

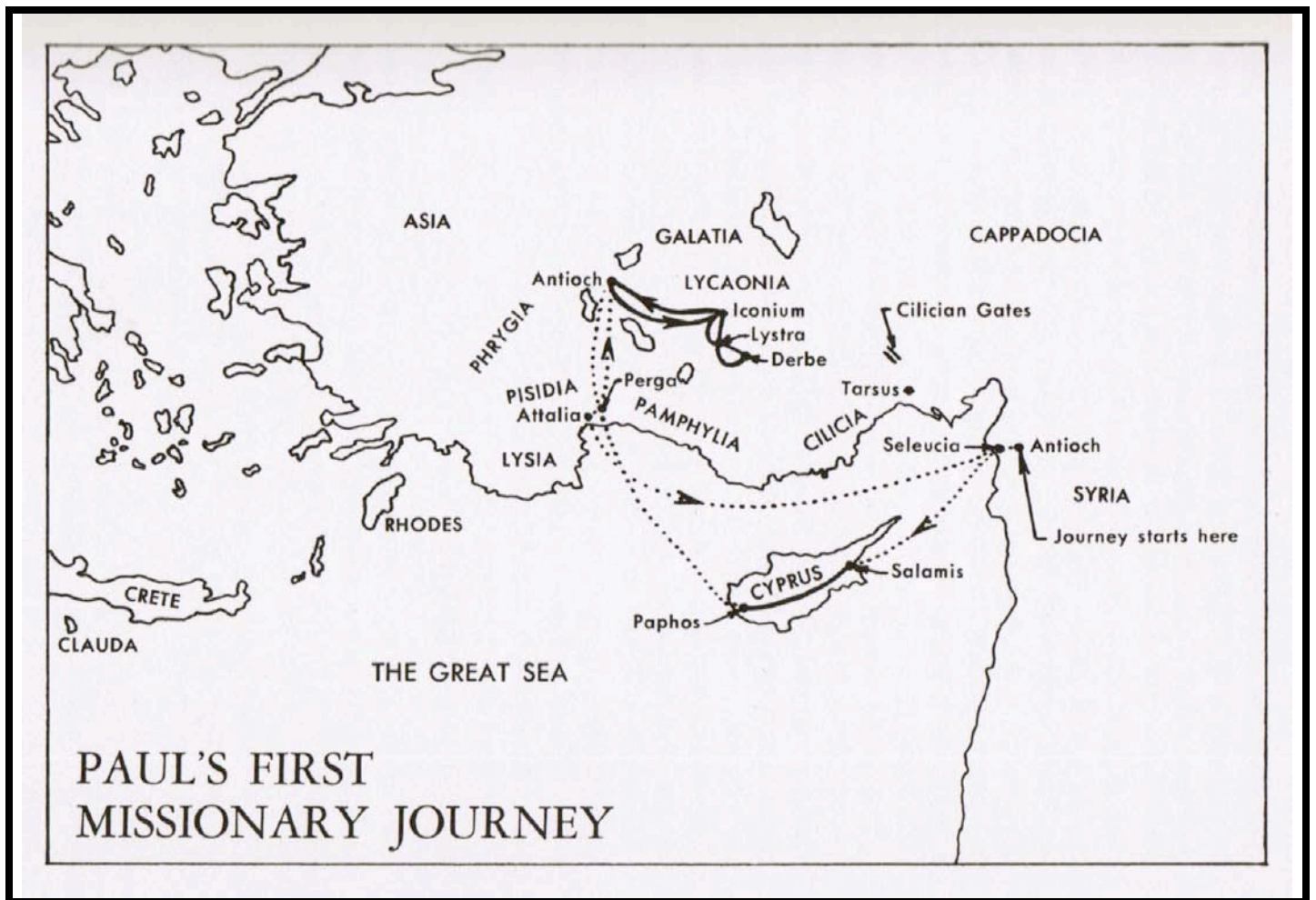
READ The BIBLE Together



Acts 13:1 - 21:15
9th December 2012 - 2nd February 2013

SHALOM CHURCH, SINGAPORE
(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)

ACTS 13:1 – 14:27-28 is a record of what we would normally call the first missionary journey of Paul and his co-workers. The map below shows the places where the gospel would reach in this first missionary journey:



Before His ascension, our Lord Jesus had told His disciples that they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (ACTS 1:8). The 'ends of the earth' were beginning to be reached with the gospel as we come to ACTS 13!

We shall study this first missionary journey in 7 parts:

- The formation of the team (ACTS 13:1-4)
- The gospel in Cyprus (ACTS 13:4-12)
- The gospel in Antioch-Pisidia (ACTS 13:13-52)
- The gospel in Iconium (ACTS 14:1-7)
- The gospel in Lystra/Derbe (ACTS 14:8-21a)
- The returning trip (ACTS 14:21b-26)
- The report to the church (ACTS 14:27-28)

Today, we shall start with ACTS 13:1-4 -- The formation of the team.

Day 1 Read the brief introduction above and ACTS 13:1-4

1. The spotlight has now shifted to the church at Antioch. The five leaders (prophets and teachers) of this local church were mentioned in verse 1. Write down their names and any information you may have/know about them:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Description/Information</u>
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i.

ii.

iii.

iv.

v.

2. (a) What was the church doing in verse 2a?
(b) Who spoke to the church and what was said? (Verse 2b)
(c) What was the response of the church? (Verse 3)
3. (a) According to verse 3, who sent Barnabas and Saul out?
(b) According to verse 4, who sent Barnabas and Saul out?
(c) How do you reconcile both statements?

Day 2 Summary Notes for ACTS 13:1-4

ACTS is a record of what Jesus our ascended Lord continued to teach and to do from heaven, by His Spirit and through His apostles. Since His ascension, the gospel had been preached in Jerusalem and Judea. Then in ACTS 8, the gospel reached Samaria and in ACTS 10, a Roman centurion came to faith in Jesus. Slowly but surely, the ascended Lord was carrying out what He had said in ACTS 1:8.

Up to ACTS 12, gospel outreach had been limited to the Palestinian and Syrian mainland. Nobody had yet caught the vision of taking the gospel to the nations overseas, but the word of the Lord must be fulfilled – *to the ends of the earth* (1:8). The situation changed when we turn to ACTS 13.

In ACTS 13, our attention is drawn to the church at Antioch. In verse 1, we find them ministering to the Lord and fasting. Are we here given a glimpse into their weekly worship service? Or was this a special meeting whereby they were seeking to know the will of the Lord concerning gospel outreach?

Whatever the nature of that meeting was, we know the church was taking time to worship the Lord. It was during this time of worship that the Holy Spirit spoke. He called the Antioch church to set Barnabas and Saul apart and send them out as missionaries. In response, the church took some more time to fast and pray, before they laid hands on these two men and sent them out.

While verse 3 says that the Antioch church sent the missionaries out, verse 4 says that it was the Holy Spirit who did it. There is no contradiction! Barnabas and Saul had both the internal (the Holy Spirit setting them apart) and external call (the local church confirming them as missionaries). Hence, at the human level, it was the church who sent them out while from the divine perspective, God the Spirit was the Sender!

We should also note the interesting composition of the leadership at the Antioch church:

Barnabas – *a Jew, a generous, big-hearted man*

Simeon – *a Hebrew name, and yet he is called Niger, suggesting he is from Africa.*

Lucius – *a Greek name (Cyrene is near modern day Libya)*

Manaen – *he grew up with Herod (Antipas), the one who beheaded John the Baptist*

Saul – *a Jew and ex-Pharisee*

The multi-cultural, multi-racial mix of leaders in the Antioch church could perhaps reflect the same mix in the membership! This ‘international’ church (humanly speaking) was the right church to spearhead this gospel mission to the ends of the earth! This composition of leaders in itself was a testimony of the gospel that in Christ, all are one!

Concerning Manaen and Herod, F. F. Bruce said, *“What a commentary on the mystery and sovereignty of divine grace that, of these two foster brothers, one should attain honour as a Christian leader while the other should be best known for his shameful behaviour in the killing of John the Baptist and in the trial of Jesus!”*

1. What new truths have you learnt from the Summary Notes, and how have they impacted your life?

2. What old truths were you reminded of from the Summary Notes? How can you live out these truths you've re-learned in your life right now?

3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Day 3 Read ACTS 13:4-12

These 9 verses tell us of the advance of the gospel in Cyprus. Verse 5a informs us that the missionary team first preached to the Jews when they arrived on the island. Verse 5b informs us that there was also a third member of the missionary team called John.

The practice of preaching the gospel first in Jewish synagogues was to be a regular feature in the missionary journeys of Barnabas and Paul. It was a practical expression of the principle Paul laid down in Romans 1:16.

The main event that happened in Cyprus during this missionary journey is recorded in verses 6-12. In it, we see the triumph of the gospel over the forces of darkness.

