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THE STORY SO FAR

The book of Acts is a continuation of Jesus' ministry in the world, through his disciples/church sharing and growing in his word, through the power of his Spirit. There is an ever expanding circle of influence that we can trace throughout the book – following the instructions/prophecy of Jesus himself in Acts 1:8.

As we dive into Chapter 15 we come out of the 1st Church Council in Jerusalem, in which the barriers for Gentile entry into the church have been eliminated – they need not become Jews first to become Christians. This is key – as Paul and his gang now enter territory where they encounter fewer and fewer Jews, and more and more true Gentiles.

INTRODUCTION

Many Christian writers/scholars are increasingly referring to the West as “Post Christian” – with the idea being that we live in society that has or is moving on from Christian values and ideals. While this is certainly to be seen, it gives us as Christians what we haven't had for many generations. That is – it gives us more of an idea of what the early church went through – and enables us to understand the culture clash between the early church and the Graeco-Roman world it inhabited a lot better. What they faced is what we increasingly will face.

And so – as we follow Paul and his friends into Greece in this series, we will learn – among other things – what responses to the gospel we will see. We can learn to expect different forms of rejection, or opposition. But in the same breath we will be encouraged to see that the gospel always reaches some people, that God will always open peoples' eyes to his salvation – and Jesus will continue to grow his church.

While South Africa might not be as “Post-Christian” as Europe – we too face challenges to our faith, and to our mission, and so CCC, use this series to:

- a) Understand the challenges we share in common with Paul & co.
- b) See God at work in history.
- c) And think through how this helps us in our desire to “See lives transformed by Jesus”.
- d) Think more deeply as a Redeemed **Family** – our applications can look to be “church” applications – rather than just individual application.

It is generally accepted that Paul's 2nd missionary journey took place between 49-52AD. It is on this journey that Paul met Luke (who wrote Acts). Luke actually joined Paul on a number of occasions – as there are references to “we” rather than “they” (e.g. Acts 16:10: “After he had seen the vision, we immediately...”). Luke's gospel accounts and his record in the book of Acts is thus seen as “apostolic” as he recorded the history of the apostles' journeys and met with most if not all of them in his travels to Jerusalem.

A MAP OF PAUL'S JOURNEYS



THEMES

There are a few recurring themes/ideas that pop up in this journey – and it's worth remembering them as you read through these texts:

- 1) Paul – though the apostle to the gentiles – still tries to start his mission in every city to the Jews. This is evidenced by going to Synagogues or places of prayer. If he doesn't go to one – think about why that might be.
- 2) Every time there is opposition to the gospel, there is a **true** reason for the opposition, as well as the reason given. They're not always the same. Use this to think through what opposition we might face, and what that says about peoples' heart idols.
- 3) Importantly – this is a "descriptive" section of the Bible. It tells us a history. It is not necessarily "prescriptive" meaning that we should do exactly what Paul and Co have done – rather, we want to think through their words and actions in their context – and learn what principles we can apply in our day and age as citizens of PMB.

This is not a long section. Read through the entirety twice, and then start reading through each study section separately with pen and highlighters. There are some questions at the end of each study to help direct your reading and preparation.

STUDY 1: ACTS 15:36-16:10

³⁶After some time had passed, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit the brothers and sisters in every town where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they're doing." ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take along John who was called Mark. ³⁸But Paul insisted that they should not take along this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work. ³⁹They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed off to Cyprus. ⁴⁰But Paul chose Silas and departed, after being commended by the brothers and sisters to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹He traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

16 Paul went on to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek. ²The brothers and sisters at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him. ³Paul wanted Timothy to go with him; so he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for the people to observe. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

⁶They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia; they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷When they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸Passing by Mysia they went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!" ¹⁰After he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- a) Divide the passage into different scenes giving reasons.
- b) Summarise the events of the entire passage into 1-2 sentences.
- c) Think about what goes before and what comes next. Why do you think this passage is here?
- d) Is there something here that excites you?
- e) Is there something here that confuses/concerns you?
- f) Discuss: what do you think we can learn here about:
- a. God
 - b. His mission
 - c. Our world
 - d. Our culture
 - e. Ourselves

STUDY 2: ACTS 16:11-24

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, a Roman colony and a leading city of the district of Macedonia. We stayed in that city for several days. ¹³ On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there. ¹⁴ A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. ¹⁵ After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

¹⁶ Once, as we were on our way to prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She made a large profit for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ As she followed Paul and us she cried out, "These men, who are proclaiming to you^[a] a way of salvation, are the servants of the Most High God." ¹⁸ She did this for many days.

