



**A series of studies
in the book of Acts
Chapters 10-28**

St Alban's Press

The Unstoppable Gospel

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Source material & helpful commentaries:

- The Message of Acts John RW. Stott
- The Acts of the Apostles David G. Peterson
- Teaching Acts David Cook
- Acts Bruce Milne
- From Pentecost to Patmos Craig L. Blomberg
- Mission Unstoppable Booklet Matthias Media

Background Information

1. Authorship

The Book of Acts was written by Luke, the author of the gospel by the same name. Luke was a Dr, evangelist, missionary and historian. Acts is part of a two volume set comprising 'Luke– Acts'.

The opening verses of the Gospel of Luke say, *'...I too decided to write an orderly account for you most excellent, Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.'*

Luke 1.3-4.

The name 'Theophilus' means 'one who loves God'. Some have suggested Luke may have used this name, as a way of addressing anyone who loved God rather than a specific gentile Christian. Most commentators recognize Theophilus as a new believer, wrestling with his faith. It was probably written between 63-65 AD.

2. Purpose

Luke tells us his purpose when he says, he has written so that *'we may know the certainty of the things taught'* ie. about Jesus and the mission of the church.

John Stott, suggests Luke wrote with three purpose in mind:

i. Historian: to convey the facts. He was in a good position to do this as he travelled with Paul as an eye witness on many of his missionary journeys.

ii. A diplomat. As you read through Acts repeatedly it shows that the Romans had no issue with Jesus or his followers. The Roman authorities saw it as 'religio licita'. It was not a new religion but as a form of Judaism, was free to be practiced. That was Luke's political apologetic, but he also wrote as a 'religious' apologetic to explain the tension between the church and the Jewish community. He wrote to defend Paul against Jewish Christian criticism of his mission to the Gentiles. He also wanted to demonstrate the parallel yet different ministries Paul had to the Gentiles and Peter had to the Jews.

iii. Evangelist/Theologian:

Without a doubt Luke wrote a reliable and faith historical narrative so that people might have confidence in the facts and come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Luke presents a gospel that is historical, a salvation that has been prepared by God (in the Old Testament), a salvation that is bestowed by Jesus Christ. Jesus is the central character in both 'Luke –Acts' and salvation alone comes through him. And thirdly, a salvation that is offered to all people through the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ through the Church.

3. Structure of Acts

The book of Acts is essentially about the outworking of Jesus' commission to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1.8) With this in mind Luke focusses on the ministry of Peter & Paul who work in tandem but essentially different mission fields.

The Narrative Structure

	Dominant Apostle	Evangelistic Target
Acts 1-7	Peter	Jerusalem
Acts 8-12	Peter	Jews, Samaritans, God-fearers.
Acts 13-28	Paul	Gentiles (but Jews first)

Source: D. Cook p16

Time Line of Acts

A.D. 30	Founding of Church in Jerusalem (Acts 1-2)
32-35	Paul's Conversion (Acts 9)
34-37	Paul's first visit to Jerusalem (Acts 9.26f)
43 or 46	Famine relief sent to Jerusalem from Antioch (Acts 11.27f)
46 or 47	First missionary journey (Acts 13-14)
48	Apostolic Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15)
48-51	Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15.36– 18.22)
50	Paul reaches Corinth (Acts 18)
53	Third Missionary Journey begins (Acts 18.23)
54-57	Paul stays at Ephesus (Acts 19)
57-58	Paul in Greece (Acts 20)
58 (June)	Paul reaches Jerusalem (Acts 21)
58-60	Imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 24-26)
60-61	Appeal to Caesar—voyage to Rome (Acts 27)
61-63	Imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28.30)
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64	Great Fire of Rome & Nero's persecution
64-67 approx.	Paul & Peter executed in Rome?

How to make the most of this study?

This series is focussing on Acts Chapters 10-28, with an introductory study on Acts Chapters 1-9 to help set the scene and give the background to all that follows.

Each study will cover multiple chapters of the book of Acts which is historical narrative in style.

The format for each study will be:

- i. Read the text—which may be 2-3 chapters in length.
- ii. Apply the Swedish Method to reviewing the Chapters involved.
- iii. Consider the additional questions provided.
- iv. Pray as each group decides is appropriate, but having identified at least 1 important application.

A Vision for Personal Spiritual Growth



- Expectations - Evaluation — Consequences
- How are you going spiritually?
- What has God been teaching you from his word lately?

Study 1.**The Unstoppable Gospel****'You shall be my witnesses....'****Acts 1.1-4.31**

1. All the evidence (ie. NCLS etc) suggests that most Christians struggle to be bold witnesses for Jesus.
Do you agree? What do you think holds us back from being more courageous in our speaking of Jesus and matters of faith with others?