1. Name the characters involved:

Missionary team --

Proconsul --

Sorcerer --

2. (a) What did the sorcerer try to do?

(b) What was Paul's response?

(c) Why did Paul give such a strong response?

3. What was the proconsul's response to what happened? (Verse 12)

4. What have you learnt from this account?

Day 4 Read ACTS 13:13-52 (if possible); else just read ACTS 13:13-22.

ACTS 13:13-52 described the advance of the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia. Can you locate this place on the map in page 2?

Upon reaching Antioch of Pisidia, they went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. After the Old Testament Scriptures were read, Barnabas and Paul were invited to speak. Paul did and his sermon begun at verse 16.

1. From verse 16, we know who were present in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia. Who were they?

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The audience was clearly Jewish, people who know their Scriptures. This explains why Paul quoted Psalm 2, Psalm 16, Isaiah 55 and Habakkuk 1 so freely, and why he spent time narrating the history of Israel.

2. From verses 17-22, Paul was narrating the history of Israel.

(a) Which period of Israel's history was being narrated here?

(b) According to Paul, who was the main actor/initiator in Israel's history?

(c) What do you think was the reason that Paul narrated Israel's history and emphasized the main actor of Israel's history?

Day 5 Read ACTS 13:13-52 (if possible); else just read ACTS 13:23-41.

These 19 verses are a continuation of Paul's sermon, preached in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia.

1. From David (verse 22), Paul now talks about the seed of David (verse 23). Who is He?

2. The seed of David dominates this entire section of the sermon. What happened to him?

Verses 27-28:

Verse 29:

Verses 30-31:

3. According to Paul, this proclamation about the seed of David and what happened to Him is to be viewed as:

Verse 26:

Verse 32:

4. (a) How should the people respond to this seed of David? (Verses 38-41)
- (b) Have you made the same response to Him? Why?

Day 6 Read ACTS 13:42-52

- (1) Verses 42-48 show us the various responses of the people in Antioch of Pisidia to the message of Paul. What were they?

Verse 42:

Verse 43:

Verse 45:

Verse 48:

(2) Quite a number of Jews and Gentiles believed in Jesus after the preaching of Paul. How did *Luke* explain their coming to faith in Jesus? (Verse 48)

(3) Verses 49-52 describe what happened when the gospel spread throughout the entire region around Antioch of Pisidia. What was it?

Verse 50:

Verse 52:

(4) What have you learnt from this passage?

Day 7 Summary Notes for ACTS 13:5-52

The gospel in Cyprus (ACTS 13:4-12)

The first stop for the missionary team was Cyprus, the hometown of Barnabas. The main incident that *Luke* wanted us to look at was Paul preaching Jesus to Paulus, but with Bar-Jesus opposing. The end result was Paulus believing in Jesus and Bar-Jesus (aka Elymas the sorcerer) blinded. It represented the triumph of the gospel over both human and demonic opposition! We should note from this incident that each time the gospel is proclaimed, the devil will seek to hinder men from believing.

The gospel in Antioch of Pisidia (ACTS 13:13-52)

The main event that *Luke* wanted to focus on was Paul preaching in the synagogue. It was a Jewish audience (men of Israel and those who fear God) and hence we found Paul quoting from the Old Testament Scriptures freely and talking to them about Israel's history. But Paul was not giving a history lesson! He carefully reminded his hearers that God was the active initiator in every major epoch of Israel's history – *He chose, He brought, He destroyed, He distributed, He gave, He removed and He raised up men.*

This emphasis on God being the active initiator prepares the ground for Paul to talk about the ultimate act of God: *He raised up a Saviour, the Seed of David – Jesus!* Indeed, Jesus was the main focus from verse 23 to the end of the sermon. Paul told his hearers who Jesus was and what happened to Him, showing them that it all happened as the Old Testament Scriptures had said.

According to Paul, what he had just proclaimed was the gospel – *word of salvation, glad tidings.* In other words, Jesus is the gospel! The gospel is about Jesus and what He has

done. It is not about me and what happened to me! There is also no gospel preaching unless people are called to believe in Jesus so that their sins can be forgiven and they be declared righteous (verses 38-39). In fact, Paul ended his preaching by warning his hearers of the dire consequences of rejecting Him (verses 40-41).

Compare your gospel preaching/sharing with what Paul had said in this passage? Are they similar or different? Why?

The response to the gospel was two-fold, as always. People either reject or accept the glad tidings. In Antioch of Pisidia, we read of a tragedy whereby the majority of the Jews rejected this word of salvation. But the tragedy did not have a tragic ending as the Gentiles accepted the word of salvation.

The same two responses were repeated throughout the entire region – the Jews rejected while the Gentiles accepted. We can also expect the same two responses today – people will either reject or accept the gospel we proclaim. We need not be discouraged, but press on with the work, confident that those whom God has appointed to eternal life shall believe.

The Gentiles accepted the glad tidings of Jesus and His cross!! Have you also accepted this word of salvation? If your answer is 'No', why?

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes above?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Week 2

[16th – 22nd December 2012]

Day 1 Read ACTS 14:1-7

These 7 verses tell us of the advance of the gospel in Iconium. Can you locate Iconium in the map provided in page 2?

1. (a) To whom did they preach? (Verse 1)

- (b) What did they preach? (Verse 3)

- (c) How did they preach? (Verse 3)
 - (d) What was the response to their preaching?
2. (a) What was the initial form of the opposition to the gospel? (Verse 2)
 - (b) What was the response of the missionary team to this opposition? (Verse 3)
 3. (a) What was the latter form of the opposition to the gospel? (Verse 5)
 - (b) What was the response of the missionary team to this opposition? (Verse 6)
 4. What may the different responses of the missionary team teach us?
 5. Imagine that you were Theophilus (ACTS 1:1). What thoughts and feelings would you have after reading these 7 verses?

Day 2 Read ACTS 14:8-21a

These 13½ verses tell us of the advance of the gospel in Lystra (mainly) and Derbe. Can you locate these two cities in the map provided in page 2?

1. A miracle was performed in Lystra. Describe in your own words what happened:
2. What was the initial response of the people of Lystra towards Paul and Barnabas, seeing that they have performed this miracle?
3. What did Paul and Barnabas do in response?

4. In verse 19, we read of Paul being stoned until he nearly died. How can we account for this drastic change in attitude towards Paul from the people of Lystra?

5. Imagine that you were Theophilus (ACTS 1:1). What would you have learnt after reading these 13½ verses?

Day 3 Read ACTS 14:21b-26

These 5½ verses tell us of the missionary team returning to visit the cities where they had earlier preached the gospel.

1. (a) What was their main message to the disciples in those three cities?

(b) Why do you think this was their main message to the believers here?

2. (a) What was the main thing they did for the churches in those three cities?

(b) Why do you think they did this?

3. Why do you think Paul and Barnabas revisited these believers? What lessons about the Christian Life can we learn from this?

Day 4 Read ACTS 14:26-28

We come now to the end of the first missionary journey by Paul and Barnabas.

1. To whom did they give their report of the missionary journey? Why?

2. What was the content of their report?

3. What lessons can we learn about the local church and missionary work from these 3 verses?

Day 5 Summary Notes for ACTS 14:1-28

Gospel at Iconium (ACTS 14:1-7)

The story of the gospel in Iconium was almost similar to what took place in Antioch of Pisidia. The team first preached the gospel to the Jews, but they did not limit themselves only to the Jews. Soon there were Jews and Gentiles who believed as well as Jews and Gentiles who don't. We should expect to see the two similar responses each time the gospel is preached!

The opposition also followed almost the same pattern – slander followed by violence. Recall that this pattern was also found in how Stephen was treated in ACTS 7. It is significant and instructive to note that when faced with slander, the team stayed on to preach the Gospel, but when the opposition became violent, they fled! Missionaries may become martyrs but they should never try to be heroes!!

Verse 7 is inspiring – they continued to preach the gospel wherever they went, though recent past experiences showed them that if they continued to preach the gospel, they would continue to be persecuted! They did not ask for the persecutions, but persecutions would not stop them from proclaiming their Saviour!

Gospel at Lystra & Derbe (ACTS 14:8-21a)

The miracle performed in Lystra has some similarity to JOHN 9 (healing of the man born blind) and ACTS 3 (healing of the cripple at the Temple). Even the response of the people – both initial and final – has a familiar ring to it! Initially, they were overly enthusiastic about Paul and Barnabas, even thinking that they were gods. However, this welcome was based on wrong understanding and did not last. Finally, poisoned in the mind by other hostile Jews from surrounding regions, they turned against these preachers and almost succeeded in stoning Paul to death!

We recall that the crowd was shouting “*Hosannas*” to Jesus on Palm Sunday and then screaming “*Crucify Him!*” on Good Friday, just 5 days later. If Jesus suffered at the hands of the fickle multitude, then the disciples of Jesus should not expect anything less.

