

ACTS 6-10 - PART 2
WITNESSES
VILLAGE CHURCH
STUDIES



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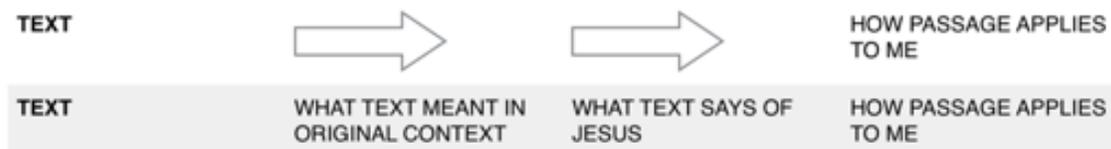
READING THE BIBLE

Because Jesus is the centre of the Bible, we read everything through the lens of his life, death and resurrection. If all God’s words point to Jesus then we have to see Christ before we can see ourselves.

UNDERSTANDING

Because “everything written... in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44) is about Jesus, we can’t expect that the Bible would speak primarily to us.

Because the Bible was written to an original audience, we need to understand what it was saying to them. And because all of scripture is speaking of Jesus, we need to understand why, and in that we can see how the passage speaks to us.



What is this passage saying to its original readers? How is this passage speaking of Jesus? What is this passage saying to Christians today?

KNOWING IT, FEELING IT

Because we might want to connect with God and know Him better we could want everything He says to be immediately relevant to our lives. But the Bible is about God. The wonder of the gospel is that, by grace through faith, we are “in Christ,” as the New Testament often puts it. And if we are “in Christ” we have received every spiritual blessing that Jesus received (Eph.1:3).

Because the Bible is all about Jesus, and because those who believe in him are “in Christ,” the most powerful truths of reading the Bible come from seeing how the words are speaking of Jesus.

A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS

There are many confronting, many culturally-offensive and many confusing parts in the Bible. Even Peter, one of the writers of the Bible, considers Paul, another writer of the Bible to be “hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16). That’s why God gives us His Spirit and a community. Asking God and asking those who have been around the Bible for a bit longer, and have maybe thought through and wrestled with these questions as well, is invaluable when trying to grow in your understanding. As well as that, Village will be running a How to Read the Bible course starting on the second Sunday of this month, and every odd-numbered month.

BACKGROUND

WHO WROTE ACTS?

Acts is the second part of a two part record that Luke the Physician (Col 4:14) wrote, the first being what we know as the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1-4). Whereas for the Gospel Luke interviewed eyewitnesses to build an account of what happened, Acts is a combination of both his research and his personal experience, as can be seen when the narrative changes from third person to first person in Acts 16:10.

WHY & WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?

At the start of both his record of Jesus' life, and the life of the early Church, Luke indicates that he's writing this for someone named Theophilus (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1). We don't learn much more about Theophilus, but it seems like Theophilus sponsored Luke to research & record Jesus' life, and the effects of his resurrection on those who witnessed it and then those who heard about it. It's hard to know exactly when it was written, but because there's no reference to the destruction of the Jewish temple (70AD), it's most likely that the Gospel of Luke was finished and sent to Theophilus sometime after AD 61, and what we have as Acts not long after that. It's hard to know, but what we can be certain of is that Luke did his research with those who saw the risen Jesus with their own eyes.

WHAT'S ACTS ABOUT?