Read Acts 1.1-4.31

Anything that 'shines' from the passage for you, jumps out at you, strikes you, etc



Anything hard to understand or any questions?



What does the passage teach us about Jesus or how does it point to him?



What is the application/s for your life from the passage?

Study 1 - Questions

1. How does Luke affirm the authority of the apostles in Acts 1.1-4? Why is this significant?
2. Jesus said the Holy Spirit was promised. Can you find verses in the Old & New Testament that are examples of this promise?
3. What was the primary purpose of the giving of the Holy Spirit?
1.8
4. What qualification was necessary for the replacement person for Judas to have? 1.21-22 Why is this important?
5. Write a short summary of Peter's 'gospel' in 2.22-36. Is it different or have a different emphasis to the way we normally speak about Jesus? Explain.
6. Do you think we fail to call people to repentance when we preach/present the gospel? If so why?
7. What are the features of the early church—highlighted in 2.42-47. Is that a good model for us today? Where are we different to them in our practice of the faith?
8. How is Peter's preaching (Ch. 3.11-26) a fulfillment of Jesus promise in Acts 1.8?
9. Do you believe 4.12? That salvation is found in no one else or by no other name than Jesus? If you answer yes, how do you explain our reluctance to speak his name with others?
10. Peter & John were 'ordinary & unschooled men' 4.13 yet showed great courage. What can we learn from their example. Is there anything we can do to develop greater courage and boldness in our own witness?

Study 2.**The Unstoppable Gospel****'No Favouritism' - Acts 10.1-11.18**

1. Why do we dislike prejudice or favouritism? Can you think of examples in society today? What are some of the negative consequences of either prejudice or favouritism?

Background: In the unfolding drama of Acts, the gospel has gone to Jerusalem through the ministry of Peter. In chapter 7 came the martyrdom of Stephen and as a result of further persecution the gospel begins to go out into Samaria (Ch. 8)

In Ch. 9 the main architect of the persecution, Saul is converted. In chapters 10-12 we continue to witness the ministry of Peter in taking the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.

Read Acts 10.1-11.18

Anything that 'shines' from the passage for you, jumps out at you, strikes you, etc



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What is the application/s for your life from the

Study 2 - Questions

1. What do we know about Cornelius?
Do you think there are many people you know who are like Cornelius? Do you think they recognize they are not right with God? What needs to happen for them to be saved?
2. How does this story illustrate the fact that mission is neither all of God nor all of 'man' - that gospel ministry is about a divine partnership. What part does God play? What part do we?
3. Why was the sheet with clean and unclean animals and the command to eat such a shock for Peter? (Lev.11)
4. In 9.43, 10.6 & 10.32 we are told where Peter is living. Why is it significant that he should receive such a vision in such a house?
5. How did Peter justify his actions? What convinced his audience that he must be right?
6. How did the brethren respond in the end? (11.18)
7. Why do you think accepting uncircumcised Gentiles into the church was such a challenge to the early church?
8. Are there any barriers or prejudices in our church that may stop or hinder people coming to faith in Lindfield? Are there prejudices we need to repent of?
9. What had to happen before Cornelius household could be saved and receive the Holy Spirit? What does this have to teach us?
10. Ask God to show you if there is someone he wants you to speak to this week?

Study 3.**The Unstoppable Gospel****'The Hand of God' - Acts 11.19-12.24**

1. Do you think we sometimes forget God is working out his plans—even if we can't see it? Why are we so forgetful or what makes us doubt?

Read Acts 11.19-12.24

Anything that 'shines' from the passage for you, jumps out at you, strikes you, etc



Anything hard to understand or any questions?



What does the passage teach us about Jesus or how does it point to him?



What is the application/s for your life from the passage?

Study 3—Questions

1. How was God preparing Barnabas and Saul for the mission to the Gentiles?
2. The name King Herod should sound familiar. He comes in a long line of Kings opposed to God's purposes. Can you think of and identify his predecessors?
3. Persecution and growth of the church seem to go hand in hand. Why do you think that is the case?
4. How do you explain God allowing James to be killed (probably beheaded) and Peter spared?

Also think through: Why was so much time given to the martyrdom of Stephen and one line to James?

5. James is dead, Peter in prison—what is the church doing? Does this have anything to teach us?
6. Did the church expect God to answer their prayer?
7. What does this episode have to teach us about the sovereignty of God?
8. Why is it often hard to accept the sovereignty of God over all the events of our lives?
9. 12.23 & 24 stand in stark contrast. What do they teach us?
10. Having considered this amazing episode, what fruit should it produce in our lives?