The returning trip (ACTS 14:21b-26)

It is an inspiring testimony of the love of Paul and Barnabas that they made this return trip! We know that their aims were to strengthen the souls of the disciples and exhort them to continue in the faith. We need to realize that they did this at the risk of

suffering more physical violence from the hostile inhabitants of those cities! What moved them to make this return trip?

It has to be love – love for Christ and for Christ’s people! Like how Jesus said to Peter in JOHN 21, Peter’s love for Christ will express itself in feeding the flock. Here we see their love for the Saviour expressing itself in going back to help the young believers, even if that meant more pain and danger to themselves.

Note the summary of their message to these churches: “*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*” (ACTS 14:22) In simple words: *no cross, no crown!*

The report (ACTS 14:26-28)

These 3 verses are significant in reminding us that gospel work should never be the work of lone rangers. The missionary team was sent out by the Antioch church and upon completion of their journey, they came back to give a report to the church. There is proper accountability, which is very important.

Shalom Church’s Guidelines to Responsible Church Membership Point 8: “*That this Church send out members called and prepared for missionary service, and that this be done as the Holy Spirit directs, bearing in mind that the one sent, are sent out and supported by the Church. (Acts 13:1-3)*”

1. Write down one lesson you’ve learnt from the Summary Notes above:
2. In what ways have this lesson impacted your life right now?
3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Day 6 Special Study on Fasting (I)

We read that the leaders of the Antioch church *fasted* before Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for mission work. After they received the message, they again *fasted* before sending the two out to the work. Read ACTS 13:2-3 if you need to refresh your memory.

What is *fasting*? Should Christians *fast*? What is the purpose of *fasting*?

Fasting in the Bible

Below are some examples of saints (both Old and New Testament) who fasted. Copy out

the verses in the space provided:

Ezra 8:21 ~

2 Samuel 1:12 ~

2 Chronicles 20:3 ~

Joel 2:15-16 ~

Daniel 9:3 ~

Matthew 4:2 ~

Acts 14:23 ~

“A Biblical definition of fasting is a Christian’s voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. It is Christian, for fasting by a non Christian obtains no eternal value because the Discipline’s motives and purposes are to be God-centered. It is voluntary in that fasting is not to be coerced. Fasting is more than just the ultimate crash diet for the body; it is abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.”

Donald Whitney

Have you ever engaged in this spiritual discipline of fasting? If ‘No’, why?

Day 7 Special Study on Fasting (II)

Look at the 7 verses that you’ve copied out in Day 6. For each of the verses, answer:

Who fasted?

What’s the purpose?

Ezra 8:21

2 Samuel 1:12

2 Chronicles 20:3

Joel 2:15-16

Daniel 9:3

Matthew 4:2

Acts 14:23

Read Matthew 6:16-18. Did Jesus say “*If you fast*” or “*When you fast*”? What’s the implication?

After this Special Study on Fasting, will you be practicing the spiritual discipline of *fasting*? If ‘Yes’, what would be your purpose in doing so? If ‘No’, why not?

Week 3

[23rd – 29th December 2012]

Day 1 Introduction to ACTS 15:1-35 (I)

In ACTS 10, we read of the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius. Recall that Peter was the man God used to bring Cornelius to faith in Jesus. While Cornelius was a Gentile, yet we know that he was likely to be a God-fearing Gentile by the time Peter met him. *A God-fearing Gentile would be non-Jew attracted to the Jewish faith and, for all intents and purposes, follow that faith except for circumcision.*

In ACTS 11, we read of believers in Syrian Antioch preaching the gospel to Greeks/Hellenists and many of them coming to faith in Jesus. These new converts could either be Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists) or Greeks who are attracted to the Jewish faith known as God-fearers.

In both instances, we read of the Jerusalem church expressing concerns and sending delegations to investigate. The result was acceptance of these new converts, seeing real evidence of God’s work in them.

From ACTS 13-14, we read of the first missionary journey of Paul and his co-workers. Then we read of Gentiles who were fully pagan (not proselytes or God-fearers) like Sergius Paulus of Cyprus and the idolatrous Lycaonians coming to faith in Jesus. As Paul and his co-workers said in their report to the Antioch church, *God has opened the door of faith to the Gentiles!*

The trickle has become a torrent!! How would the Jerusalem church respond to this huge number of outright Gentiles coming into the church? Would they accept these Gentile believers from the region of southern Galatia? Would they make certain demands of these new converts, and if so, what?

We need to realize what is happening at the end of ACTS 14. For a long time, the church has been Jewish -- most of the Christians up till then were Jews, with just a handful of non-Jews. But now, that composition was going to change! For the first time, the Christian church had a huge number of non-Jews in her membership, and before long, Gentiles will outnumber Jews in the church!!

Comfort zones were being violated! Long cherished customs would be broken! Things would never be the same again! In more than one sense, this was a very uncomfortable time for the Jewish Christians. How will they respond to such a huge change?

Ponder . . .

1. Is something similar happening to the Shalom Church today?

2. Imagine that you were a Jewish Christian then.
 - (a) What would be your feelings, seeing so many non-Jews coming into the church?

 - (b) What would be you be doing, seeing so many non-Jews coming into the church?

Day 2 Introduction to ACTS 15:1-35 (II)

The churches planted in the first missionary journey (Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe) were located in the southern Galatian region. Paul's letter to the Galatians was written to these churches before the event of ACTS 15:1-35.

In Galatians 2:11-16, Paul mentioned an event that took place in Antioch. We shall take some time to study these 6 verses today.

1. What was Peter doing before those 'certain men from James' came to Antioch?

2. (a) What did Peter do after those 'certain men from James' came to Antioch?

(b) What was the impact of this act of Peter?

3. Why was Paul so upset with Peter?

4. If you were present then, would you
 - (a) Be upset with Peter like Paul
 - (b) Be upset with Paul for being so upset with Peter
 - (c) Shrug your shoulders and walk off, because this is so trivial matter

Which option above is your answer? Why would you respond in that way?

Day 3 Read ACTS 15:1-5

1. The 'certain men came down from Judea' (verse 1) would be those 'certain men from James' (Galatians 2:11). What were their demands?

Verse 1:

Verse 5:

2. (a) What was the response of Paul and Barnabas to these demands?

(b) What was the final decision of the Antioch church concerning this matter? (Verse 2)

3. What happened when the Antioch delegation arrived in Jerusalem?

Verse 4:

Verse 5:

Note: The two strong words '*cannot*' (verse 1) and '*necessary*' (verse 5) makes it very clear the issue at stake. These men from Judea were saying that one must be a Jew in order to be a Christian. In other words, you must believe in Jesus *plus* be a Jew (that is, be circumcised and keep all the laws of Moses), if you are to have your sins forgiven and have eternal life. If the church at Antioch caved in to this pressure, then it would mean that from that time onwards, sinners are told that they must believe in Jesus and be a Jew if they are to be saved. This would effectively change the content of the gospel, and we would no longer have the gospel. Hence, what is at stake is the gospel itself!

Day 4 Read ACTS 15:6-11

ACTS 15:6-29 records the Jerusalem Conference, convened to discuss the controversy at hand. Although much has been said at this meeting (verse 7a), *Luke* chose to only put the spotlight on three speeches: by Peter (verses 7b-11), by Barnabas and Paul (verse 12) and by James (verse 13-21).

We shall focus on the speech by Peter today.

1. (a) What incident was Peter referring to in verses 7-9?

(b) According to Peter, God initiated the whole incident and He was also the main actor throughout. How can we see this from Peter's speech?

2. Throughout Peter's speech, the '*us-them*' theme was repeated. Note what was said each time:

Verse 8:

Verse 9:

Verse 11:

What do you think is Peter's purpose in repeating this theme?

3. Compare the words of Peter in v11 and Paul in Galatians 2:15-16. What are their difference or similarities (if any)?

What might this mean for us living in Singapore today?

Day 5 Read ACTS 15:12-21

1. After hearing Peter's speech, what was the response of the people present at the meeting?
2. The speech by Barnabas and Paul is found (in summarized form) in verse 12. It was one-line summary of their first missionary journey. What did they emphasize?
3. The next person to speak was James. In his speech, he quoted from Amos 9:11-12.
 - (a) What was his purpose in quoting Amos?
 - (b) What was his concluding statement to the conference?

Day 6 Read ACTS 15:22-35

1. After the conference was over, a letter was drafted.
 - (a) Who were the authors of this letter?
 - (b) Who were the recipients of this letter?
 - (c) What was the main message of the letter?

2. How did the Antioch church receive the letter?

3. The letter contained these words: '*It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us*'. What does this mean?

Day 7 Summary of ACTS 15:1-35

The controversy (ACTS 15:1-5)

The entrance of a huge number of Gentiles into the Christian Church must be quite a shock to the system for the Jewish believers. While we may expect some discomfort and needed adjustments, yet the controversy raised here touches the very core of the gospel. The Judaizers (as the proponents came to be known) were insisting that to be a Christian, the Gentile believers must become a Jew – *be circumcised and keep all the laws of Moses*. Whatever concerns they may have concerning Gentile believers, however legitimate they may be, when they used words like “*unless*” and “*necessary*”, they have in effect changed the gospel!

