

## SESSION 2: THE ENDS OF THE EARTH (ACTS 10-28)

### PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION

Read Acts 10-11, 13-14, 15-21, 28; Galatians (as much as you have time to read).

### Summary of the Video: Module 6, Episode 2

We now sink our teeth into the second half of Acts (chs. 10-28). At this point in the story, it seems that Paul started writing his letters. So, we will look at a couple in here. However, some of his letters are too long to fit into this one lecture (which is rather long already)! We walk through Acts chapter by chapter and examine each letter when it would likely have been written in the story.

Acts 10-11 contains a dream and its application from which the Gentile mission is birthed in its full form. Peter hears that God wants him to broadcast salvation to non-Jews, Cornelius receives the Gospel, and many other Gentiles join in. The report of this Gentile revival is received with joy.

Aside: There are three examples of prophetic ministry in Acts: Agabus (Acts 11), prophets and teachers (Acts 13), Judas and Silas (Acts 15). In all three episodes, they give direct guidance about how to care for the poor, send people out on mission, and resolve theological/relational tensions in the church.

The first deliberate evangelistic mission starts in Acts 13-14. An apostolic team led by Paul and Barnabas (with John Mark) heads out after prophets and teachers pray and fast for God's direction.

*Paul served Jewish believers out of a sense of gratitude (because the Gospel had come through them in a sense). Should we serve Jewish believers in the same way today? It should positively impact our posture toward and attitude about Jewish people. But the practical outworking of our honoring Jews depends on many factors.*

Now, because Andrew Wilson believes this is when Galatians would have been written (around Acts 14), we take a quick look at that book. Making much the same point as Peter and Luke, Galatians teaches that one need not become culturally Jewish in order to worship Jesus; therefore, Christianity can express itself differently in different cultures around the world. The primary issue of Galatians isn't about "earning your salvation" as much "proving that you're God's child by keeping the Jewish law."

*In Galatians 4, Paul talks about the observance of days, months, and seasons. Is he writing to Jews or all Christians? Do Christians need to (or should they) observe religious holidays? He's talking to Gentiles in the whole book. The problem with such observance isn't the act as much as the attitude or hope behind observing the day. If you feel it "sets you apart from other Christians/people", that is problematic.*

*Were the “basic principles” to which the non-Jewish Galatian Christians were “enslaved” the relics of their previous religion or of Judaism?* For Paul, you are enslaved to any god that you turn to serve. In chapter 3, Paul seems to include Jews (and therefore the Jewish religion they practiced) as being in danger of enslavement to “basic principles”.

Next we turn to Acts 15 and its “Council of Jerusalem”. It is quite important in the story of Acts and the declaration that Gentiles don’t need to “become Jews” to be legitimate Christians. He drops a bomb on us in asking whether or not Christians should “eat kosher” (i.e. according to Jewish food regulations). Feel free to ponder the question for a few moments before continuing on with the video. Andrew Wilson follows with his own perspective on the question.

We then briefly overview Paul’s “second missionary journey” from Acts 15-18. Within the time frame of this journey, Paul likely wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians, so we check out those letters. Because both letters emphasize “faith, hope, and love”, we use that to structure our study of them.

We turn next to Paul’s “third missionary journey” as seen in Acts 18-21. During this journey, he may not have planted as many churches, but he seems to have written more letters that entered the NT (1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans, possibly also Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon).

In the final section of this session, we look at Paul’s trials from Acts 21-28. It is his journey to Rome and he evangelizes along the way, so in that sense it’s also a missionary journey!

*For what reason would a scholar date Galatians after the “Jerusalem Council”?* If you think Paul wrote to the “northern Galatian area” (to ethnic Galatians) you would conclude that he hadn’t reached that area before the Jerusalem Council.

## Terms You’ll Need to Know:

Arminian—based in the teaching of Jacobus Arminius (1500s), this theology places heavy emphasis on human responsibility rather than God’s sovereignty (in predestination).

Peter Leithart, *Delivered from the Elements of the World: Atonement, Justification, Mission* (IVP Academic, 2016).

Eschatology—traditionally this has been “the study of last things”, but in this course we use the term to describe “God’s ideal” or all that God plans to do in and through Jesus, the Spirit and the church.

Over-realized eschatology—believing that more that has been predicted in Scripture has happened than really has (e.g. Jesus has returned, we’ve been resurrected).

Under-realized eschatology—believing that less that has been predicted in Scripture has happened than really has (e.g. Jesus hasn’t come; Jesus hasn’t sent the Spirit; Jesus hasn’t started his kingdom).

## Watch Video

Watch Module 6 Episode 2 (1hr 45 minutes).

