



TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

THE BOOK OF ACTS PART 2



TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

THE STORY OF GOD'S GRACE FLOODING OUT INTO THE WORLD

At the end of last year, we worked through the first half of Acts. We saw many stories of God's grace flooding out into the world, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. There were many images of God working through his Gospel--working to draw unexpected people to himself, often through surprising and unexpected means. We saw how the whole world was being reshaped around Jesus, and by his boundless Gospel.

This term, we'll be journeying through the second half of Acts. The vibe is a little different in the second half of the book--the narrative slows down a bit, and it focuses in on the lives and ministries of a few individuals, with Paul taking up the greatest focus. There will be many travels (feel free to try and track their movements on the map), a lot of imprisonments and trials for the Apostles, many churches built, and a background to a lot of the letters of the New Testament. Along the journey we get some fascinating insights into Paul and the Apostles, and what it looks like for the Gospel to come to many different cultures and contexts. This is one of the main themes of the book: How the Gospel gives life to every people and culture in history--challenging, encouraging, and confronting each at different points. What it looks like to come to Jewish leaders looks very different to what it looks like to come to a city full of idols and unknown gods. But throughout the book, we see what it looks like for the Gospel to continue flooding out, reaching the world with the life-changing Word.

// It's our prayer that this series will give us hope, that by the power of God's Spirit the Gospel can speak into any culture with the power and life of Christ's death and resurrection.

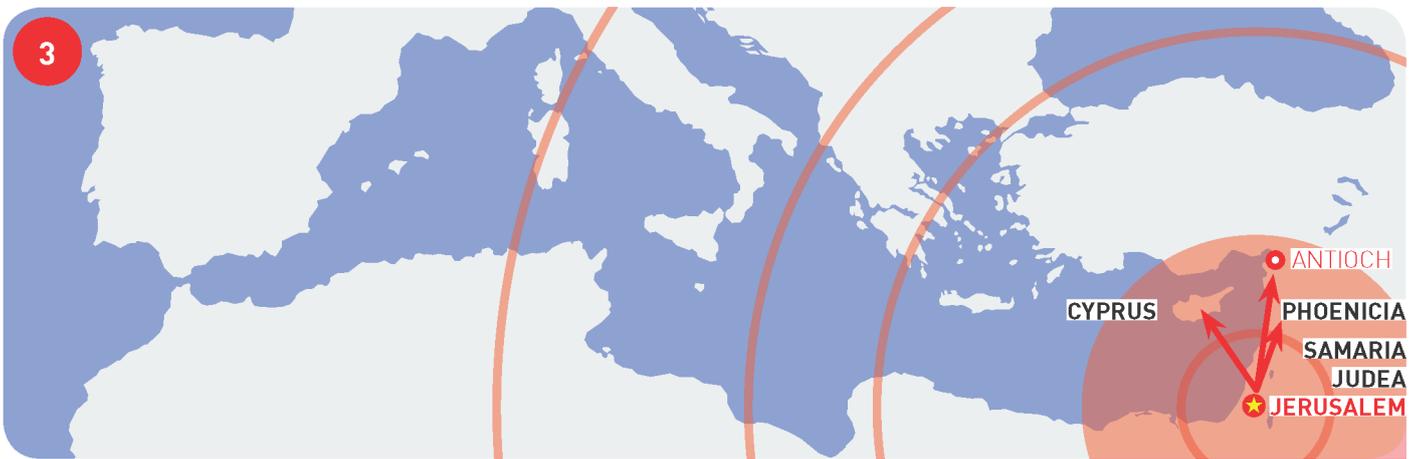
In a world filled with much confusion and hostility towards the Gospel, we see it journey deeper and deeper into the heart of the biggest superpower in the world at the time: Ancient Rome, the ends of the earth. For us today, as people living in a complex, multicultural world, with many different levels of understanding and acceptance for the Gospel, it's our prayer that this series will give us hope, that the Gospel is never crushed, and that by the power of God's Spirit it can speak into any culture with the power and life of Christ's death and resurrection.