The Conference (ACTS 15:6-21)

This was the most important conference the Christian Church had since Pentecost. The issue at stake is absolutely crucial. It is no wonder that '*there had been much dispute*' taking place at the conference.

Luke chose to only focus on the speech of Peter, Barnabas and Paul, and James. It is instructive to note that when Peter talked about his experience with Cornelius, he cast it in terms of what God has initiated and done – *God chose, God who knows, God gave, God purified*. In the same way, the report given by Barnabas and Paul was thoroughly God-centered – *how many miracles and wonders God had worked . . .*

As for James, he brought the conference back to the Word of God in Amos 9. He pointed out to them that what happened was what God had already said would happen in the Old Testament. The overall emphasis was clear: *This is God's work. How can we oppose Him and still call ourselves His people?*

In itself, this is a very instructive and significant lesson in how to handle differences and controversies. It must never be “my view against yours”, but “what has God said” and “what is God doing”!

Think back to the questions of Week 3 Day 1. When we see different people coming into the church that may cause some discomfort to us, just as how the entrance of the Gentile believers could bring discomfort to the Jewish Christians, we need to ultimately come back to the gospel. What is the gospel and what does the gospel say to me about how I should view them and accept them? It should never be my comfort and discomfort, but what God has said and what God is doing!!

The conclusions (ACTS 15:22-35)

Having come to a settled conviction, the church in Jerusalem wrote a letter to all the other Gentile churches, affirming that salvation is given to all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ regardless of race, and that the only requirement for fellowship is the gospel requirement, namely walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

The Gentile churches rejoiced upon receiving the letter, and the Church (Jews or Gentile, it does not matter) being united, continued to grow in numbers and in grace.

1. Write down one lesson you've learnt from the Summary Notes above:
2. In what ways has that lesson impacted your life right now?
3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Week 4

[30th December 2012 – 5th January 2013]

Day 1 Special Study on the Apostolic Prohibitions (I)

The conclusion of the conference was clear:

*Gentile believers were to be embraced as brothers in the Lord.
They did not need to be Jews first before they were admitted to the church.
This puts both Jewish believers and Gentiles believers on equal footing.*

Besides this conclusion, the Jerusalem Conference was pleased to add four prohibitions on the Gentile believers (verse 20, 29). What were they?

Acts 15:20

- (i) **things polluted by idols** → *allsgema eidolon* (literally: pollution idols)
- (ii) **sexual immorality** → *porneia* (literally illicit sexual intercourse, metaphorically worship of idols)
- (iii) **things strangled** → *piktos* (strangled animals, deprived of life without shedding of blood)
- (iv) **blood** → *haima* (blood, blood shed by violence)

Acts 15:29

- (i) **things offered to idols** → *eidolothuton* (sacrificed to idols)

- (ii) **blood** → *haima* (blood, blood shed by violence)
- (iii) **things strangled** → *piktos* (strangled animals, deprived of life without shedding of blood)
- (iv) **sexual immorality** → *porneia* (literally illicit sexual intercourse, metaphorically worship of idols)

Not long after this Jerusalem Conference, Paul and his co-workers embarked on his second missionary journey. In that journey, he would preach the gospel in places like Thessalonica and Corinth. We note that in his letters to the churches in these places, he would mention these 'issues' raised in the Apostolic Prohibitions:

1 Thessalonians 1:9 ~ *For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,*

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 ~ *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;*

1 Corinthians 10:7-8 ~ *And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell.*

We note also that in Christ's letter to the church at Pergamos, the same 'issue' was raised:

Revelation 2:14 ~ *But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*

So it appears that these 'issues' were issues that Gentile believers would face as Christians, and hence they were told that they must deal with it, if indeed they were true believers.

After you have read the Summary Notes (I) above, what questions do you have about the four Apostolic Prohibitions? Write them down below:

Day 2 Special Study on the Apostolic Prohibitions (II)

A common understanding of these four Apostolic Prohibitions is to understand them as things Gentile believers must do in order to maintain fellowship with the Jewish believers. These prohibitions are based on Leviticus 17-18. (Take time to read these 2 chapters if you can).

Leviticus 17-18 forbids Jews and strangers living among them (Gentiles) from offering sacrifices to other gods than the LORD, from eating blood, from having sexual relations with close relatives, among others. It is believed that James at the Jerusalem Conference proposed that Gentile believers must now keep these prohibitions in Leviticus 17-18 so that Jewish believers can have table fellowship with them.

However, there are problems with such an understanding. For example:

- (a) Jews are not allowed to eat pork (Leviticus 11:17). However, a Gentile believer can obey these four Apostolic Prohibitions and still eat pork, and the Jewish believers must have fellowship with him! How is the eating of pork less offensive to the Jews compared to the eating of blood?
- (b) ACTS 15:19-20 clearly state that the aim was not to trouble the Gentile brethren, and ACTS 15:28 say that the aim was to place no greater burdens on them than is necessary. Could a Gentile believer argue that not to eat pork or blood (things they have been consuming all their life) is something burdensome to them?
- (c) Does the Apostolic Prohibitions imply that it was actually fine to marry close relatives, and that not doing it was just to maintain fellowship with Jewish believers?

In view of the problems highlighted above, a better way to understand the Apostolic Prohibitions is to understand the general lifestyle of the Gentiles at that time. Going to the pagan temple to worship was very much part and parcel of their life. At the temple, they would eat food offered to idols as part of their pagan festival. Some records have suggested that the pagan priests would drink blood and the worshippers would eat flesh with blood. What is without doubt was that (most of the time), sacred prostitution would take place in the temple during pagan festivals!

The Apostolic Prohibitions would then mean that the Gentile believers were called to live as new creatures in Christ, having turned from dead idols to the living God. As such, they should not be attending the temple festivals anymore. Hence, they should no longer participate in things polluted by idols, no longer eat meat with blood or drink blood, and no longer be involved in sexual relations with temple prostitutes. The fact that some believers in the church at Pergamos were still doing it incurred the wrath of Jesus. Paul also had to tell the Corinthians Christians that while they could eat meat offered to idols at home, they shouldn't participate in the temple festivals anymore!

This way of viewing the Apostolic Prohibitions would accord with the phrases '*not trouble them*' and '*lay no greater burdens upon you than these necessary things*'. The Gentile believers were not told to do any thing more than was required by the Gospel:

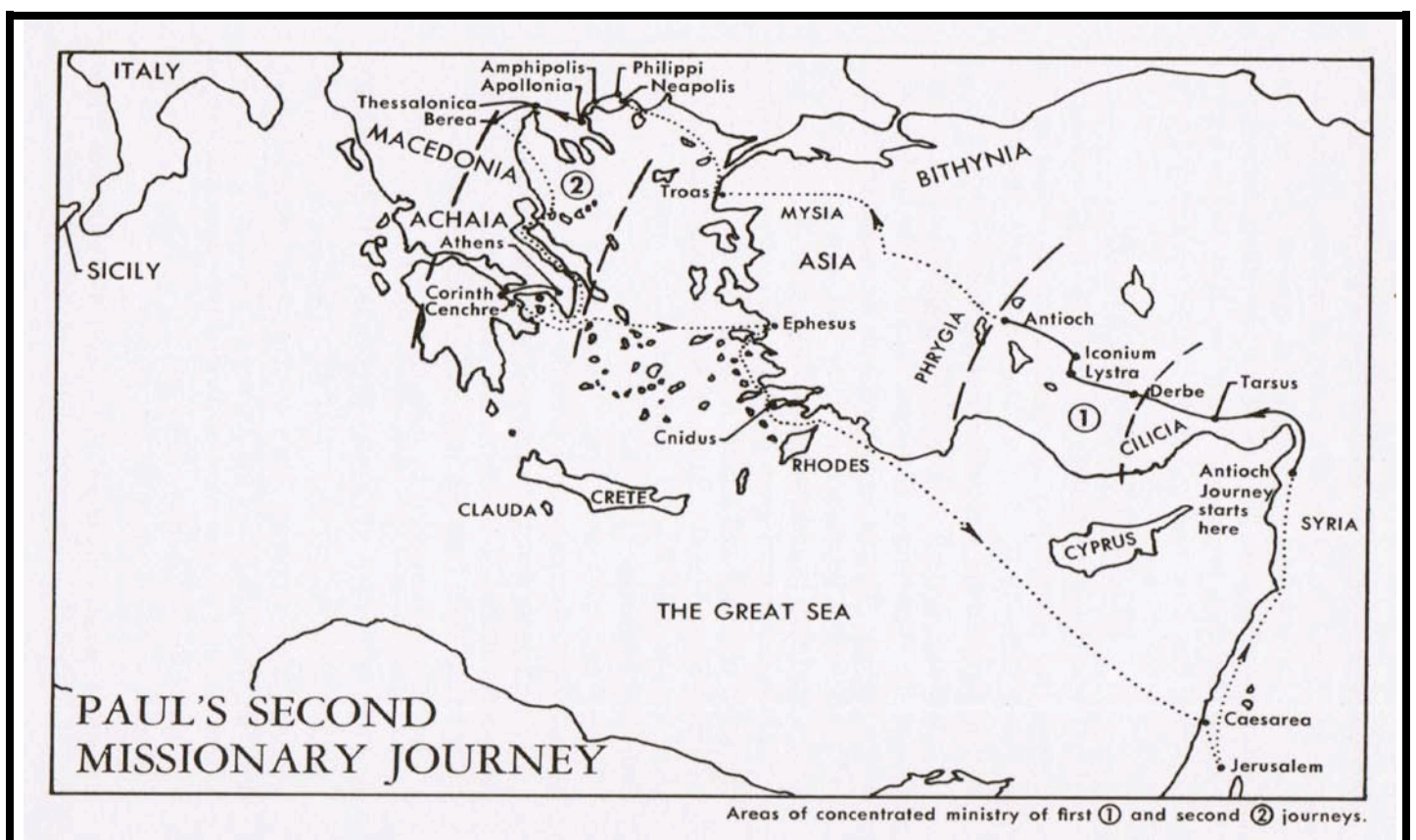
If you have truly turned to Christ from idols, then let it show in your life! Count the