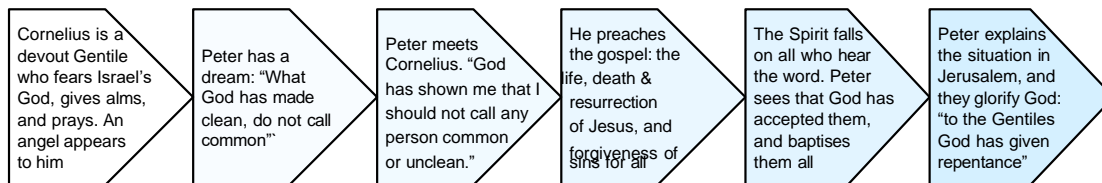
## The Church Age

- I. The Story So Far
- II. Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (Acts 3-9)
- III. The Ends of the Earth (Acts 10-28; Galatians; 1&2 Thessalonians)**
- IV. Romans
- V. 1&2 Corinthians
- VI. The Prison Letters
- VII. The Catholic Epistles
- VIII. Revelation

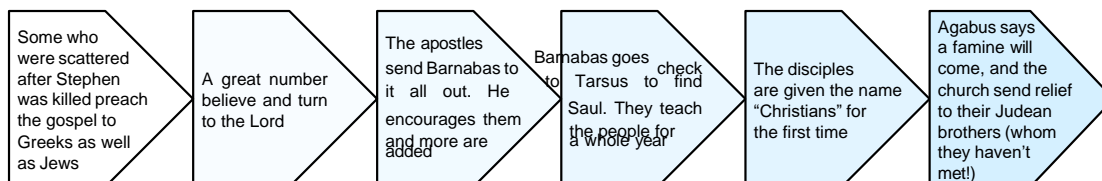
27

## The Gospel Reaches the Gentiles (Acts 10-11)

### God-Fearing Gentiles in Caesarea (10:1-11:18)



### Random Gentiles in Antioch (11:19-30)



28

## Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14; AD 46-47)

- This is the first ever deliberate apostolic mission. Note:
  - The multiracial leadership team in Antioch, worshipping and fasting, and then hearing God clearly speak (13:1-3)
  - Paul's confrontation with Elymas on Cyprus (13:4-12)
  - John Mark's departure (13:13)
  - Preaching in Pisidian Antioch (13:14-43)
  - Paul and Barnabas' commission to the Gentiles, fulfilling Isaiah 49 (13:44-52)
  - "As many as were appointed to eternal life believed" (13:48)
  - Paul and Barnabas are first called apostles in Iconium (14:1-4; cf. v14)
  - Pagan worship in Lystra and Derbe, followed by stoning (14:5-20)
  - Encouragement of the churches, appointing elders, praying and fasting (14:21-23)
  - All of this is in Galatia!
  - Feedback in Antioch (14:24-28)



29

## Galatians (AD 48)

- Two thought-provoking ways to approach the letter
  - Why does Christianity look different everywhere? Why does its centre of gravity keep moving?
  - Tom Wright: imagine a missionary school in South Africa under apartheid
- There are two main practical problems addressed by Paul: circumcision in Galatia (5:1-15) and table fellowship in Antioch (2:11-14). A third, the observance of the Jewish calendar, surfaces briefly (4:8-13)
  - All reflect the view that Gentiles need to become like Jews if they are to be full members of God's people
- But Paul will have none of this
  - Because justification is by faith and not by works of the law (2:15-21)
  - Because the gift of the Spirit is by faith, for all nations, and not by works of the law for Jews only (3:1-14)
  - Because being in Christ is by faith, for all nations, and not by works of the law for Jews only (3:15-29)
  - Because we are now sons and not slaves (4:1-31)
  - Because righteous living comes through faith, love and the Spirit, not by works of the law (5:1-26)
  - Because forcing circumcision is about boasting, rather than about new creation (6:12-16)
- In that sense, Galatians is not just about individual lawkeeping (or "legalism"), but about individuals, communities and the whole of creation (1:4; 6:15)
  - The Christian life is not a matter of food, or festivals, or foreskins, or the flesh ...
  - ... but about faith, fellowship, forgiveness, family, freedom, Fatherhood, favour and fruit