Study 4.**The Unstoppable Gospel****'Proclamation at a Price' - Acts 13.13-14.28**

1. If someone asked you, 'What is the hardest thing about being a Christian?' - what would you say?

Read Acts 13.13-14.28

Anything that 'shines' from the passage for you, jumps out at you, strikes you, etc



Anything hard to understand or any questions?



What does the passage teach us about Jesus or how does it point to him?

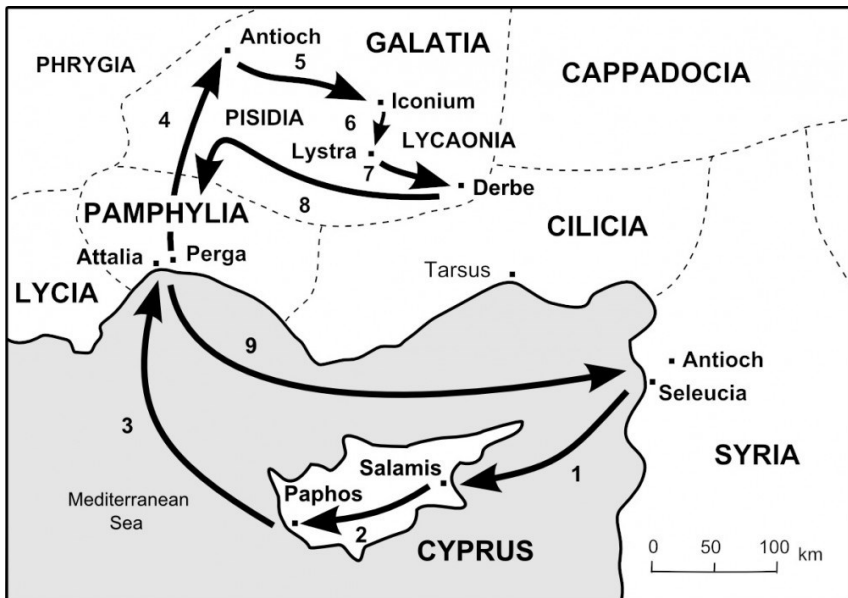


What is the application/s for your life from the passage?

Study 4— Questions

- Thinking back over the first 12 chapters of Acts which covers Peters mission to take the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria—what have you been convicted of more than anything else? What has God been teaching you? What have you done about it?

Paul's First Missionary Journey



- Give a summary of Paul's gospel as preach at Pisidian Antioch. What strikes you about his presentation & method?
- Paul doesn't mention Jesus death as the means of our forgiveness but because of the resurrection we can experience forgiveness. How do you explain this?

4. What patterns do you see unfolding in Paul's first missionary journey?
5. Becoming a Christian is the greatest blessing of all, and yet the Christian life will involve hardship because we follow Jesus. How can we be sure to maintain the joy whilst having realistic expectations about how non-believers might respond to us?
6. What reception should we expect from proclaiming the gospel?
7. False expectations are the foundation of doubt. Do you have false or unrealistic expectation for your ministry?
8. Why do you think Paul was able to persevere despite persecution in every place he preached. Does this have anything to teach us? (See 14.22)
9. How do you explain Paul and Barnabas returning to the cities from which they had been chased out of? One had almost killed him! (14.21-23)
10. How would you summarize the mission to the Gentiles so far? How does Paul?

What is the take home message from these chapters for you and your personal witness?

Study 5.**The Unstoppable Gospel****'Saving Grace—A Watershed Moment' Acts 15.1-16.5**

1. Why do you think most people (ourselves included) have such a hard time understanding, let alone accepting salvation by grace alone?

Read Acts 15.1-16.5

Anything that 'shines' from the passage for you, jumps out at you, strikes you, etc



Anything hard to understand or any questions?



What does the passage teach us about Jesus or how does it point to him?



What is the application/s for your life from the passage?

Study 5—Questions

1. Outline the dispute that led to the Council of Jerusalem being necessary?
2. We often think theological disputes in the church are unhelpful and should be avoided. What does this episode have to teach us about such matters?
3. Talk about the conference of the century!
The three main speakers were: Peter (Apostle to the Jews), Paul (Apostle to the Gentiles) & James (Brother of Jesus and head of the church in Jerusalem). Wow!
Summarize their arguments.
4. Are there behaviours that betray us as still thinking we somehow have to earn God's favour? Give examples.
5. Read Galatians 5.1-6 How does this give an insight into the challenges Paul faced in regard to this issue?
6. If Gentile Christians had been made to observe the law and undergo circumcision, what do you think would have happened to the church?
7. Can you think of disputes facing the Christian church today that we must not back away from for the sake of the gospel of grace?
8. Paul has just won a debate opposing the imposition of circumcision. He then proceeds to circumcise Timothy (Acts 16.15) What does this teach us about both Paul & Timothy?
9. Does Paul's dispute with Barnabas over Mark surprise you? Does it have anything to teach us about ministry?