cost: Your fellow countrymen will treat you as an outcast because you choose to shun all the pagan festivals that you used to attend!

Take time to ponder over what's written in Summary Notes (II). Write down your thoughts below and then discuss them with your RTBT group on Sunday:

Day 3 Read ACTS 15:36-41

ACTS 15:36-18:23 record the second missionary journey of Paul and his co-workers. The map below will show us the various places they visited in this journey.



For today, we shall look at the start of the journey.

1. In these 6 verses, four Christians were mentioned. Other than Paul and Barnabas, we have . . .

(a)

(b)

What do we know about (a) and (b) from the book of ACTS that we have read thus far?

2. Verse 39 mentioned a sharp contention between Barnabas and Paul.

(a) What was the contention about?

(b) Why was there this contention?

(c) Was the contention resolved? If yes, how was it resolved?

3. What lessons can we learn from this episode?

Day 4 Read ACTS 16:1-5

In ACTS 15:36, Paul proposed that they visit the brethren in every city where they have preached the word of the Lord and see how they were doing. In ACTS 15:41, we read that he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there. This means Paul and his co-workers were visiting most of the churches planted during the first missionary journey. Can you recall the names of those cities?

1. Here we are introduced to a new member of the missionary team – Timothy. Write down all you know about him from these 5 verses:

2. (a) Why did Paul circumcise Timothy?

(b) Do you think he was right to do this? Explain your answer.

3. Verse 4 mentions that the apostolic letter (ACTS 15:23-29) was delivered to the churches while verse 5 mentioned that the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.

Do you think there is a link between verse 4 and verse 5? If so, what is the relation?

Day 5 Read ACTS 16:6-10

1. What was happening in verses 6-8?
2. What happened in verse 9?
3. What lessons do you think we can learn from this episode here?

Day 6 Read ACTS 16:11-24

1. Can you locate Philippi on the map in page 24? Do you know which modern country is Philippi located at? (Note that the gospel had now reached Europe for the first time!)
2. In your own words, tell us about the first European convert – *who was she, how was she converted, and how do we know her conversion was genuine.*
3. In verse 24, we read that Paul and Silas were put in prison. In your own words, tell us what happened.
4. What lessons have you learnt from this passage?

Day 7 Read ACTS 16:25-40

This account tells us of the conversion of the second European convert. We only know him by his occupation – the Philippian jailor.

1. What led the jailor to ask what he must do to be saved?
2. What did Paul say in answer to the jailor's question?

3. How can we know if his conversion is genuine or otherwise?
4. Why do you think Paul refused to depart secretly as arranged by the magistrates?
5. When they finally left the prison, what did Paul and Silas do before departing the city?

Note: The use of the pronoun “*they*” possibly indicates that *Luke* stayed behind in Philippi and did not depart the city with the team.

Week 5

[6th – 12th January 2013]

Day 1 Read ACTS 17:1-9

After leaving Philippi where they were beaten and imprisoned, Paul and Silas travelled about 100 miles (161 km) to Thessalonica, probably stopping at Amphipolis and Apollonia only for overnight stays (perhaps).

Can you locate Thessalonica on the map in page 24? Thessalonica was the capital of the province of Macedonia.

Although he was an apostle to the Gentiles, yet Paul’s custom was to first reach the Jews with the Gospel in every new place he ministered. Hence we read of him going to the synagogue and preaching to the Jews there.

1. (a) What did he use to reason with the Jews?

(b) What was the main point of his message?

➤ *That the Christ . . .*

➤ *This Jesus . . .*

2. Three groups of people believed his message. Who are they?

-
-
-

These people would form the church at Thessalonica to whom Paul would later write two epistles (1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians).

3. (a) Why was Jason (presumably one of the converts) and some other believers dragged to the rulers of the city?

(b) What were the charges against Paul and Silas? How serious were they?

(c) How was the matter resolved?

Note: The “*security*” mentioned in verse 9 was probably a sum of money that the authorities took from Jason, whereby he will forfeit if the same trouble would occur again or if Paul be seen in Thessalonica again. This explains why the believers in Thessalonica had to send Paul away.

Day 2 Read ACTS 17:10-15

1. Where was the next place the missionaries came to?

2. How were the people here described? Why?

3. Describe what took place – *where the missionaries went and what they did, and the responses to what they said and did.*

4. Review the two episodes -- in Thessalonica and Berea. What lessons can we learn concerning the preaching of the gospel?

Day 3 Summary Notes for ACTS 17:1-15

The indefatigable spirit of Paul and Silas was commendable indeed! They had just been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, but did they ask for an extended break? No! After they left Philippi, they pressed on with the Gospel work, travelling more than 160 km to the capital city of Macedonia – Thessalonica. At Thessalonica, they met with trouble once more but again, their response was not to lie down and take cover. No, they travelled another 97 km to Berea to preach the Gospel! What zeal! **Are we like them, or unlike them? What's their driving force?**

How Paul preached the Gospel in these two places, mainly to the Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the synagogues, is instructive:

- (a) He used the Scriptures (Old Testament),
- (b) His purpose was to show that Jesus is the Christ
- (c) He aimed at the mind: *reasoned* (verse 2), *explaining and demonstrating* (verse 3), *persuaded* (verse 4), *searched the Scriptures* (verse 11).

A wide range of people believed – Jews and devout Greeks, leading women and prominent men. The Gospel makes no racial or gender discrimination. Faith is what is required.

Opposition would always follow. In Thessalonica, it was the Jewish population who stirred up trouble. In Berea, it was not the native Jews but Jews from nearby Thessalonica who led the opposition. Opposition is to be expected because the devil will not be quiet when his kingdom is threatened. Like what was said in Acts 14:22 ~ *We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*

What is your likely response when you meet with opposition while seeking to preach the Gospel?

Day 4 Read ACTS 17:16-21

The next stop for Paul was Athens. Can you locate Athens on the map in page 24?

Athens has been the foremost Greek city-state since the 5th century B.C. It boasted of its rich philosophical tradition inherited from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, of its literature and art, and of its notable achievements in the cause of human liberty.

Paul was in Athens alone while waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him from Berea.

1. While in Athens, what did he see? (Verse 16)
2. Upon seeing what he saw, what did he feel? (Verse 16)
3. As a result of what he saw and felt, what did Paul do? (Verse 17)
4. As a result of what Paul did (verse 17), two groups of philosophers disputed with him.
 - (a) Who were they?
 - (b) What was his main message to them?
 - (c) What were their initial responses to Paul's preaching? (Verse 18)
 - (d) What did they finally decide to do with Paul? (Verses 19-20)

Day 5 Read ACTS 17:22-34

Verses 22-31 contain Paul's speech to the Athenians. Unlike previous sermons to the Jews and proselytes (people who know the Old Testament Scriptures), here we find Paul hardly referring to the Scriptures. Instead, he begins by talking to the Athenians about God.

1. Paul highlights five truths about God in these 10 verses.

God is the Ruler of all the nations	Verse 24
God is the Creator of the universe	Verse 25
God is the Judge of the world	Verses 26-27
God is the Maker (Father) of all humans	Verses 28-29
God is the Sustainer of all life	Verses 30-31

Can you connect the right verses to the truths highlighted?

2. Why do you think Paul highlighted these five truths about God to these Athenians?

3. (a) Do you believe these five truths about God?

- (b) Which one of these five truths do you have difficulties believing? Discuss it with a friend in your RTBT group.

