

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a mountain range. The sky is a gradient from light blue at the top to bright yellow and orange near the horizon, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The mountains are silhouetted against this light, with some showing more detail in the foreground. In the bottom right corner, a small silhouette of a hiker with a backpack and a walking stick is visible on a ridge.

MISSION UNSTOPPABLE

Studies in Acts 8-18

Bathurst Presbyterian Church 2018

As we discovered in term 2, book of Acts is all about the ongoing work of the risen Christ. We learnt of King Jesus' plan to extend his kingdom to the ends of the earth through the spread of the news about him. In our previous series the news about Jesus has been confined to Jerusalem however **in Acts 8-18 the gospel now breaks out of Jerusalem to spread through Judea, Samaria and even to the gentile nations.** In these chapters we'll uncover just how unstoppable Jesus' mission is.

As with any study, you'll get the most out of them if you're able to read the relevant passage and answer the questions before your group meets. That will also equip you to best encourage the others in your group with what you say. However, if some weeks you don't get to prepare, please don't use that as an excuse to not go along. Just being there is a great way of showing the group that they're important to you. Plus, the studies are designed to be useful even if you're thinking about them for the first time at your group.

Each study firstly works through the verses (section by section) so as to help build an understanding of what the overall passage means. The study then ends with a "Think it through" section in which practical applications are considered. All the studies match the Bible talks on Sunday and are designed so they can be done either before or after hearing the talk. The only exception is study 8. This is an extension study into Acts 17-18 which, because of time constraints, will only be dealt with briefly in the sermon series.

Acts 8

Read Acts 8:1-3

1. Skim back over the main events of the previous few chapters. Imagine you are a Christian during the time of Acts. How would you be feeling at the beginning of Acts 8?
2. What negative things did the death of Stephen result in?
3. Why do you think the apostles stayed in Jerusalem?
4. What more do we discover about Saul in these verses? What impression is building of this man? (keep this answer in mind for the next study)

Read Acts 8:4-25

5. What positive thing resulted from the death of Stephen? In particular how are verses 1 & 4 especially significant because of what Jesus had said in 1:8?
6. What did Simon get wrong?
7. Why do you think the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria?
8. Why do you think the Holy Spirit had not come upon any of the people prior to the arrival of Peter and John?

Read Acts 8:26-40

9. Who does Philip tell the gospel to this time? What things do we know about this person? Why do you think Luke singles out this event to tell us?

10. What do we learn about the risen Christ from what Philip tells the eunuch?

Think it through

- In what ways do we see the sovereignty of God operating in Acts 8? How is this an encouragement to us?
- Rejoicing and joy are often associated with conversions in Acts (eg 8:8,39). So often in our lives this initial joy seems to subside with time. Why do you think that is and how can we help each other prevent it?
- With the persecution that rises up after Stephens death, God takes a bad situation and used it for his own purposes. Can you think of instances when God has done that in your own live?
- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Give thanks that king Jesus is determined for his kingdom to continue to grow even in the midst of persecution.

Acts 9

Read Acts 9:1-2

1. How would you describe Saul in these verses? What do we already know of Saul before Acts 9?

Read Acts 9:3-9

2. Twice Jesus accuses Saul of persecuting Him. How was Saul doing that?

3. How would you describe Saul now?

Read Acts 9:10-25

4. Jesus has a job for Ananias. How does Ananias feel about it?

5. Jesus has a job for Saul. Describe it in your own words.

6. How would you describe Saul now?

Read Acts 9:26-31

7. How would you describe Saul now?

8. Summarise the change that happens to Saul in this chapter. What does this show us about the risen Jesus?

9. In what way is v31 a fitting summary for the story for Saul?

10. In what ways is v31 a fitting summary for the whole of Acts so far?

Think it through

- "If God can forgive Saul, he can forgive anyone!" Do you think that's true? In what ways do we sometimes limit God's grace?

- Paul would often write about his conversion in his letters. Look at the following references. In each case what valuable lesson does Paul draw from his conversion?

1 Corinthians 15:3-11

Galatians 1:11-24

- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Share the names of people you know who aren't Christians yet. Spend time praying for them and rejoice that God can save *anyone*.

Acts 10:1-11:18

Read Acts 10:1-23

1. What things do we discover of Cornelius in these verses?
2. Why do you think Cornelius' may have needed a vision to encourage him to invite Peter?
3. Describe in your own words the content of Peter's vision? (if you're artistic have a go at drawing it)

Read Acts 10:24-48

4. What lesson does Peter say he learnt from his vision of the foods?
5. How does Peter live this lesson out in these verses?
6. Peter tells Cornelius all about Jesus, the climax of the speech coming in v43. Why does the word "everyone" have special significance in v43? (see also how Peter starts his speech in v34-35)
7. How do the gentiles present respond to Peter's message? How do the jews present respond?

Read Acts 11:1-18

9. Why is Peter criticised by the believers in Jerusalem?

10. What does Peter say in response to the criticism?

11. In describing these events, Luke repeats a lot of details from the previous chapter. Why do you think he does that?

Think it through

- Peter came to realise that "God does not show favoritism." (10:34) In what ways do we sometimes show favoritism?