PAUL'S TRAVELS



"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses from Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

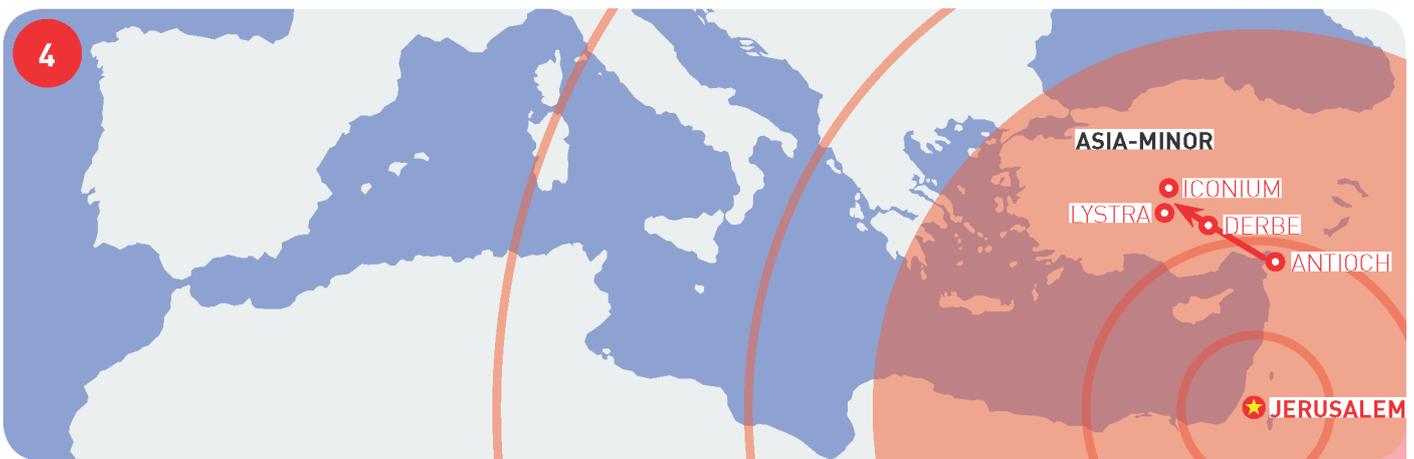
Acts 1:8



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 trust 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 message of Jesus (10:44). The doors are now open for the Gentile mission to begin!

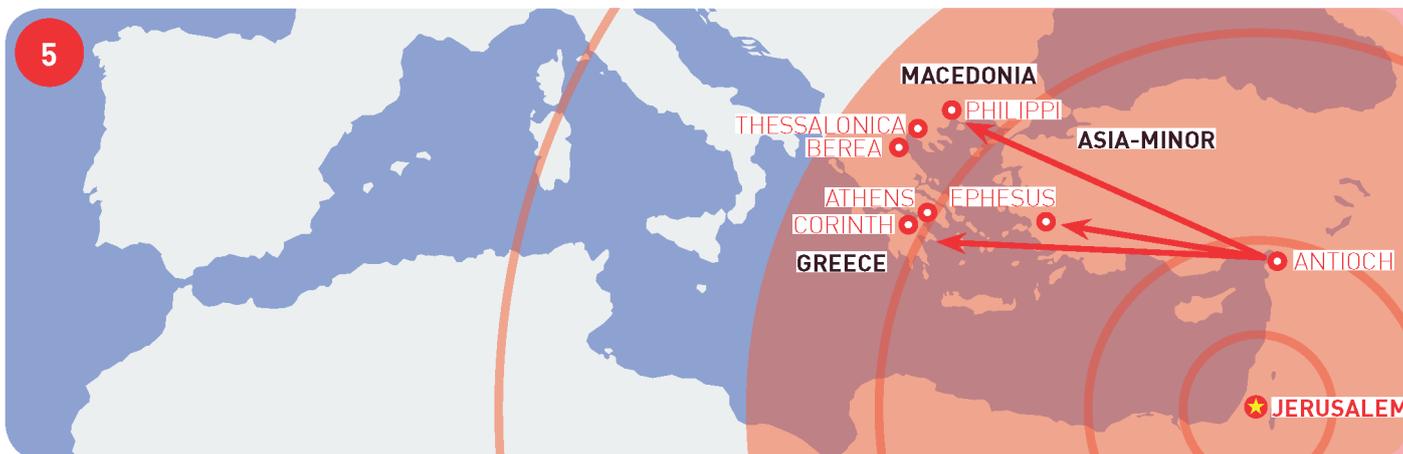
11:19 – 12:24 On account of the persecution, the gospel spreads to the Jews as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Uniquely, the gospel is preached to the Gentiles as well in Antioch, with many coming to faith in Jesus (11:21-24). The church is fully established through the preaching ministry of Barnabas 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 continues to spread and flourish, 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 (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 being stoned to death (14:19). Nevertheless, by God's grace, a Roman leader (13:9), and many Gentiles believe and the word of the Lord 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 preach the word in 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 of God and are baptised (18:8).
- 18:23 – 19:41** Paul teaches for two years in Ephesus "so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (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. "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power." (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 preach 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 message of Jesus to the Roman Governors, Felix and Festus, and Agrippa, King of Judea in fulfilment of Jesus' promise 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 "boldly and without hindrance" (28:31). From Rome, over many centuries, the word of God continues to spread to 'the ends of the earth'.

