts 24 is Drusilla, the youngest daughter of King Herod Agrippa I. The Herods were a nominal Jewish family, who were thoroughly loyal to the Romans. At just 16 Drusilla had been promised to another man, but Felix (with the help of a Cyprian magician) persuaded her to leave her husband to be and become his third wife. Perhaps this is why Felix became afraid when Paul spoke of righteousness, self control and the judgment to come (24:25)!

## B. Read Acts 25:1-12 – On trial before Festus

Porcius Festus succeeded Felix as procurator of Judea in AD59, and served in that role for only 2or 3 years before he died. That’s about all we know about him!

## C. Read Acts 25:13-26:32 On trial before Agrippa

Herod Agrippa II was the son of the Herod Agrippa who was eaten by worms in Acts 12, and the great grandson of Herod the Great, who ordered the execution of the babies in Bethlehem after Jesus was born. Being only young when his father died, Roman procurators took over responsibility for Judea, and



Herod was given responsibility for a more manageable territory to the north. His family had Jewish connections, and from AD 48-66 he had the responsibility of appointing (and deposing) the high priests of Israel. Being somewhat of an expert in Jewish matters, Festus was pleased to have Herod Agrippa assist with judging Paul. Also in attendance was his sister, Bernice, with whom there were rumours of an incestuous relationship. His other sister was Drusilla, wife of Felix.

4. Through this whole section, Luke emphasizes that Paul could not be condemned (23:29; 25:5,8,10-11,20,25; 26:31-32). How does this help us to trust Jesus today?
5. If time permits – In chapter 26 Luke records Paul’s account of his conversion for the third time (also in Chapters 9 & 22). Why do you think Luke would repeat this 3 times?
6. What would be good to pray in response to what God has shown you tonight in his word? Pray together now.