- (c) For each of the five truths about God -- write down one impact it should make on your life, if you truly believe it:
 - *If I believe God is the Creator of the universe, then*
 - *If I believe God is the Sustainer of all life, then*
 - *If I believe God is the Ruler of all nations, then*
 - *If I believe God is the Maker (Father) of all humans, then*
 - *If I believe God is the Judge of the world, then*

Day 6 Read ACTS 17:22-34 again

1. Paul has been criticized for his sermon in Athens, with some commentators saying that “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” was absent from his preaching at the Aeropagus.

Take time to read Paul’s sermon in verses 22-31 again. Do you agree with the critics? Explain your answer.

2. What’s the response(s) to the preaching of Paul?
3. In verse 33, we read that some Athenians mocked when they heard Paul talking about the resurrection. Their mocking reveals their unbelief.
 - (a) Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Do you believe this? If not, why? Please share your reservations with your RTBT group if any
 - (b) Christians believe that all men will rise from the dead on the last day. Do you believe this? If not, why? Please share your reservations with your RTBT group if any

Day 7 Review of ACTS 17:16-34

1. Review the lessons of the past 3 days on ACTS 17:16-34. What is the most important lesson you’ve learnt? Write it down in the space provided below:
2. Imagine yourself in Athens at that time.
 - (a) Would you say what Paul said in verses 22-31? Why?
 - (b) Would you do what Paul did in verses 17? Why?

- (c) The action and words of Paul in Athens can be traced back to what he saw and how he felt (verse 16). There is a real danger that we could see what Paul saw and yet not feel what he felt, because we have gotten used to our environment.

Take time to pray that we will always be provoked to jealousy every time we see people giving honour to idols instead of to God.

Week 6

[13th - 19th January 2013]

Day 1 Read ACTS 18:1-18a

The next stop for Paul in this missionary journey is Corinth. Can you locate Corinth on the map in page 24?

Corinth in 1st century AD was a great commercial centre. It boasted of two ports and was hence a city of seafarers, of maritime merchants. It was also a city associated with immorality.

While in Corinth, Paul worked as a tentmaker (verse 3).

1. Besides working as a tentmaker, what else did Paul do? (Verse 4)
2. What was the response of the people? (Verse 6a)
3. As a result of the people's response, what did Paul do? (Verse 7)
4. What was the result of Paul's action in verse 7? (Verse 8)

Note (1): Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue (verse 8) would be a Jew. It is a most amazing thing that he and his household came to faith in Christ after Paul turned his evangelistic efforts to the Gentiles!

Note (2): The people mentioned in verse 8 would be members of the church in Corinth. Paul wrote 1 & 2 Corinthians to that church.

Day 2 Read ACTS 18:1-18a again

1. The Lord spoke to Paul in a night vision in verses 9-10.

(a) What did the Lord command Paul to do? (Verse 9)

(b) The Lord gave Paul two reasons why he must obey His command. What are they?

*

*

2. (a) What happened in verses 12-13?

(b) What's the response of the proconsul? (Verses 14-16)

(c) What happened in verse 17 and what's the response of the proconsul?

3. From verse 11 and verse 18a, we know that Paul was able to stay and minister to the Corinthians for a relatively long time (more than 18 months). This was in sharp contrast to what happened elsewhere whereby Paul had to leave the city after a very short time.

What do you think was/were the reason(s) that led to this long stay in Corinth?

Day 3 Read ACTS 18:18b-23

These verses mark the end of Paul's second missionary journey and the start of his third.

After spending more than 18 months in Corinth, he took his leave and headed back to his home church in Syrian Antioch. On the way, he visited Ephesus and had a brief stopover in Jerusalem.

1. Why, do you think, does Paul keep making a return trip to Syrian Antioch at the end of his missionary journey? What lessons can we learn from this?

2. The "church" mentioned in verse 22 is the Jerusalem church. Why, do you think, Paul would make a trip there to greet them? What lessons can we learn from this?

3. Verse 23b marks the start of (what's commonly called) Paul's third missionary journey.

(a) Where did he go?

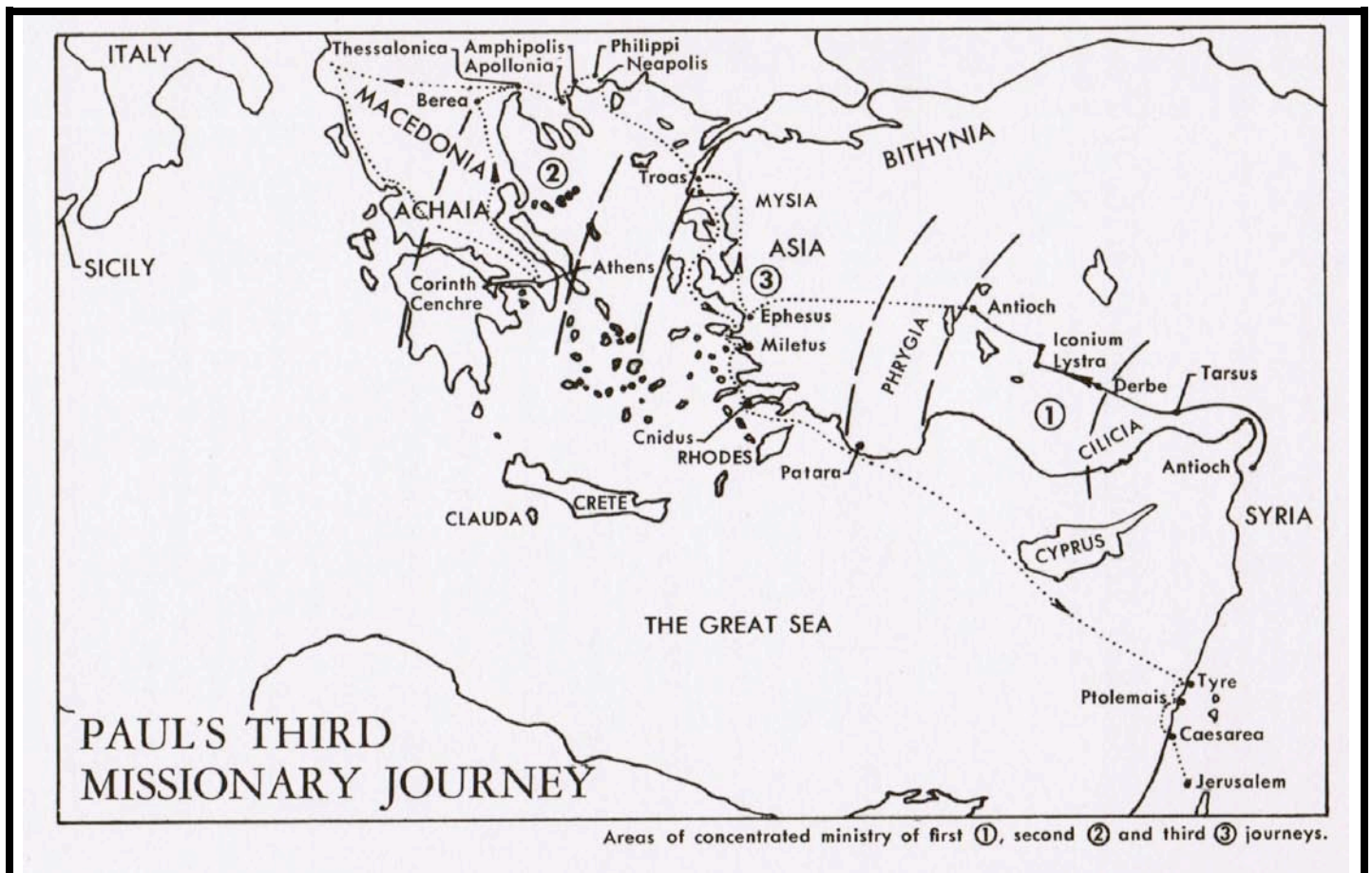
(b) What was his aim?

(c) What lessons can we learn from this?

Note (1): Paul's haircut (verse 18) probably has to do with a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6). It was likely that while in Corinth, Paul had taken a temporary Nazirite vow that meant not cutting one's hair during the period of the vow. His haircut here would mean that the vow is now over.

Note (2): From verse 19, it is clear that Aquila and Priscilla stayed on in Ephesus, and did not accompany Paul for the rest of the journey.

Note (3): It is significant that Paul kept returning to visit the churches he first planted in his first missionary journey (see 14:21-26, 15:36, 41) We can learn from this that Paul did not see mission work as just making disciples and baptizing them, but also teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).



Day 4 Read ACTS 18:24-28

1. Who was Apollos? (Verse 24)
2. What did he do in Ephesus? (Verse 26a)
3. What did he do in Achaia? (Verse 28)

Note: Achaia is the region where Corinth would be situated (see map on page 35).

4. (a) What was the shortcoming of Apollos? (Verse 25)
 - (b) How did Aquila and Priscilla help Apollos concerning this shortcoming? (Verse 26)
 - (c) What can we learn from Aquila and Priscilla in the way they handle Apollo's shortcoming?