WEEK 5
WHERE YOU'RE AT

Acts 17

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God is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things.”



STUDY QUESTIONS

As Paul continues his journey, he faces enormous opposition. But his strategy stays the same—keep sharing the gospel no matter the audience, no matter the opposition. The one thing that does change from town to town is the method he uses to engage his audience. The gospel remains the same, but he contextualises it to engage people from very different backgrounds.

Read Acts 17:16-34.

What strikes Paul about the spiritual state of Athens?

Paul was distressed by the false religiosity that he saw in Athens, but the people still seemed drawn to his message. What was it that attracted the Athenians to what Paul was talking about (17:16-23)?

How does Paul show his sensitivity as a communicator of the Gospel?

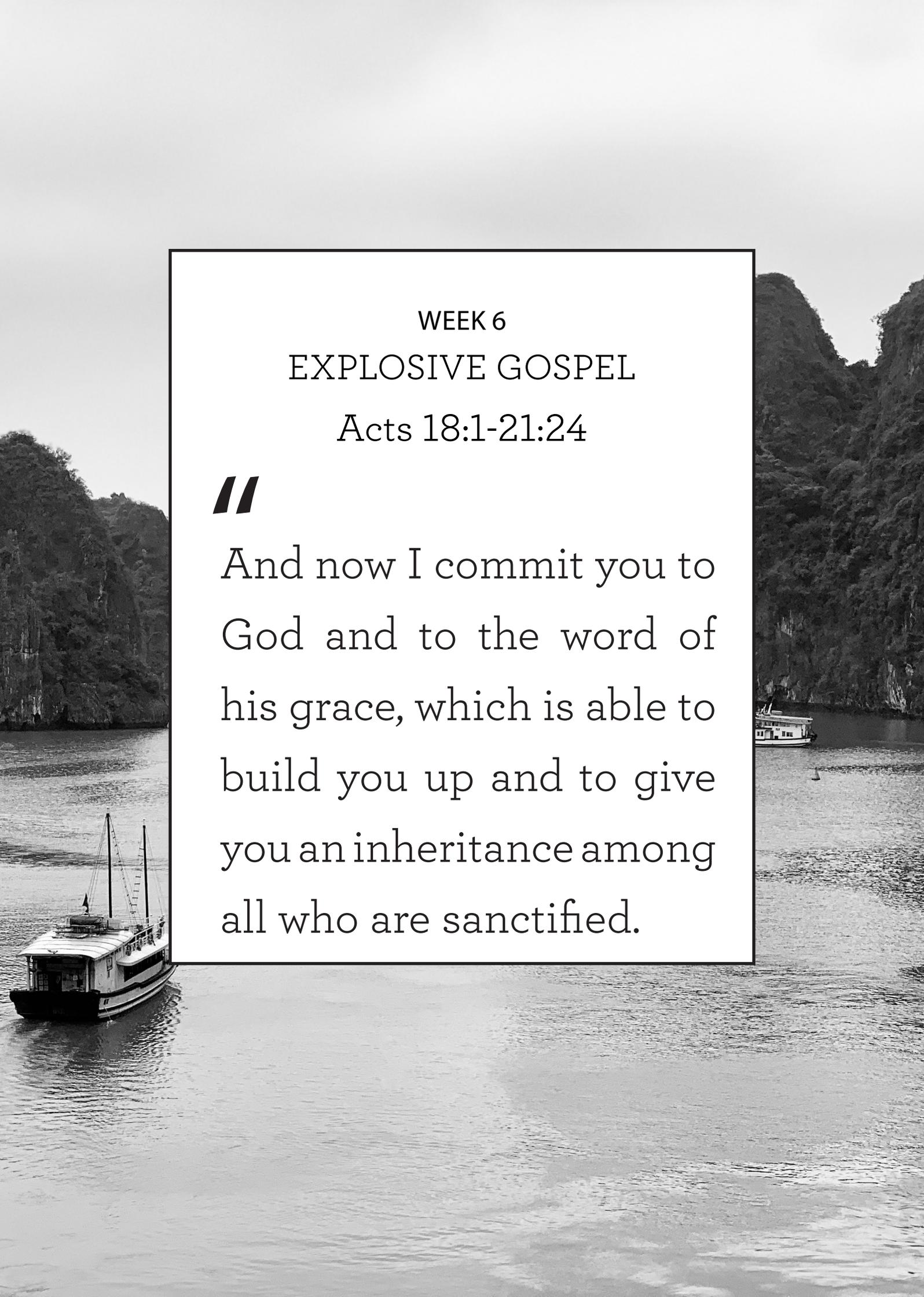
What similarities can you see between Athens and Brisbane?

In verse 28, he even quotes one of their poets as a means to communicate truths about God. Can you think of a way that someone could do that today?

Skim through Paul's speech in Athens. When speaking to the people of Athens, what aspect of the story of Jesus is central to Paul (see verses 18, 31, 32)?

Paul shows in his preaching at Athens that he has a deep understanding of their culture AND their beliefs. In our witnessing of the gospel, how might we do one without doing the other?

What unique hope does the resurrection of Jesus give those who aren't yet Christian?



WEEK 6
EXPLOSIVE GOSPEL
Acts 18:1-21:24

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And now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all who are sanctified.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Read 20:17-38.

How do we see Paul's love in this passage?

What do you imagine Paul's life in the Ephesian church looked like, based on the words of his farewell?

Have you seen this kind of love in the church before?

How does the Holy Spirit compel Paul, in verses 22-24?

As Paul reminds them of his time with them, note the way he describes his focus and message:

I have not hesitated to preach anything that _____ v20

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that _____ v21

If only I finish the race & complete the task of _____ v24

I have gone about preaching the _____ v25

I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the _____ v27

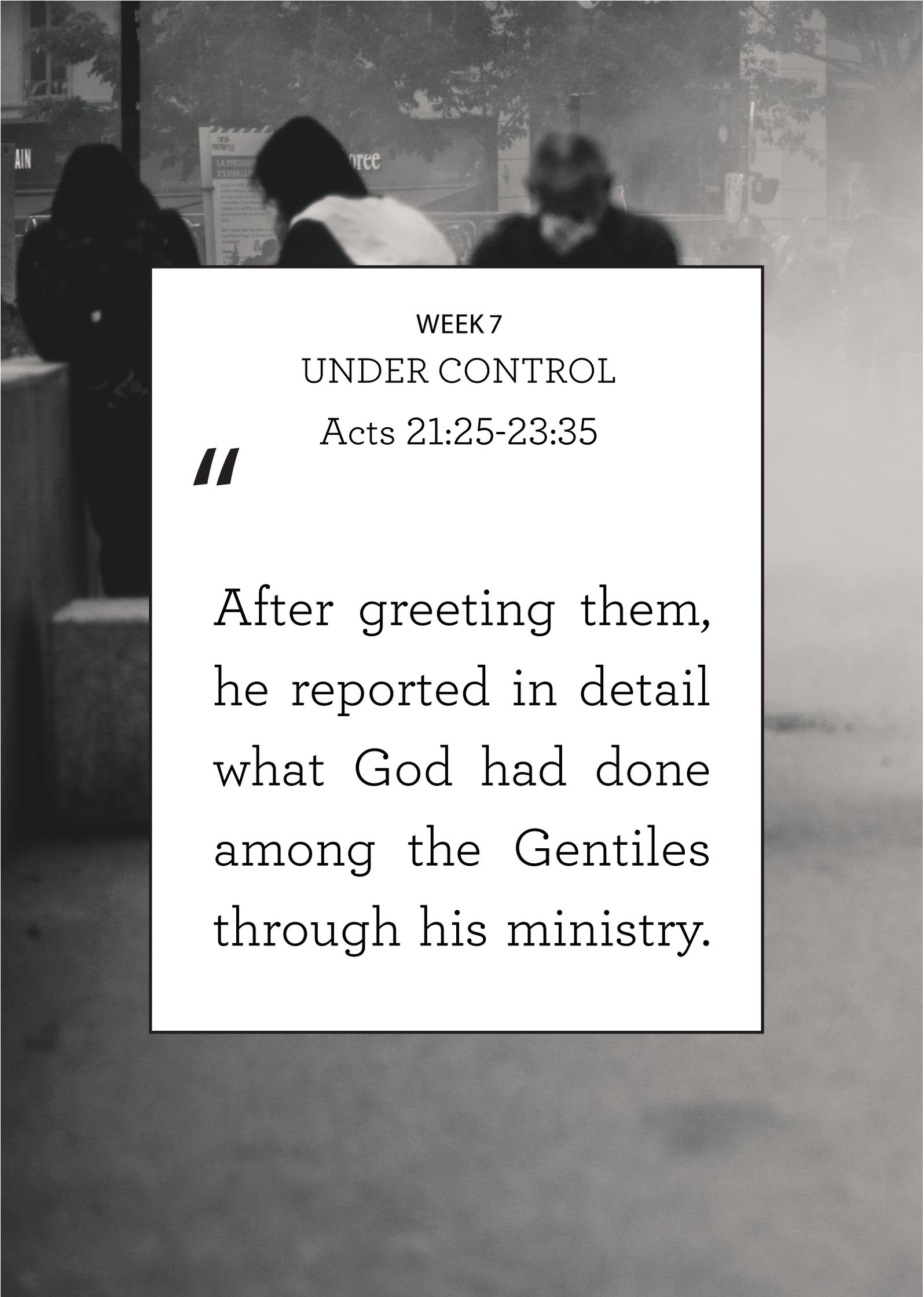
Now I commit you to God and the _____ v32

What was the focus of Paul's preaching, from 20:25-27?

How far do you feel you are on the journey to knowing "the whole plan of God" in the Bible?

Read 20:28-31. What warning does Paul give the Ephesian elders? Is this relevant today?

Paul didn't just speak to the church about all these things, but he modelled it to them with his life (read 20:35 again). What inspiration, challenge, or conviction can we take away from this for our own lives?



WEEK 7

UNDER CONTROL

Acts 21:25-23:35

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After greeting them,
he reported in detail
what God had done
among the Gentiles
through his ministry.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Do you think Christians have a right to speak about Jesus anywhere? Why?

Read 21:15-40.

Paul is accused by both the Jewish people and the Roman soldiers. What are their accusations? How truthful are they?

When Paul is falsely accused, he doesn't simply accept it. Yet his defence doesn't show any of the hatred that he's been shown. How does Paul speak to his different accusers?