- When do you think friendship can drift into favoritism?

- Do you think there might be some things we do as a church (or a small group) which exclude others? How might we address these things?

- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Give thanks that God does not show favoritism but wants everyone to be saved. Pray we might have the same desire.

Read Acts 12:20-25

7. Compare the attitude of Herod (12:21-23) with that of Peter (10:25-26)?

8. Which King is victorious, Herod or the risen Christ? (don't be afraid to say the obvious, it's not a trick question!). Why do you think Luke spends so much time telling us about Herod?

Think it through

- So far in Acts we have seen that the risen Christ is powerfully committed to saving all types of peoples. To what extent do you share this desire? What are ways that we can encourage each other to share Jesus' determination?
- Barnabas has been popping up within Acts a few times now. Skim back over the following verses and see what type of person he is (4:36-37, 9:26-28, 11:22-26, 12:25). In what ways is Barnabas a good example for us?
- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Give thanks for Jesus' authority as the King of Kings. Pray that we might follow him with the humble obedience he deserves.

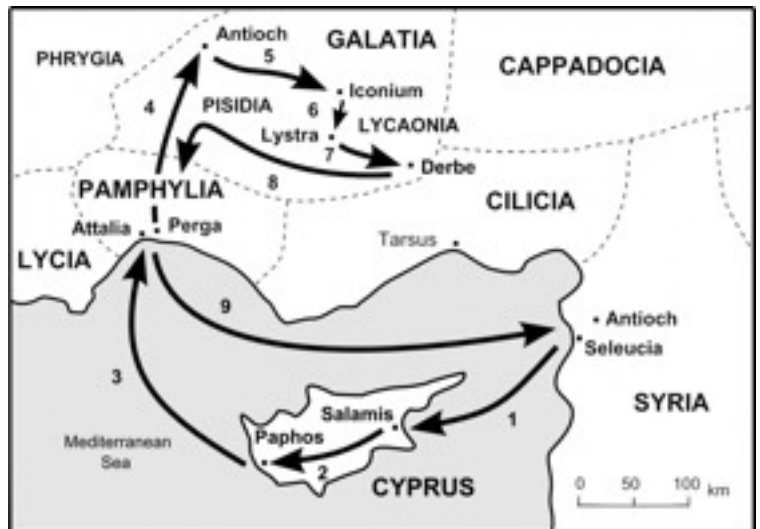
Acts 13-14

Re- read Acts 11:19-29 as well as Acts 13:1-3.

1. What impression do you have of the church at Antioch?

Read Acts 13:4-12

2. Follow Paul & Barnabas' route on the map opposite. Why do you think they headed for Cyprus first? (have a look back at 4:36 & 11:19-20).



3. It's ironic that Paul is now the one being used by God to strike blind those who oppose the work of the risen Christ (compare 13:11 & 9:8). What does this show about the risen Christ?

Read Acts 13:13-52

4. Continue to follow Paul & Barnabas' route on the map. Luke spends much space telling us Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch. What do we discover from Paul's speech about Jesus' place in God's plans? (see esp v23, 32)

5. In his speech, Paul quotes several sections from the Old Testament. What is his point in each case?

Psalm 2 is quoted in v33

Isaiah 55 is quoted in v34

Psalm 16 is quoted in v35

Habakkuk 1 is quoted in v41

Isaiah 49 is quoted in v47

6. How do the different groups of people respond to Paul's message? How do these reactions fit with God's plans for Paul (cf 9:15)

Read Acts 14

7. Continue to follow Paul & Barnabas' route on the map. In what ways are their experiences in Pisidian Antioch repeated in other towns?
8. What impression do you get of Paul from his behaviour in v19-20?
9. Skim back over their trip and list all the different ways we have seen Jesus to be in charge.

Think it through

- Imagine you were Paul. How do you think you'd be feeling at the end of this trip? Why?
- Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch emphasised how Jesus is at the centre of all God's plans. Why is it important to therefore keep Jesus at the centre of our plans as well? What practical ways can we help each other do that?
- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Give thanks that Jesus is at the very centre of all God's plans and ask that we might help each other keep Jesus at the centre of our plans.

Acts 15:1-35

Read Acts 15:1-21

1. What problem comes to the fore following Paul's and Barnabas' trip? (13:39, 15:1,5)
2. Do you think this is a serious issue?
3. What does Peter say regarding the necessity of gentiles to be circumcised? (v6-11)
4. What do you think Paul & Barnabas would have said regarding the necessity of gentiles to be circumcised? (v2,12)
5. What does James say regarding the necessity of gentiles to be circumcised? (v13-21)

Read Acts 15:22-35

6. What conclusion do the apostles and elders come to?
7. How is this conclusion communicated?

8. It's an interesting feature of the Council at Jerusalem that, having made it very clear the gentiles are not saved by being circumcised but by the grace of God through the forgiveness of sins, they then go on to urge gentile believers to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. This is most likely out of pastoral concern, so that there might be no unnecessary barriers to fellowship between gentile and jewish Christians (v21). Do you think this was a good idea?
9. How was the decision received in the Antioch church?