Day 5 Summary Notes for ACTS 18

ACTS 18:1-18a

Paul spent more than 18 months ministering in Corinth and wrote at least two letters to this church (1 and 2 Corinthians). No one should doubt that Paul loved these Christians dearly, and yet as we know from his two letters to the Corinthian church, they often doubted his love for them and caused him much pain!

We read in verses 1-3 that Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, stayed with them and worked with them as tentmakers. We know from Paul's letters, especially 2 Corinthians, that the fact that Paul laboured with his hands became a problem with the Corinthians!

As was his usual mode of operation, Paul would first preach the gospel to the Jews. When the Jews hardened their hearts against the gospel, Paul would then turn to the Gentiles. We see Paul doing this in verses 4-7, and yet it is amazing to read that the ruler of the synagogue turned to Christ in faith after that!

Two reasons can be cited for Paul's rather lengthy stay in Corinth:

- (A) The vision of Christ (verses 9-10)

Paul was commanded to continue preaching in Corinth by Christ, with the promise that Christ will be with him and hence no real harm will come upon him. Also, Christ still had many of His elect in Corinth, and so Paul must stay on to preach that these elect may come to faith!

(B) The indifference of Gallio (verses 12-17)

Gallio the proconsul refused to entertain the Jews when they tried to create trouble for Paul. As a result, Paul was not 'forced' to leave Corinth 'prematurely', like what happened in Thessalonica.

ACTS 18:18b-23

Paul was no lone ranger. We can see this from two incidents highlighted by *Luke* in this section.

First of all, we find him returning to the Antioch church at the end of this missionary journey. We find him doing the same in ACTS 14, at the end of the first missionary journey. We can safely presume that he returned to his home church to give them a proper account of what was done during the journey. Paul was not a law to himself!

Secondly, we find him making a special journey to greet the believers in Jerusalem. Here is a man who was keen to maintain fellowship with other believers, and whenever possible, to do whatever he could to prevent any misunderstandings for the devil to exploit. Hence it is significant that after his second missionary journey, he would make this trip to Jerusalem.

ACTS 18:24-28

Apollos was clearly a capable man who would be a very useful servant of the Lord. However, he had one shortcoming as stated in verse 25. The way Aquila and Priscilla proceeded to help him was most wonderful. As F. F. Bruce puts it, "*How much better it is to give such private help to a preacher whose ministry is defective than to correct or denounce him publicly!*"

1. What new truths have you learnt from the Summary Notes, and how they have impacted your life?
2. What old truths were you reminded of from the Summary Notes? How can you live out these truths you've re-learnt in your life right now?
3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Day 6 Read ACTS 19:1-10

Paul first visited Ephesus during his second missionary journey but left after a short time (18:19-21). After a period of time, Apollos visited Ephesus and preached to the Jews living there. We do not know if Aquila and Priscilla engaged in any evangelistic outreach while in Ephesus since *Luke* said nothing about it. Neither do we know how the brethren (18:27, presumably believers in Ephesus?) came to become Christians.

Here in these ten verses, we find Paul returning to Ephesus. Can you locate Ephesus on the map in page 35?

1. Describe, in your own words, what happened between Paul and the 12 men in verses 1-7:
2. Why, do you think, these 12 men did not have the Holy Spirit until verse 6?
3. Paul taught in the synagogue and in the school of Tyrannus for about two years. What were the results of his efforts?

Note: It was believed that during these two years (19:10), churches in the Lycus valley (Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea) were founded, although Paul did not appear to have visited these cities personally.

Day 7 Read ACTS 19:11-20

1. What did God do through Paul (v.11-12)?
2. What did this lead to (v.13-16)?
3. What was the result of this incident being known (v.17-19)?

4. How can you see the truth of verse 20 in this whole episode?

Week 7

[20th – 26th January 2013]

Day 1 Read ACTS 19:21-22

These two verses tell us the future travel plans of Paul. He planned to go to:

- (a) Macedonia
- (b) Achaia
- (c) Jerusalem
- (d) Rome

1. Concerning (a) and (b), 1 Corinthians 16:1-7 tells us why Paul planned this trip. What's the reason?
2. Concerning (c), Romans 15:22-33 tells us why Paul planned this trip. What's the reason?
3. Romans 15:22-33 also gives us information as to why Paul planned to go to (d). What's the reason?
4. From the above, what can we learn about this man Paul?

Day 2 Read ACTS 19:23-41

1. A riot took place in Ephesus.
 - (a) Who instigated it and why? (Verse 24-27a)
 - (b) Why did the rest of Ephesians join in? (Verse 27b)
2. Who quelled the riot and how did he do it?

3. What can we learn from this incident?

Day 3 Summary ACTS 19:1-20

ACTS 19:1-7

Here we read of Paul's encounter with a group of twelve men called 'disciples' in verse 1. Whose disciples? Upon initial contact, it appeared that they are disciples of Jesus i.e. Christians. However, there must be something about them that moved Paul to ask them this question: "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*" When they replied that they have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit, Paul asked them next, "*into what then were you baptized?*"

The reason why Paul would asked these two questions is this: Normally, when one believed in Jesus, one would have received the gift of the Spirit and undergo water baptism, as outlined in ACTS 2:38-39. Once we grasped this, it is clear that these twelve men were not (yet) Christians and Paul proceeded to call them to believe in Jesus (verse 4). When they believed in Christ, they were baptized and we are told that they received the Spirit (verse 6).

This incident is significant from the historical-redemptive perspective. In Acts 2, we read of the believers (mainly Jews) receiving the Spirit. In Acts 8, the Samaritans came to faith in Christ and their reception of the Spirit was a message to all that both Jewish and Samaritans believers are equal members of the church. In Acts 10, a Gentile named Cornelius came to faith in Christ and his reception of the Spirit conveyed the same message. Now in Acts 19, we have former disciples of John the Baptist coming to faith in Christ, and once more *Luke* records their reception of the Spirit. The message is crystal clear: All who believed in Jesus Christ will receive the Holy Spirit of Promise, never mind your race and background!

ACTS 19:8-10

In ACTS 18:19-21, we read that the Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus were friendly to Paul and wanted to hear more from him. Now they had the opportunity to hear Paul for 3 months, and the result was (sadly) a hardening of heart and outright opposition to the Gospel.

In response, Paul withdrew himself, went next door to a lecture hall and continued to preach the Gospel to others who would hear. The result, as verse 10 tells us, was that the whole region heard the gospel!

Acts 19:11-20

Once again, these ten verses once more portray what happened when the Gospel comes into contact with the forces of darkness – the sick were healed (verse 11), the demon-possessed delivered (verse 11) and men held in bondage to the occult set free (verses 18-19)! These miraculous deeds were real. Yet this also points to the fact that there will

be false miracles, like that sad but hilarious episode concerning the seven sons of Sceva (verses 13-16).

The purpose of these miracles was not to awe people nor draw attention to Paul. Rather, as *Luke* was careful to emphasize, it was so that “*the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified*” (verse 17) and that “*the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed*” (verse 20).

What lessons concerning evangelism can we learn from these twenty verses?

Day 4 Summary ACTS 19:21-41

ACTS 19:21-22

As Paul continued to preach and teach in Ephesus, he was concerned about the advance of the gospel and the prosperity of the churches in other places. Hence, his plan to travel to Macedonia and Achaia, then to Jerusalem and finally to Rome!

We know from 1 Corinthians 16 and Romans 15 (as well as 2 Corinthians 8) that Paul was organizing a collection from the Gentile churches to be given to the churches in Judea as a gift, to help them in their famine situation. The aim of this project was to further cement the fellowship between the Jewish and Gentile believers.

At the same time, he was concerned that the gospel should continue to be preached in places where Christ has not yet been named! Hence he wanted to go to Rome, and to move on to Spain from Rome (Romans 15:28)!

From his travel plans, we are therefore given a deeper insight into this man Paul. He was a man totally devoted to Jesus and His kingdom! While ministering in Ephesus, he was at the same time concerned about inter-church relations as well as other missionary outreach!!

ACTS 19:22-41

It is very possible that Paul was talking about this riot experience in Ephesus in 1 Corinthians 15:32 ~ *I have fought with beasts at Ephesus* and 2 Corinthians 1:8 ~ *Of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.*

The instigator of the riot was a man named Demetrius the silversmith. The advance of the gospel threatened his income as the sales of the statues of Diana (Artemis) nose-dived! However, he did not give that as the only reason but gave three motives for concern: (i) the danger of their trade falling into disrepute, (ii) temple of Diana be despised and (iii) magnificence of Diana be destroyed. He was successful in his aim, and a riot resulted!

It is without doubt that Satan was behind this whole matter for he would not be quiet when the name of Christ was magnified in a place that it used to be his stronghold. Could his aim be to bring harm to Paul and even to the young believers in Ephesus? Yet both Satan and his agent (Demetrius) would ultimately fail in their aim.