Study 6.**The Unstoppable Gospel****'The Advance of the Gospel' - Acts 16.6-18.17**

1. If there was just one thing you wish your non-Christian friends would understand what would it be?

Read Acts 16.6-18.17

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Anything hard to understand or any questions?



What does the passage teach us about Jesus or how does it point to him?

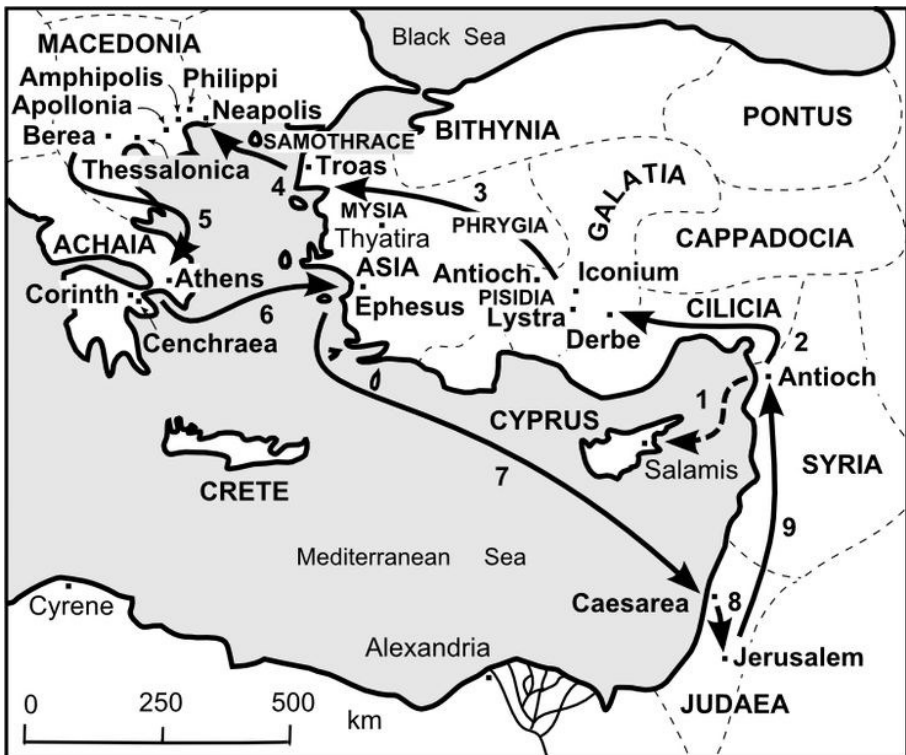


What is the application/s for your life from the passage?

Study 6—Questions

1. If you have ever been on a mission team of any sort, (Beach Mission, Holiday Camp etc) as either a leader or participant describe your experience. What is the strength of these sorts of missions? What are their weaknesses? Do they strengthen the life of the local church? How?

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



2. What was Paul's strategy in his missionary journeys?
3. Who is the unseen architect of this great mission? Do we sometimes overlook this vital fact in our endeavours? Why?

4. Lydia like others we have met in different parts of Acts, was a God fearer, even a worshipper of God, and yet she still needed to be saved. What lesson is there in this for us?
5. We live in a society and world where many people say they believe in God, why is that insufficient for salvation?
(See James 2.19)
6. Throughout Acts we see the gospel proclaimed boldly accompanied by miracles of various kinds. What do you make of this? Should we expect to see such miracles today? If so why don't we?
7. What do we learn from Paul's imprisonment on Philippi?
8. How is Paul's preaching at Athens a helpful model for us to think through as we seek to present the gospel in our time?
9. Paul's perseverance and persistence in the face of constant opposition is inspiring! What motivated him to keep going? What should motivate us?
10. Paul was not sent on a mission to 'love' people but to proclaim the truth of the gospel. Why is loving people without speaking of Jesus a dangerous model for us to practice?

Study 7.**The Unstoppable Gospel****'The Heart of Ministry' - Acts 18.18-20.38**

1. These next Chapters cover Paul's third and final missionary journey. (See 18.23) Thinking back, what is the main challenge Acts has brought to you personally?