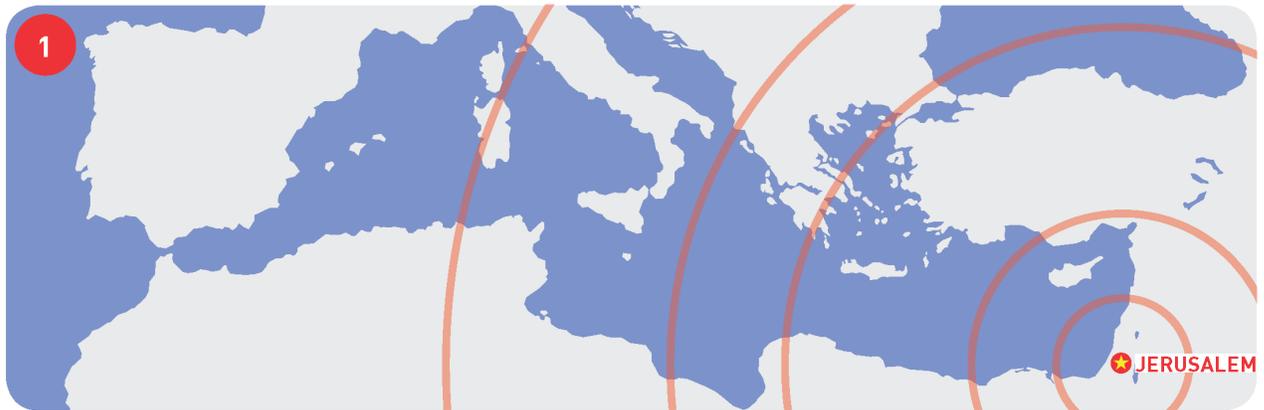
In short, Acts is about what Jesus continued to do after his ascension. It records the expansion of the early church from Jerusalem, to Samaria and right into the heart of Rome. While there are probably many reasons Luke wrote Acts, from the material he included it seems clear that Luke was keen for everyone to know that this Jewish Messiah is not just for Israel, but is the Saviour of the whole world. It's a book about the first witnesses to the resurrected Saviour and how through God's Spirit those witnesses took the Gospel right into the heart of the most powerful empire the world had known. The world was being reshaped around Jesus.

A NOTE ABOUT READING ACTS

You'll notice as you read Acts that there's a regular occurrence of miraculous events. We'll take a few weeks to deal with some of the questions that arise out of this, but it's worth noting at the start that Acts is a book that isn't prescriptive about the Christian life or church, but descriptive. For more information on this, and lots more about Acts, check out the articles on the Village Church website at vc.org.au/acts

GOSPEL PROGRESS IN ACTS

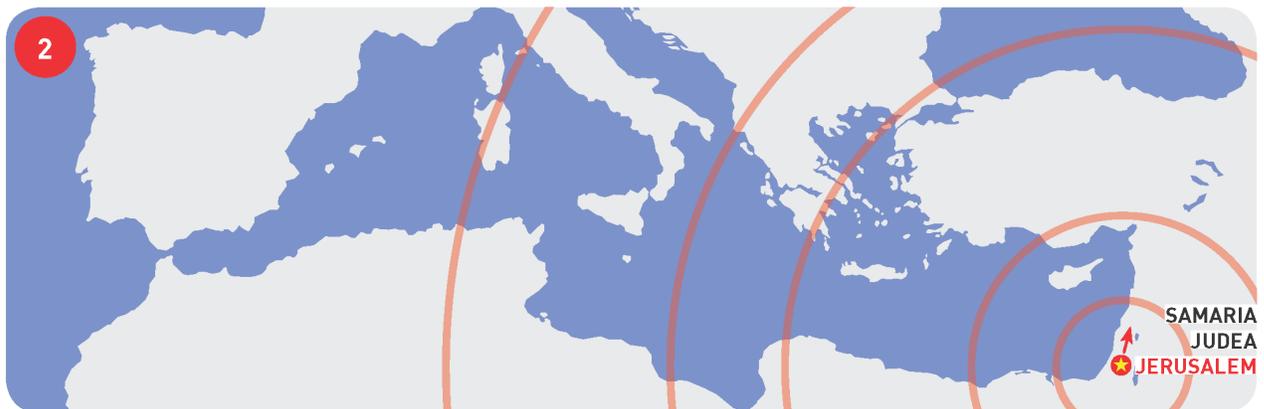
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1:1 - 6:7