Paul was kept safe by the intervention of both the Christians and non-Christians (verses 30-31)! Then came the intervention of the town clerk (verses 35-41). We have no indications that he was a Christian. He was merely doing his job and yet what a wonderful job he did! Wisely, he asserted his authority, quelled the riot and dismissed the crowd!

God has His way of protecting His people! Sometimes, He may even use people whom we will never know their names!!

1. What new truths have you learnt from the Summary Notes, and how have they impacted your life?

2. What old truths were you reminded of from the Summary Notes? How can you live out these truths you've re-learnt in your life right now?

3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Day 5 Read ACTS 20:1-6

1. (a) After Paul left Ephesus, where did he go?

- (b) Can you name (recall) the churches there? (See ACTS 16:11-17:15)

- (c) What did Paul do while among them?

Note: Paul would always re-visit the churches he had planted. This is because he firmly believed that Christians need to be constantly encouraged and hence he will always seize the opportunity to do so.

2. Where is his next stop and how long did he stay there?

Note: It is believed that the specific city he stayed in was Corinth.

3. Name the travel companions of Paul listed in verses 4-6:

-
-
-
-
-
-

What are some possible reasons why these people listed here?

Day 6 Read ACTS 20:7-12

Here we are given an account of an incident that took place where Paul and his companions were in Troas.

1. On which day of the week did the disciples at Troas meet?
2. What would these disciples do during the meeting? (Verse 7)
3. What happened to the young man named Eutychus?

Verse 9:

Verse 10:

Verse 12:

4. What do you think is the purpose of this account?

Day 7 Summary Notes for ACTS 20:1-12

It has been pointed out that these twelve verses begin and end with the word '*parakaleo*' (translated as 'encouraged' and 'comforted'). Believers need to be encouraged and comforted, and as we can see from these twelve verses, *parakaleo* come from God's word and God's power.

It is reasonable to believe that when Paul embraced the believers in Ephesus (Asia), he did more than just hugged them. He must have exhorted them with God's Word. In the same way, while in Macedonia, we read that he encouraged them with many words. The 'many words' must mean Paul exhorting them *often*, but with what? God's Word! Then we read of Paul spending three months in Achaia. Can you imagine Paul saying nothing to these Corinthians from God's Word? In fact, we see the same trend continuing in Troas when the 'talking' lasted till midnight and continued till daybreak!!

The incident of Eutychus demonstrated the power of God in raising the dead! It comforted the believers in Troas and all who read the account because it reminded them that the God they worshipped is living and powerful, and that this raising from the dead is but a reminder of the victory we have in Jesus' resurrection!

We should also note from these 12 verses that the early disciples met on the first day of the week (Sunday) and when they met, they had the Lord's Supper (breaking of bread) and preaching.

1. What new truths have you learnt from the Summary Notes, and how have they impacted your life?
2. What old truths were you reminded of from the Summary Notes? How can you live out these truths you've re-learnt in your life right now?
3. Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Week 8

[27th January – 2nd February 2013]

Day 1 Read ACTS 20:13-16, Ephesians 4:11-16

ACTS 20:13-16 is a rather breathless account of the journey of Paul and his co-workers from Troas (where he addressed the local church) to Miletus (where he addressed the elders of the church). They stopped at four coastal ports along the way – Assos, Mitylene, Chios and Samos. It appears that they sailed in the day and anchored each night, probably due the wind. Paul appeared to be in a hurry, and verse 16 explained that it was because he wanted to be at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

Look up Miletus and Ephesus on the map in page 35. The distance between them is about 30 miles. Miletus will occupy our attention for the rest of ACTS 20.

1. From verse 17, we read that Paul sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.
 - (a) Besides elders, what other name/designation were given to these men? (Verse 28)
 - (b) What is the main task of these men? (Verse 28)

2. Another way of saying '*to shepherd*' would be '*to pastor*'. When Paul later wrote an epistle to the Ephesians church, he mentioned 'pastors' – Ephesians 4:11-16.
 - (a) From Ephesians 4:11, how should we view 'pastors'?
 - (b) From Ephesians 4:11-12, what should pastors be doing?

Verse 11:

Verse 12:
 - (b) Ephesians 4:11-13 outline the goal that pastors should aim at as they carry out their task. What is it?

3. Imagine that Shalom Church is the located in Ephesus and we now receive the call from Paul at Miletus.
 - (a) Who would be making this 30 miles journey to see Paul?
 - (b) Take time to pray for these men individually by name, that they will be faithful elder-overseers-shepherds for your soul.

Day 2 Read ACTS 20:17-38 (if you can), else just ACTS 20:17-21

Paul's message to these Ephesians elders-overseers can be divided into three sections:

- His ministry among them (verses 18-21)
- His coming sufferings after leaving them (verses 22-27)
- His exhortation to them (verses 28-35)

Today we shall look at verses 18-21.

1. Paul begins with an appeal to their memory of how he lived among them as he served the Lord: *You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manners I always lived among you, serving the Lord . . .* (verse 18-19a)

The four prominent features of his lifestyle among them were:

- with all _____ (verse 19)
 - with _____ tears (verse 19)
 - with (*many*) _____ (verse 19)
 - with utter faithfulness in preaching and teaching (verses 20-21)
2. How can we see the utter faithfulness in the preaching-teaching ministry of Paul among the Ephesians?
 3. Whether to Jews or Greeks, Paul's message was ultimately the same.
 - (a) What was it?
 - (a) Can you say this day that you have heeded his message? Why or why not?

Day 3 Read ACTS 20:17-38 (if you can), else just ACTS 20:22-27

1. From what the Ephesians elders knew, Paul now turned to what he knew (and did not know).
 - (a) What did Paul know? (Verse 23)
 - (b) What did Paul not know? (Verse 22)
 - (c) Why was Paul persisting in making the trip to Jerusalem? (Verse 22, 24)
2. Paul was persuaded that he would not see these Ephesians elders again on earth (verse 25). Hence, he bade farewell to these men, stating that he was innocent of their blood (verse 26).

(a) What does this phrase mean?

(b) How can Paul be so sure that he is innocent of their blood? (Verse 27)

3. Is there a situation whereby we can and must say that we are innocent of someone's blood? What would that situation be? Elaborate.

Day 4 Read ACTS 20:17-38 (if you can), else just ACTS 20:28-35

1. Paul's call to the Ephesians elders was to *take heed* (verse 28) and *watch* (verse 31). Over what or whom were they to take heed and watch?

2. What reasons did Paul give to motivate the Ephesians elders to heed his call?

Verse 28c:

Verse 29-30:

3. What confidence did these Ephesians elders have, that they could do the task? (Verse 32)

4. In verses 33-35, Paul again reminded the Ephesians elders of his lifestyle among them. What relevance does this have with regard to the call in verse 28 and 31?

Day 5 Read ACTS 20:36-38

These 3 verses describe the farewell scene after Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians elders.

1. What did Paul and the elders do?

Verse 36:

Verse 37-38a:

Verse 38b:

2. What does this farewell scene tell you about Paul's relationship with these people?

3. Have you ever experienced a similar situation? Elaborate.

Note: When ACTS 21:1 says '*we had departed from them*', the Greek conveys the idea that Paul and his co-workers had to tear themselves away from the Ephesians elders! This is an indication of the deep affection and ties they had with one another.

Day 6 Read ACTS 21:1-15

These 15 verses detailed the remaining section of Paul's journey to Jerusalem. When he finally reached Jerusalem (verse 15), it would mark the end of Paul's third missionary journey. *Luke*, in writing these 15 verses, wanted to highlight what happened at two places: Tyre and Caesarea.

1. (a) Who did Paul and his co-workers meet in Tyre?
(b) How long did he stay with them?
(c) What did they say to him?
(d) How did they part ways?

2. (a) Who did Paul and his co-workers meet in Caesarea?

Verse 8-9:

Verse 10:

- (b) What did the prophet say? (Verse 11)

- (c) What did the believers say in response? (Verse 12)

(d) What was Paul's response to their pleadings? (Verse 13)

3. Why do you think Paul insisted on making this journey to Jerusalem?

Day 7 Special Study: *Paul's insistence on journeying to Jerusalem*

We read in ACTS 21:15 that Paul finally reached Jerusalem. Let's re-cap how the journey started and what significant things happened along the way:

19:21 ~

20:22 ~

20:23 ~

21:4 ~

21:11 ~

21:12 ~

Paul was adamant in making this trip to Jerusalem.

(a) Was he right in rejecting the pleas of his friends to abandon the trip?

(b) Was the Holy Spirit giving Paul contradictory messages, telling him to go to Jerusalem (19:21 and 20:22) and not to go to Jerusalem (21:1)?

(c) Was Paul right in making this trip?

Acknowledgement

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Thank you, brothers!

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another! (Proverbs 27:17, ESV)