



ACTS

15-23

Gosford
PRESBYTERIAN
Church

Introduction

We are picking up our study in Acts after the Jerusalem Council. In the previous section, we saw how Paul moved through Galatia and how the gospel was opposed by those insisting on Jewish traditions. This culminated in the Jerusalem Council, which addressed whether Gentile believers needed to observe the law, particularly circumcision.

The Council resolved not to burden Gentile believers beyond a few key requirements (Acts 15:29). What emerges is a faith that is no longer defined by Jewish boundary markers, and which begins to spread more widely under Roman oversight. In the following chapters, we see the gospel continue to grow, often in unexpected ways and despite ongoing opposition.

Studies prepared by Jason Forbes.

Study 1 Acts 15:36–16:15

Life is messy, and so is gospel ministry. Just when we think things are going well, unexpected things can happen, and we are quickly revising our plans. This study shows that gospel ministry can often happen, not despite our messiness, but because of it.

Understanding the Text

(What is God doing and where is this going?)

1. How does the Spirit guide the mission, and what is surprising about the way that guidance happens (Acts 16:6–10)?
2. Why does Paul have Timothy circumcised, and how does this relate to the decision made in Acts 15?
3. What is significant about the move into Macedonia and the response of Lydia?
4. What does this passage show about how the gospel advances (e.g., through direction, flexibility, or unexpected people)?

Study 2 Acts 16:16-40

We can easily get things confused. We often mistake one thing for another. The same can happen with the gospel. People can end up seeing it as an opportunity to make money. In this study, we see that the gospel is anything but, and it is spiritually dangerous to confuse the Gospel with other things.

Understanding the Text

(What is God doing and where is this going?)

1. What is significant about the way the gospel first appears in this passage (16:16–17)?
2. How do the different characters (owners, crowds, magistrates, jailer) respond to the gospel (vv. 19, 22, 33, 35)?
3. What does this passage show about the authority and nature of the gospel?

9. What might it look like for the gospel to disrupt systems we benefit from?

10. How can we respond like the jailer—moving from fear to trust and transformation?

Pray

Pray for link missionaries Rick and Kayleen Manton, serving in Indigenous Ministry with APWM.

Pray for SRE classes in Narara Public School.

Study 3 Acts 17:1-15

In our last study, we saw how the gospel is different to everything else. The Jews are increasingly recognising what the gospel implies—and are becoming more active in opposing it. In this study, we start to see the opportunities that this opposition creates to take the gospel even further.

Understanding the Text

(What is God doing and where is this going?)

1. How do we see the gospel being proclaimed (vv. 2, 10)?
2. What were the responses (vv. 4, 12)?
3. What opposition was there (vv. 5–9, 13)?
4. What does this indicate about the Gospel?

Study 4 Acts 17:16–33

So far in Acts, the gospel has largely been proclaimed within Jewish contexts, particularly in the synagogues. But Jesus' commission was never limited to this. In this study, we see what happens when the gospel is brought into a completely different cultural and philosophical setting—and how it is both connected to and distinct from what people already believe.

Understanding the Text

(What is God doing and where is this going?)

1. Where is the gospel being proclaimed? What's the same and what's different? Why might it not be expected (vv. 17, 19)?
2. How are people responding? Are there any differences to what has been seen already (vv. 18, 19, 32–33)?
3. How does Paul relate the gospel (vv. 22–31)?
4. What does this indicate about the Gospel?

Relating to Other Scripture

(Where else do we see this pattern?)

5. How does this passage complicate our expectations from Acts 1:8?

6. How might Paul's approach be similar to Jesus' approach with the Roman Centurion (Luke 7:1–10)?

7. How do these Old Testament passages help us understand God's intention for the nations? (Gen 12:3; 1 Ki 8:41–45; Isa 2:2–3; 42:6; 49:6; 52:10; 56:6–7; 60:3)?

Application

(How do we live this out?)

8. What are some helpful ways that we have heard the gospel being related?

9. What's been a helpful way for you?

10. In what ways can you relate the gospel?

Pray

Pray for Rob and El Falls, serving at the Talua Theological Training Institute in Vanuatu.

Pray for SRE classes in Lisarow and Ourimbah Public Schools.

5. How does this fulfill Jesus words (Matt 16:18)?

6. What does this mean for God's promises (Gen 12:1–3).

Application

(How do we live this out?)

7. Is there opposition to the gospel today, if so, how?

8. How do you see the gospel continuing to be proclaimed?

9. What bearing should this have on the way you live now?

Pray

Pray for our link missionaries Igal and Milana Vender, serving with International Mission to Jewish People (IMJP) in Tel Aviv, Israel.
Pray for SRE classes in Point Clare Public School.

Study 6 Acts 19

Not only does the proclamation of the Gospel grow, it also disrupts. In this study, we see the gospel powerfully entering a new region, and the disruption that comes with it.

Understanding the Text

(What is God doing and where is this going?)

1. What are the indicators that the gospel is being proclaimed in a new area (vv. 5–6, 11–12)?
2. How is the gospel being proclaimed (vv. 1, 8)?
3. What's the response to the gospel (vv. 9–10)?
4. How is the gospel unique to any other spiritual practice (vv. 11–19)?