THE GOSPEL STARTS IN JERUSALEM

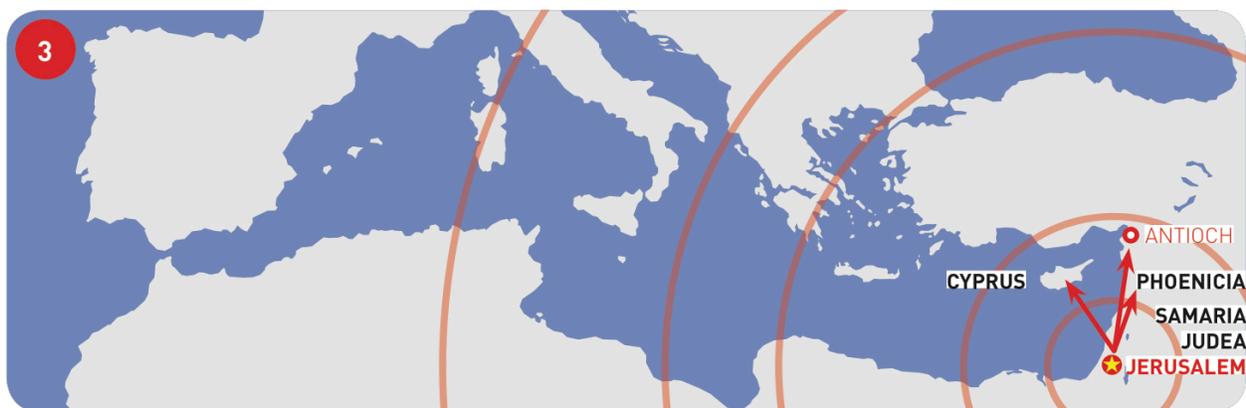
- 1:1-26 The risen Lord Jesus promises his gathered disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them and they will be his 'witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (1:8).
- 2:1-47 Many Jewish people, gathered from 'every nation under heaven' to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem, hear the gospel of Jesus. More than 3000 people receive the good news and are baptised as believers (2:41, 47).
- 3:1 - 4:31 Many of the Jews who heard Peter and John preach the gospel in the temple believe, in total about 5000 men (4:4).
- 4:32 - 6:7 Despite much persecution, the word of the Lord continues to increase, with multitudes of both men and women in Jerusalem being added to the Lord, including a great number of the priests (5:14-15; 6:7).



6:8 - 9:31

THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO JUDEA & SAMARIA

- 6:8 - 7:60 The gospel continues to be powerfully preached by Stephen, until he is executed by the Jewish leaders.
- 8:1-40 In God's sovereignty, the terrible persecution of the church leads to the spread of the gospel throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1), fulfilling the first stage of Jesus' mission (1:8). Philip preaches in Samaria, with many locals joyfully embracing the gospel, including Simon the Magician (8:6, 12-13, 25). Lastly, Philip sees an Ethiopian eunuch come to faith in Jesus (8:35-38).
- 9:1-31 Saul, the great persecutor of the Christian church, comes to faith after being confronted by the risen Lord Jesus (9:17-22) and is commissioned to evangelise 'the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel' (9:15). To the shock of the Jews, Saul [now Paul] immediately proclaims Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus (9:20) and the church multiplies, with newfound peace throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria (9:31).



9:32 - 12:24 THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO THE GENTILES

9:32 - 11:18 After Aeneas is healed, residents of Lydda and Sharon turn to the Lord (9:35). Likewise, after Tabitha is raised, many in Joppa trusted in Jesus (9:42). Finally, to the shock of the Jewish believers, the Holy Spirit converts the Gentile Cornelius and all his household to the gospel (10:44). The doors are now open for the Gentile mission to begin!

11:19 - 12:24 On account of the persecution, the gospel spreads to the Jews as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Uniquely, the gospel is preached to the Gentiles as well in Antioch, with many coming to faith in Jesus (11:21-24). The church is fully established through the preaching ministry of Barnabas and Saul (11:26), and Antioch becomes the new base for Paul's three missionary journeys into Asia-minor, Macedonia and Greece. Back in Jerusalem, the word of God 'increases and multiplies, despite the imprisonment of Peter and execution of James (12:24).



12:25 - 16:5 THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO ASIA-MINOR

12:25 - 14:28 After being commissioned for gospel mission (13:2-3), Paul and Barnabas sail from Antioch (in Syria) to Cyprus and then onto Pisidia and Galatia, visiting the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Along the way they face much opposition to their preaching from both Jews and Gentiles, culminating in Paul almost stoned to death (14:19). Nevertheless, by God's grace, a Roman leader (13:9), and many Gentiles believe and the gospel spreads through the whole region (13:48-49; 14:1, 21, 27).

15:1 - 16:5 Despite the call for Gentile believers to be circumcised, the Jerusalem Council sends delegates to the largely Gentile church in Antioch to encourage them in their faith (though urging them to not be a stumbling block to the Jewish believers). Furthermore, though Paul and Barnabas part company, the apostles revisit and strengthen the churches planted on their previous mission together (15:39-40; 16:1), and the number of believers continue to grow (16:5).