Read Acts 18.18-20.38

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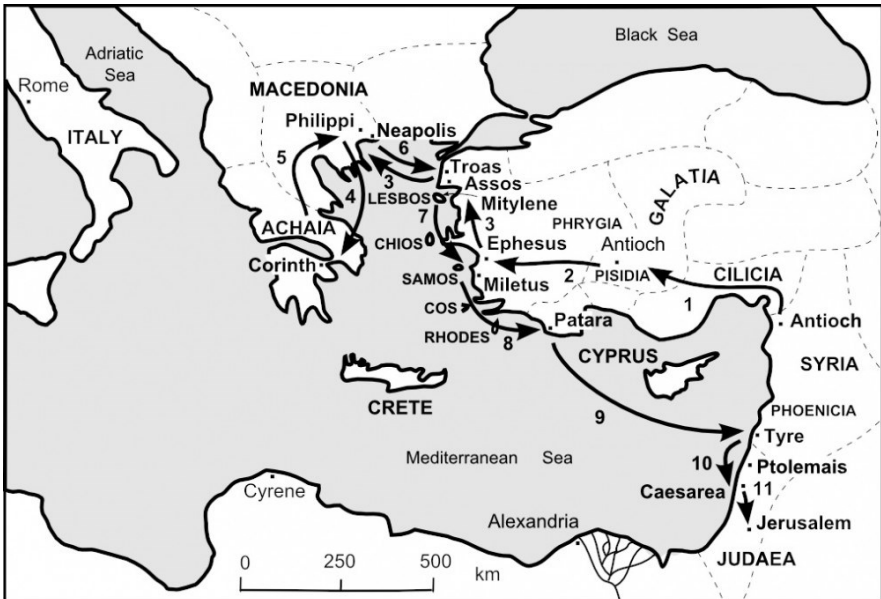


What is the application/s for your life from the passage?

Study 7—Questions

1. Paul on his return would always report to the sending churches of Antioch and Jerusalem. Why is this important? What does this teach us about mission and ministry workers?

Paul's Third Missionary Journey



2. The two times that Paul experiences opposition from the Gentiles is in 16.19 & here in 19.26. In both cases there opposition is based on commercial or financial considerations. Can you think of examples where Christianity is opposed because 'it is bad for business'?
3. Does anything stand out for you in Chapter 19 and Paul's time in Ephesus? Discuss.

4. Why is repentance and faith the only appropriate response to a true understanding of the Gospel? What evidence for transformed lives is there in the events at Ephesus?
5. *'He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all.'* 19. 26. Can you identify similar 'gods' in our culture today? Why do people put their trust in them?
6. Paul sweeps through Macedonia (20.1-6) What do you think his strategy is? Does this have anything to teach us?
7. What do you think is the significance of bringing Eutychus back to life? (See Acts 9.36-43, Luke 7.11-17, 8.49-56)
8. In the whole book of Acts only the ministry at Ephesus is reviewed. (20. 17-27) What does he mention and what does he leave out?
9. Paul says a lot about the role of shepherds. What is their primary function?

What else does this emotional farewell teach us about ministry?
10. The church at Ephesus had such a promising start. Paul writes of his hopes for them (Ephesians 1.18-23) Some 23 years later John writes in the book of Revelation (2.1-7) saying, 'Yet I hold this against you, you have forsaken your first love.' Could the same be said of us? Is there any evidence for it?

Study 8.**The Unstoppable Gospel****'...to the Ends of the Earth' - Acts 22.22-23.11; 28.17-31**

1. How are you going spiritually? What has God been teaching you from his word lately in your personal devotions?



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What is the application/s for your life from the passage?

Study 8—Questions

Suggestion: Your group might simply read the final chapters 22-28 (which will take some time) and then consider a few of the questions below.

1. How does God use Paul's Roman citizenship to fulfill his purposes?
2. Paul speaks boldly to the Sanhedrin (23.3) Have we lost the courage to speak like this and denounce falsehood or are we too sensitive to political correctness? Explore.
3. How do we see that the plans and purposes can never be thwarted from these final chapters. In what ways should this truth impact our lives as we seek to live as witnesses for Christ?
4. Paul stands trial before Felix, Festus & Agrippa. What conclusion do they each come to?
5. The resurrection continues to be the centrepiece of Paul's gospel preaching. Why do you think this is so?
6. What does the book of Acts teach us about the world's response to the gospel? Does this encourage or discourage you? (See 2 Cor. 2.15-16)
7. Paul endures unbelievable trials and challenges. What sustains him? (See Acts 23.11; Psalm 121) What promises do we have that should encourage, embolden and empower us in being witnesses in a hostile world?
8. **Be encouraged! God's gospel is unstoppable!** What part are you playing in bringing this life transforming message to the world?

PRAYER POINTS

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