5. What happens when the uniqueness of the Gospel is made known (v. 20)?

6. What's the main concern in Ephesus?

Relating to Other Scripture

(Where else do we see this pattern?)

7. How does this develop Acts 1:8?

8. How does this resonate with Jesus' concern for his father's house to be a place of prayer (Luke 19:46)?

9. What does this tell us about God (Isa 42:8)?

Application

(How do we live this out?)

10. How might the gospel be confused with other things today?

11. Are there things that you have confused the gospel with, or might be confusing with now?

Pray

Pray for our link missionaries James and Christina Thomas serving with Global Recordings Network.

Pray for SRE classes in Kariong Public School.

Study 7 Acts 20

Not only does the gospel need to grow, but those who believe in it need to be strengthened. In this study, we see how Paul strengthens the church, and the reasons for it.

Understanding the Text

(What is God doing and where is this going?)

1. Paul spends a lot of time with churches that have been established. What do you think his intention is?
2. Why would this be necessary (vv. 23, 25, 28)?
3. How is Paul an example to follow (vv. 25–31)?
4. What does this say about Gentiles in relation to the Church?

5. How do church leaders respond (vv. 36–38)?

Relating to Other Scripture

(Where else do we see this pattern?)

6. How does this passage complicate our expectations from Acts 1:8?

7. How are Paul's actions similar to Jesus' (Luke 21:34–22:2)?

8. How does this parallel the Old Testament (for example, Deut 30:15–20; Josh 23:1–24:28; 1 Sam 12)?

Application

(How do we live this out?)

9. What are some things that can trip us in our Christian faith?

10. How has God strengthened us to avoid being tripped up?

Pray

Pray for our link missionary organisation the Bible Society.
Pray for SRE classes in Gosford Public School.

Study 8 Acts 21:1–36

Throughout Acts, opposition to the Gospel has been steadily mounting. In this study, this opposition reaches a critical point as warnings are received concerning Paul's welfare. Nonetheless, the Disciples and Apostles stay true to their cause as they continue to proclaim the Gospel.

Understanding the Text

(What is God doing and where is this going?)

1. Who is guiding the mission and in what direction (vv. 4, 11–13)?
2. What is Paul advised to do, and why (vv. 20–24)?
3. Does this mean that the resolution of the Jerusalem Council no longer applies (v. 25)?
4. Even though Paul has observed purity regulations (v. 26), he is still opposed by the Jews. What's the real issue (v. 31)?

5. Why do you think people were saying different things about Paul (v. 34)?

Relating to Other Scripture

(Where else do we see this pattern?)

6. The disciples have been told that they will be Jesus witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). How do these events clarify the message of Jesus?
7. How do these events parallel Jesus trial (Luke 22:66–23:16)?
8. How are these events consistent with Stephen’s speech (Acts 7:2–53)?

Application

(How do we live this out?)

9. What responses might people have to the gospel today?

10. What might be the reasons?

11. How can this give the gospel clarity?

Pray

Pray for our link missionaries Matt and Mel Crocker as they serve at Grace Presbyterian Church in Wallsend.

Pray for SRE classes in East Gosford Public School.

Study 9 Acts 21:37–22:29

In this study, this opposition begins to culminate, responses are formed and positions become clearer, and people's true agendas are exposed. Yet the gospel continues to grow, and opportunities come from an unlikely source.

Understanding the Text

(What is God doing and where is this going?)

1. Who appears to be directing the mission (21:39, 40; 22:22)?
2. Why do you think Paul identity matters (21:39)?
3. Why do the crowd respond to Paul in the way that they do after he has spoken to them (22:22–23)?

4. What does Paul's appeal to his Roman citizenship reveal about how God is preserving the mission in this moment?

Relating to Other Scripture

(Where else do we see this pattern?)

5. How does this passage complicate our expectations from Acts 1:8?
6. How is this similar to Jesus' ministry (Matt 15:21–28)?
7. What implications might this have for God's promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3)?

Study 10 Acts 22:30–23:35

In this study, we see the circumstances of Paul's arrest. But instead of impeding the growth of the gospel, we see how these circumstances create further opportunities for the gospel to be proclaimed.

Understanding the Text

(What is God doing and where is this going?)

1. Who is directing the mission (23:11)?
2. How will this mission be accomplished (22:30; 23:23–35)?
3. How does Paul's statement about the resurrection expose the Jewish traditions (23:7–10)?
4. What is the real intention of the Jews (23:12–15)?

5. How are the plans of the Jews thwarted (23:16–22)?

Relating to Other Scripture

(Where else do we see this pattern?)

6. How is this fulfilling Jesus' instructions to his disciples (Acts 1:8)?

7. How do these events parallel Jesus' trial (Luke 22:66–23:35)?

8. Where else in Scripture has God worked through governing authorities (for example Gen 40; 41; Esther 4:12–14; 6:14–7:6)?

Application

(How do we live this out?)

9. Are you aware of any examples of how God has worked through government authorities?

10. Can we expect God to work through government authorities today, and what does that mean for us?

Pray

Pray for link missionary Rhys Ewing, serving with AFES at Newcastle University.

Pray for SRE classes in Kulnura and Peats Ridge Public Schools.

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