16:6 - 21:16 THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO EUROPE

- 16:6 - 17:15** Guided and empowered by the Spirit, Paul and Silas bring the gospel to Macedonia, namely in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Despite them being imprisoned, beaten and lynched, many come to faith in Jesus: Lydia and her household (16:14-15), the Philippian jailer and his family (16:30-34), a few Jews, many devout Greeks and several leading women (17:4-5, 12).
- 17:16 - 18:22** Despite Paul being mocked for his belief in the resurrection in Athens, some men and women join him and trust in Jesus (17:34). Likewise in Corinth, despite strong opposition from the Jews, Crispus the ruler of the Synagogue, his whole household and many Corinthians believe the gospel and are baptised (18:8).
- 18:23 - 19:41** Paul speaks for two years in Ephesus 'so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks' (19:10). After Paul performs extraordinary healings and exorcisms in the name of Jesus, fear falls on the residents, who praise the name of Jesus and many repent of their evil practices. 'So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.' (19:20)
- 20:1 - 21:16** Paul travels throughout Macedonia and Greece, encouraging, instructing and farewelling the churches of these regions, as well as the Ephesian elders, on his way to Jerusalem.



21:17 - 28:31 THE GOSPEL ON THE WAY TO ROME

- 21:17 - 23:35** In the face of hostility, arrest, imprisonment and an assassination plot, Paul still manages to speak the gospel to all the gathered Jews in Jerusalem, to the Jewish council and to his Roman captors.
- 24:1 - 26:32** Again during his self-defence, Paul explains the gospel to the Roman Governors, Felix and Festus, and Agrippa, King of Judea in fulfilment of Jesus' promises to him (Acts 9:15-16).
- 27:1 - 28:31** Despite being bound on a ship, shipwrecked on Malta and imprisoned in Rome, Paul witnesses to the sailors and soldiers, the Maltese people, and the Jews and Gentiles in Rome. The book of Acts concludes with Paul 'proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.' (28:31). From Rome, over many centuries, the gospel continues to spread to 'the ends of the earth'.

Study One: Stephen Gets Stoned

ACTS 6:1–8:1

6:2-6 As the church grew the apostles had to learn to delegate. In choosing people of “good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom,” they are showing the diversity, malleability and responsibility of a church body for the first time.

6:1 In those days, as the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. **2** Then the Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, “It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to handle financial matters. **3** Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. **4** But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry.” **5** The proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch. **6** They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith. **8** Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. **9** Then some from what is called the Freedmen’s Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and disputed with Stephen. **10** But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.

11 Then they persuaded some men to say, “We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God!” **12** They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came, dragged him off, and took him to the Sanhedrin. **13** They also presented false witnesses who said, “This man does not stop speaking blasphemous words against this holy place and the law. **14** For we heard him say that Jesus, this Nazarene, will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.” **15** And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

7:1 “Is this true?” the high priest asked.

2 “Brothers and fathers,” he said, “listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he settled in Haran, **3** and said to him:

Get out of your country
and away from your relatives,
and come to the land
that I will show you.

4 “Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this land you now live in. **5** He didn’t give him an inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, but He promised to give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him, even though he was childless. **6** God spoke in this way:

His descendants would be strangers
in a foreign country,
and they would enslave
and oppress them 400 years.

7 I will judge the nation
that they will serve as slaves, God said.
After this, they will come out
and worship Me in this place.

8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision. After this, he fathered Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; Isaac did the same with Jacob, and Jacob with the 12 patriarchs.

9 “The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt, but God was with him **10** and rescued him out of all his troubles. He gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who appointed him ruler over Egypt and over his whole household. **11** Then a famine and great suffering came over all of Egypt and Canaan, and our ancestors could find no food. **12** When Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent our ancestors the first time. **13** The second time, Joseph was revealed to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to Pharaoh. **14** Joseph then invited his father Jacob and all his relatives, 75 people in all, **15** and Jacob went down to Egypt. He and our ancestors died there, **16** were carried back to Shechem, and were placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

17 “As the time was drawing near to fulfill the promise that God had made to Abraham, the people flourished and multiplied in Egypt **18** until a different king who did not know Joseph ruled over Egypt. **19** He dealt deceitfully with our race and oppressed our ancestors by making them leave their infants outside, so they wouldn’t survive. **20** At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful in God’s sight. He was cared for in his father’s home three months, **21** and when he was left outside, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted and raised him as her own son. **22** So Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his speech and actions.