Paul was greatly annoyed. Turning to the spirit, he said, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out right away.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. ²⁰ Bringing them before the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are seriously disturbing our city. They are Jews ²¹ and are promoting customs that are not legal for us as Romans to adopt or practice." ²² The crowd joined in the attack against them, and the chief magistrates stripped off their clothes and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³ After they had severely flogged them, they threw them in jail, ordering the jailer to guard them carefully. ²⁴ Receiving such an order, he put them into the inner prison and secured their feet in the stocks.

STUDY 3: ACTS 16:25-40

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped.

²⁸ But Paul called out in a loud voice, "Don't harm yourself, because we're all here!" ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He escorted them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. ³³ He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God with his entire household.

³⁵ When daylight came, the chief magistrates sent the police to say, "Release those men."

³⁶ The jailer reported these words to Paul: "The magistrates have sent orders for you to be released. So come out now and go in peace."

³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They beat us in public without a trial, although we are Roman citizens, and threw us in jail. And now are they going to send us away secretly? Certainly not! On the contrary, let them come themselves and escort us out."

³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came to appease them, and escorting them from prison, they urged them to leave town. ⁴⁰ After leaving the jail, they came to Lydia's house, where they saw and encouraged the brothers and sisters, and departed.

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STUDY 4: ACTS 17:1-15

¹After they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²As usual, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead: “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah.” ⁴Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a large number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women.

⁵But the Jews became jealous, and they brought together some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. Attacking Jason’s house, they searched for them to bring them out to the public assembly. ⁶When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too, ⁷and Jason has welcomed them. They are all acting contrary to Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king—Jesus.” ⁸The crowd and city officials who heard these things were upset. ⁹After taking a security bond from Jason and the others, they released them.

¹⁰As soon as it was night, the brothers and sisters sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. Upon arrival, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹The people here were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, since they received the word with eagerness and examined^[a] the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹²Consequently, many of them believed, including a number of the prominent Greek women as well as men. ¹³But when the Jews from Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul at Berea, they came there too, agitating and upsetting^[b] the crowds. ¹⁴Then the brothers and sisters immediately sent Paul away to go to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed on there. ¹⁵Those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving instructions for Silas and Timothy to come to him as quickly as possible, they departed.

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STUDY 5: ACTS 17:16-34

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed when he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with those who worshiped God, as well as in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him. Some said, “What is this ignorant show-off^[a] trying to say?” Others replied, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign deities”—because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ They took him and brought him to the Areopagus,^[a] and said, “May we learn about this new teaching you are presenting?” ²⁰ Because what you say sounds strange to us, and we want to know what these things mean.” ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners residing there spent their time on nothing else but telling or hearing something new.

²² Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said, “People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect. ²³ For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed, ‘To an Unknown God.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands. ²⁵ Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one man^[a] he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. ²⁷ He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ For in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’ ²⁹ Since, then, we are God’s offspring, we shouldn’t think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination.

³⁰ “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some began to ridicule him, but others said, “We’d like to hear from you again about this.” ³³ So Paul left their presence. ³⁴ However, some people joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

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STUDY 6: ACTS 18:1-23

18 After this, he^[a] left Athens and went to Corinth, ² where he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul came to them, ³ and since they were of the same occupation, tentmakers by trade, he stayed with them and worked. ⁴ He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade both Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself to preaching the word^[b] and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. ⁶ When they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his clothes and told them, "Your blood is on your own heads! I am innocent.^[c] From now on I will go to the Gentiles." ⁷ So he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, along with his whole household. Many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized.

⁹ The Lord said to Paul in a night vision, "Don't be afraid, but keep on speaking and don't be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city." ¹¹ He stayed there a year and a half, teaching the word of God among them.

¹² While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack against Paul and brought him to the tribunal. ¹³ "This man," they said, "is persuading people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

¹⁴ As Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or of a serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you Jews. ¹⁵ But if these are questions about words, names, and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of such things." ¹⁶ So he drove them from the tribunal. ¹⁷ And they all^[d] seized Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal, but none of these things mattered to Gallio.

¹⁸ After staying for some time, Paul said farewell to the brothers and sisters and sailed away to Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. He shaved his head at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹ When they reached Ephesus he left them there, but he himself entered the synagogue and debated with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he declined, ²¹ but he said farewell and added,^[e] "I'll come back to you again, if God wills." Then he set sail from Ephesus.

²² On landing at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church, then went down to Antioch.

²³ After spending some time there, he set out, traveling through one place after another in the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