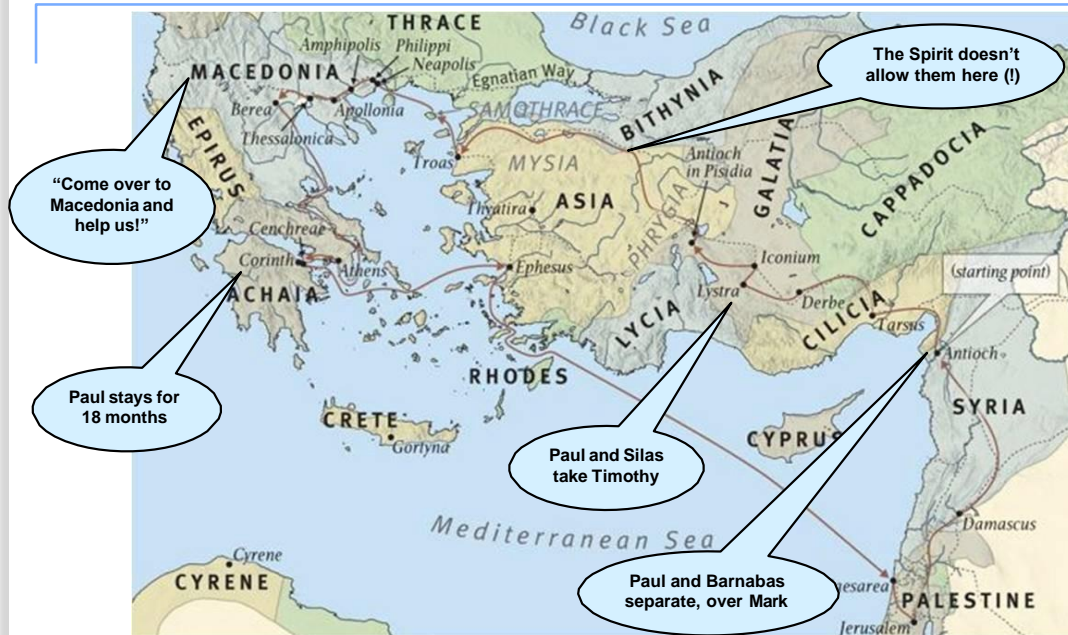
30

## The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15; AD 49)

- The Council of Jerusalem probably follows hot on the heels of the Galatian incident (although it is possible that Galatians was written later, around AD 55). In many ways, this is the centrepiece of the book of Acts
- The question is simple: do Gentiles have to become like Jews in order to inherit God's promises?
  - Obviously, there is plenty in the OT about the nations being taught God's law from Mt Zion and so on
  - But, as Peter explains (15:7-11), the gift of the Spirit has already been given to the Gentiles, which indicates that God has accepted them by grace
  - And, as James argues (15:13-18), the prophets also show that the Gentiles will seek the Lord and remain Gentiles (Amos 9:11-12)
- So without compromising on the inclusion of Gentiles, or on the grace of the gospel, the apostles and elders decide that the Jews need to accept the Gentiles as full members of God's people, but the Gentiles need to be sensitive to their Jewish brothers and sisters
  - They should abstain from things polluted by idols (see also 1 Cor 8-10) ...
  - ... and from sexual immorality ...
  - ... and from what has been strangled ...
  - ... and from blood
  - Note that the same list appears in 15:20, 15:29 and 21:25
- So: are you kosher? Why / why not?

31

## Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22; AD 49-51)



32

## 1&2 Thessalonians (AD 51)

- We could say a lot about the Thessalonian letters, but both of them include three major elements, which are introduced in 1 Thess 1:3
  - Prayer and encouragement, for perseverance and faithful gospel preaching despite persecution (work of faith)
    - 1 Thess 1:1-10
    - 1 Thess 2:13-3:13
    - 2 Thess 1:1-12
  - The importance of clarity on eschatology (steadfastness of hope)
    - 1 Thess 4:13-5:11
    - 2 Thess 2:1-17
  - The Thessalonians should imitate the apostles' example of courage, diligence and generosity (labour of love)
    - 1 Thess 2:1-12
    - 1 Thess 4:1-12
    - 2 Thess 3:1-18

33

## Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:22-21:17; AD 52-57)



34

## Paul's Trials (Acts 21:18-28:31)



### GROUP MEETING:

#### Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you? Also, ask if anything was confusing or needs clarification.

1. Who are the "unclean" or "off-limits" type of people to your church or culture? What would it take to convince people in your church to open the door to them?

2. Identify as many of the specific details as you can of the evangelistic mission in Acts 13-14. How do apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and the church work together for this trip? What can/should we take on board in our view of apostolic mission?

3. Tom Wright gives an illustration in apartheid South Africa for the writing of Galatians. Think of an example that might occur in your culture. How would Galatians speak into that problem?

4. Andrew Wilson contends that sexual immorality is sinful whereas the other two conclusions of the “Council of Jerusalem” (strangled food, blood) are not. Give your own rationale for why this is the case.

5. Acts begins with Jesus having a conversation with a handful of people and ends with the Gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire. It took only forty years. What would it look like for God to use your local church in the same way?

## Meditation on Scripture

Acts 6:7; 19:20

Galatians 3:25-28

Acts 28:30-31

## Putting This Session into Practice

Prayerfully consider this week what cultural practices you, your family, your community group, and perhaps even your church have which unnecessarily make people feel unwelcome. Consider which are biblical priorities and which should be discarded. Ask God what you might do to change that culture.