7:58-60 The Greek word for witness is “martyr”, which came to be associated with witnessing to the point of death, from which the word “martyr” derives. Stephen became the first such “ultimate” witness in the early church (c. a.d. 31/34).

8:1 Saul (who would become Paul) was there, and he agreed with Stephen’s death. In Acts 22:20 Paul reflects on the event. No doubt it had a profound effect on his ministry, and his deep remorse of his former life as a persecutor and a Pharisee.

23 “As he was approaching the age of 40, he decided to visit his brothers, the Israelites. **24** When he saw one of them being mistreated, he came to his rescue and avenged the oppressed man by striking down the Egyptian. **25** He assumed his brothers would understand that God would give them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. **26** The next day he showed up while they were fighting and tried to reconcile them peacefully, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why are you mistreating each other?’

27 “But the one who was mistreating his neighbor pushed him away, saying: Who appointed you a ruler and a judge over us? **28** Do you want to kill me, the same way you killed the Egyptian yesterday?

29 “At this disclosure, Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he fathered two sons. **30** After 40 years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush. **31** When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight. As he was approaching to look at it, the voice of the Lord came: **32** I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. So Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look.

33 “Then the Lord said to him: Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. **34** I have observed the oppression of My people in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to rescue them. And now, come, I will send you to Egypt.

35 “This Moses, whom they rejected when they said, Who appointed you a ruler and a judge?—this one God sent as a ruler and a redeemer by means of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. **36** This man led them out and performed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness 40 years.

37 “This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brothers. **38** He is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors. He received living oracles to give to us. **39** Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him, but pushed him away, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. **40** They told Aaron:

Make us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we don’t know what’s happened to him.

41 They even made a calf in those days, offered sacrifice to the idol, and were celebrating what their hands had made. **42** Then God turned away and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

House of Israel, did you bring Me offerings and sacrifices
40 years in the wilderness?

43 No, you took up the tent of Moloch
and the star of your god Rephan,
the images that you made to worship.
So I will deport you beyond Babylon!

44 “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses commanded him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. **45** Our ancestors in turn received it and with Joshua brought it in when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers, until the days of David. **46** He found favor in God’s sight and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. **47** But it was Solomon who built Him a house. **48** However, the Most High does not dwell in sanctuaries made with hands, as the prophet says:

49 Heaven is My throne,
and earth My footstool.
What sort of house will you build for Me?
says the Lord,

or what is My resting place?

50 Did not My hand make all these things?

51 “You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit; as your ancestors did, so do you. **52** Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They even killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. **53** You received the law under the direction of angels and yet have not kept it.”

54 When they heard these things, they were enraged in their hearts and gnashed their teeth at him. **55** But Stephen, filled by the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw God’s glory, with Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, **56** “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

57 Then they screamed at the top of their voices, covered their ears, and together rushed against him. **58** They threw him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59** They were stoning Stephen as he called out: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” **60** Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin!” And saying this, he fell asleep.

8:1 Saul agreed with putting him to death.

Study Two: Persecution & Spread of the Gospel

ACTS 8

1-4: Those scattered were probably the Greek speaking Christians. We see later in Acts that there were still Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 15), such as the Apostles. But God uses this scattering so the Gospel goes out.

3: Saul (Paul) is such a terror to the Church that the Church is described as having "peace" when he's converted (9:31)

13: Simon seemed to have made a genuine profession of faith, but the nature of his faith is what is in question here. Where was his heart really at?

8:1 Saul agreed with putting him to death.

On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. **2** Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. **3** Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison.

4 So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the message of good news. **5** Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. **6** The crowds paid attention with one mind to what Philip said, as they heard and saw the signs he was performing. **7** For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. **8** So there was great joy in that city.

9 A man named Simon had previously practiced sorcery in that city and astounded the Samaritan people, while claiming to be somebody great. **10** They all paid attention to him, from the least of them to the greatest, and they said, "This man is called the Great Power of God!" **11** They were attentive to him because he had astounded them with his sorceries for a long time. **12** But when they believed Philip, as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. **13** Then even Simon himself believed. And after he was baptized, he went around constantly with Philip and was astounded as he observed the signs and great miracles that were being performed.