Think it through

- Its not mentioned here in Acts but it's about this time that Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians. It seems that the men mentioned in 15;1 (or at least people like them) had followed Paul and Barnabas around on their previous trip (study 5), telling the new believers they should be circumcised. When Paul hears about this he wrote of the letter of Galatians. Read Galatians 2:11-21. What new facts does this add to the events of Acts 15?
- In ways does Gal 2:15-16 provide a good summary of the issues raised at the Council in Jerusalem.
- If we're saved by what Jesus does and not what we do, what does it matter at all how we behave? Why can't we just keep sinning?
- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

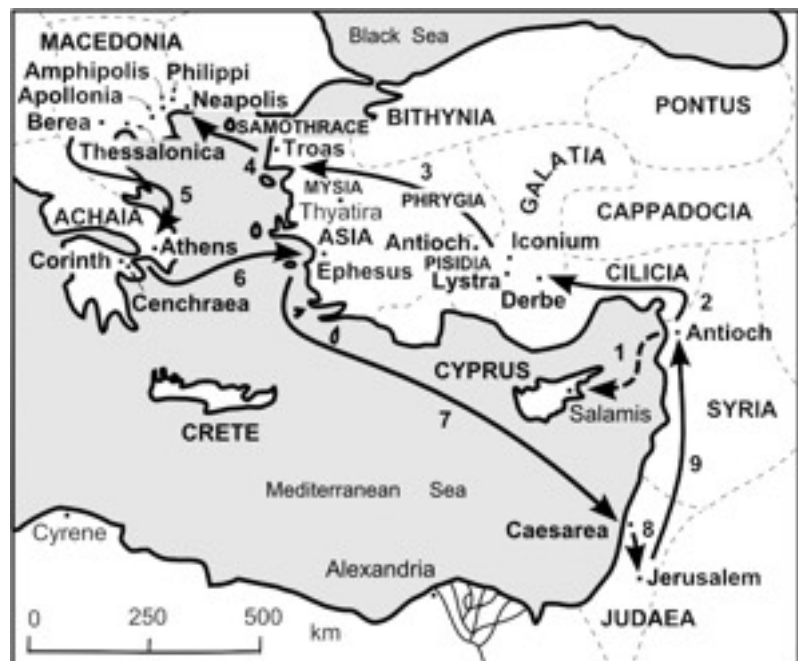
Give thanks that we are saved by God's grace alone and not by having to earn it.

Acts 15:36-16:40

In this study Paul heads off on another journey in order to tell more people about Jesus. Along the way we get to see some of the most significant events which happen to him. In this study we're going to focus on events in Philippi. In the next study we quickly look at events in Thessalonica, Athens and Corinth. In each case we discover something exciting about the risen Christ.

Read Acts 15:36-16:12

1. What is Paul's reason for heading off on another trip? Why might this have been especially important given the events of the Council of Jerusalem (see previous study)?
2. Why does Paul circumcise Timothy? Isn't this inconsistent with what he'd been arguing at the Council of Jerusalem in the previous study?
3. Follow on the map the route taken by Paul & Timothy. List the ways in which it is obvious that Jesus is directing where Paul should travel?



Acts 17:1-18:22

In this study we continue with Paul on his second journey. It's an especially good opportunity to read about some of the places we didn't have time to look at during the Bible talk.

THESSALONICA Read Acts 17:1-15

1. Look back at the map in the previous study and again follow Paul's route. What words are used to describe the way in which Paul shared the gospel at Thessalonica? (v2-4) What do these words tell us about the nature of the gospel?
2. What range of reactions does the gospel receive in both Thessalonica and Berea? How reasonable do you think each of these reactions are?
3. How long did Paul spent in Thessalonica? Given the events of his stay what do you think might be the dangers and challenges for the new church there?
4. Why do you think we are specifically told that in both cities prominent women and God-fearing Greeks believed? (v4, 12).

ATHENS Read Acts 17:16-32

5. Look back at the map in the previous study and again follow Paul's route. What was it about seeing idols that would have made Paul feel so distressed? (v16)
6. What does Paul's distress cause him to do? What reactions does he receive?

7. Most of Luke's description of Paul's visit to Athens is taken up with Paul's speech. Have a go at writing a short summary of it.

CORINTH Read Acts 18:1-22

8. Look back at the map in the previous study and again follow Paul's route. It is during his time in Corinth that Silas and Timothy rejoin Paul with good news from Thessalonica. The encouragement that Paul receives from this news (see 1 Thess 3:6-10) seems to be the trigger for Paul to go full time at gospel preaching. How do the Jews react to Paul's preaching? Why shouldn't this surprise us?

9. Why do think the risen Christ choose this specific moment to comfort Paul with words of protection in v9-10?

10. What do you think of Gallio's attitude towards the Jew's complaint about Paul?

Think it through

- Some people suggest that Paul's speech at Athens is a good model for our own evangelism. What do you think?
- As Paul wandered around Athens he was distressed at all their idols. If Paul was to wander through your home what idols might he see there? How distressed are you about them?
- Do you think God's promise to Paul in 18:9-10 has any implications for us?
- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Give thanks that the true and living God has made himself known to us through Jesus.