14 When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had welcomed God's message, they sent Peter and John to them. **15** After they went down there, they prayed for them, so the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit. **16** For He had not yet come down on any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **17** Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, **19** saying, "Give me this power too, so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter told him, "May your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought the gift of God could be obtained with money! **21** You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God. **22** Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. **23** For I see you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

24 "Please pray to the Lord for me," Simon replied, "so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

25 Then, after they had testified and spoken the message of the

8:25 It's significant here that the Apostles themselves evangelise the Samaritans. They realise the Gospel is not just for the Jews, but even for those hated by Jews.

8:30 In that culture almost everyone read aloud. Julius Caesar was thought to be a freak because he could read without speaking the words aloud.

8:36ff While we may not think much of what happens here, it's significant in what it says about what the Gospel does: destroys all barriers. Here an Ethiopian Gentile Eunuch is received into full members of the people of God.

Lord, they traveled back to Jerusalem, evangelizing many villages of the Samaritans.

26 An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: "Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is the desert road.) **27** So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem **28** and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud.

29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go and join that chariot."

30 When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this:

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb is silent before its shearer,
so He does not open His mouth.

33 In His humiliation justice was denied Him.
Who will describe His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth.

34 The eunuch replied to Philip, "I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or another person?" **35** So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning from that Scripture.

36 As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's water! What would keep me from being baptized?" **37** And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." **38** Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. **39** When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer. But he went on his way rejoicing. **40** Philip appeared in Azotus, and he was traveling and evangelizing all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Study Three: Better Call Saul

ACTS 9:1-31

9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest **2** and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. **3** As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. **4** Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

5 "Who are You, Lord?" he said.

"I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting," He replied. **6** "But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. **8** Then Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. **9** He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

10 There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Here I am, Lord!" he said.

11 "Get up and go to the street called Straight," the Lord said to him, "to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. **12** In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so he can regain his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. **14** And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name."

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites. **16** I will show him how much he must suffer for My name!"

17 So Ananias left and entered the house. Then he placed his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18 At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. **19** And after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some days. **20** Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: "He is the Son of God."

21 But all who heard him were astounded and said, "Isn't this the man who, in Jerusalem, was destroying those who called on this name and then came here for the purpose of taking them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

4-5: Up to this point Acts has recorded Saul persecuting Christians and the Church. But Jesus so closely aligns himself with both of these that he feels that persecution personally.

10: In his speech in Acts 22, Paul describes Ananias as a "devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there." (Acts 22:12).

13: Ananias calls God's people "saints" here. A favourite term of Paul in his letters.

19-20: In Galatians Paul says that he went to Arabia after his conversion (1:15-16). This was probably just after the activity recorded in v.19-22.

26: Not all the disciples were scattered from Jerusalem (8:1).

29: Here's the same group that stoned Stephen.

John Calvin on the conversion of Paul - "God's wonderful hand was openly shown, not only in such a cruel wolf being turned into a sheep, but also in his assuming the character of a shepherd."

22 But Saul grew more capable and kept confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this One is the Messiah.

23 After many days had passed, the Jews conspired to kill him, **24** but their plot became known to Saul. So they were watching the gates day and night intending to kill him, **25** but his disciples took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the wall.

26 When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple. **27** Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and that He had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. **28** Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. **29** He conversed and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they attempted to kill him. **30** When the brothers found out, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

31 So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and it increased in numbers.

Study Four: The Gentiles

ACTS 9:32–10:48

9:32 As Peter was traveling from place to place, he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda. **33** There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. **34** Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed,” and immediately he got up. **35** So all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. She was always doing good works and acts of charity. **37** In those days she became sick and died. After washing her, they placed her in a room upstairs. **38** Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent two men to him who begged him, “Don’t delay in coming with us.” **39** So Peter got up and went with them. When he arrived, they led him to the room upstairs. And all the widows approached him, weeping and showing him the robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them. **40** Then Peter sent them all out of the room. He knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said, “Tabitha, get up!” She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. **41** He gave her his hand and helped her stand up. Then he called the saints and widows and presented her alive. **42** This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. **43** And Peter stayed on many days in Joppa with Simon, a leather tanner.

10:1 There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment. **2** He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the Jewish people and always prayed to God. **3** About three in the afternoon he distinctly saw in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, “Cornelius!”

4 Looking intently at him, he became afraid and said, “What is it, lord?”

The angel told him, “Your prayers and your acts of charity have come up as a memorial offering before God. **5** Now send men to Joppa and call for Simon, who is also named Peter. **6** He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, he called two of his household slaves and a devout soldier, who was one of those who attended him. **8** After explaining everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

9 The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to pray on the housetop about noon. **10** Then he became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing something, he went into a visionary state. **11** He saw heaven opened and an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the earth. **12** In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. **13** Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat!”

14 “No, Lord!” Peter said. “For I have never eaten anything common and ritually unclean!”

15 Again, a second time, a voice said to him, “What God has made clean, you must not call common.” **16** This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into heaven.

17 While Peter was deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen might mean, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions to Simon’s house, stood at the gate. **18** They called out, asking if Simon, who was also named Peter, was lodging there.

19 While Peter was thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him, “Three men are here looking for you. **20** Get up, go downstairs, and accompany them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them.”

9:40: This is exactly what Peter had seen Jesus do at the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:40)

9-16: It’s hard not to read this part and think of Genesis 2. In fact, I think this part is meant to be read in light of Genesis 2 and Genesis 6:20.

Jesus dealt with this issue in Mark 7 (see 7:19), but Peter is only just beginning to join the dots on what Jesus said and what it ultimately means.

21 Then Peter went down to the men and said, “Here I am, the one you’re looking for. What is the reason you’re here?”

22 They said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who has a good reputation with the whole Jewish nation, was divinely directed by a holy angel to call you to his house and to hear a message from you.” **23** Peter then invited them in and gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went with him. **24** The following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. **25** When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him.

26 But Peter helped him up and said, “Stand up! I myself am also a man.”

27 While talking with him, he went on in and found that many had come together there. **28** Peter said to them, “You know it’s forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner. But God has shown me that I must not call any person common or unclean. **29** That’s why I came without any objection when I was sent for. So I ask: Why did you send for me?”

30 Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this hour, at three in the afternoon, I was praying in my house. Just then a man in a dazzling robe stood before me **31** and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your acts of charity have been remembered in God’s sight. **32** Therefore send someone to Joppa and invite Simon here, who is also named Peter. He is lodging in Simon the tanner’s house by the sea.’ **33** Therefore I immediately sent for you, and you did the right thing in coming. So we are all present before God, to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord.”

34 Then Peter began to speak: “Now I really understand that God doesn’t show favoritism, **35** but in every nation the person who fears Him and does righteousness is acceptable to Him. **36** He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all. **37** You know the events that took place throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John preached: **38** how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were under the tyranny of the Devil, because God was with Him. **39** We ourselves are witnesses of everything He did in both the Judean country and in Jerusalem, yet they killed Him by hanging Him on a tree. **40** God raised up this man on the third day and permitted Him to be seen, **41** not by all the people, but by us, witnesses appointed beforehand by God, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. **42** He commanded us to preach to the people and to solemnly testify that He is the One appointed by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. **43** All the prophets testify about Him that through His name everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins.”

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. **45** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. **46** For they heard them speaking in other languages and declaring the greatness of God.

Then Peter responded, **47** “Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” **48** And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.

44-46: Here we see a repeat of Pentecost in Acts 2. That time it was for the Jews, this time it was for the Gentiles. Just as Jesus said in Acts 1:8, so the Gospel is pushing out to all people in all places.



VILLAGE

C H U R C H

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
<p>1 CHRISTIANITY EXPLAINED LECTURE for those interested in exploring the faith, running parallel to church</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>8 HOW TO READ THE BIBLE COURSE 3 week course starts 3:30pm in Kelvin Grove INTRO TO VILLAGE formerly Next Steps Supper starts 6:15 this week</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>10</p>
<p>15 HOW TO READ THE BIBLE COURSE 3 week course starts 3:30pm in Kelvin Grove</p>	<p>16</p>	<p>17</p>
<p>22 HOW TO READ THE BIBLE COURSE 3 week course starts 3:30pm in Kelvin Grove</p>	<p>23 beSpoken TED Talks, brought to you by people from the Village community.</p>	<p>24</p>
<p>29</p>	<p>30 VC GIRLS' NIGHT OUT. Habitat, West End. 8pm.</p>	<p>31</p>



MARCH 2015



Day	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	4	5	6 GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER www.vc.org.au/dinner	7 GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER www.vc.org.au/dinner
	11	12 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY – MORNING TEA Kelvin Grove.	13	14
	18	19	20	21
	25	26	27	28