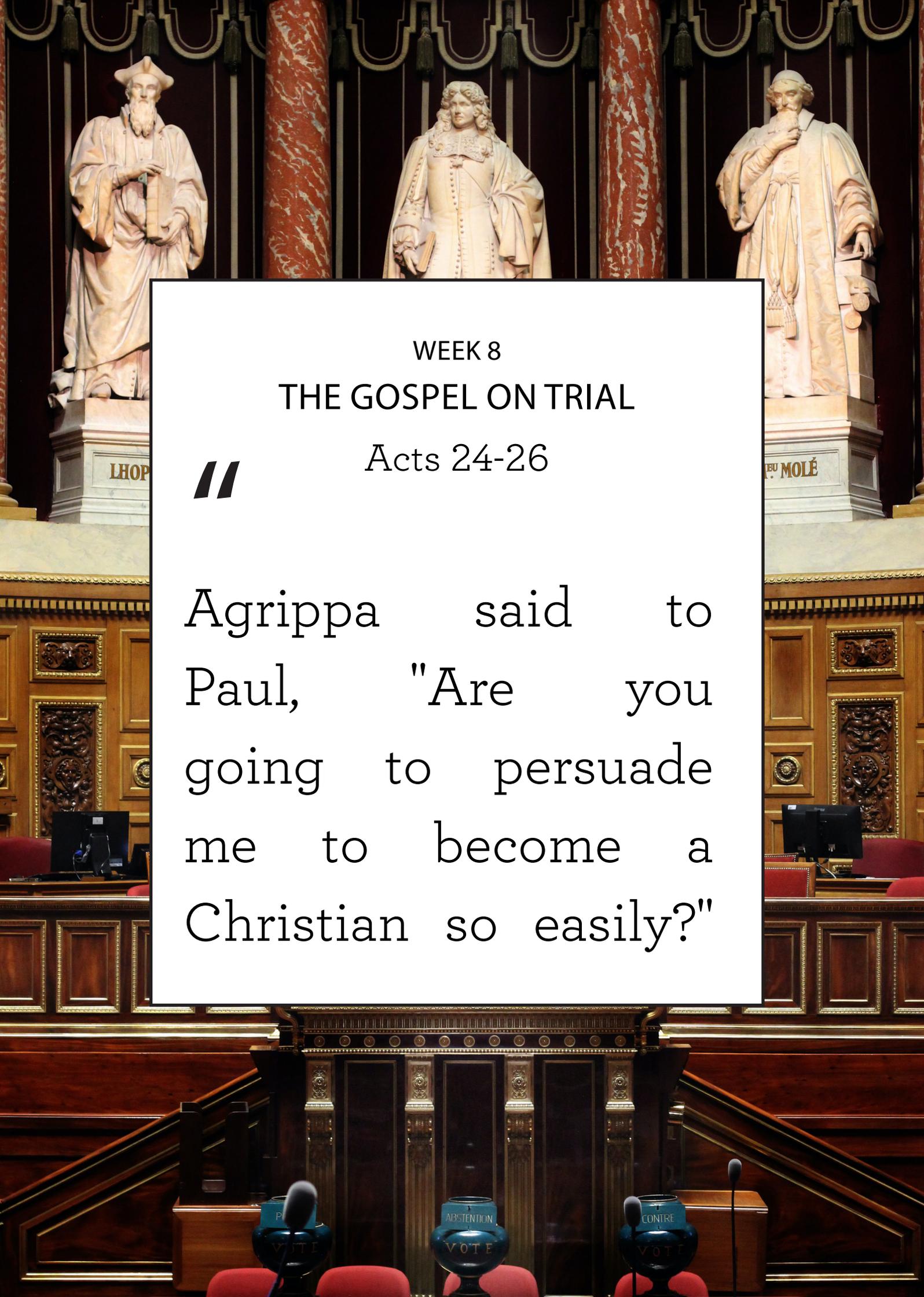
	Jewish People	Roman People
Language Used (21:37, 40)		
Background Appealed to (21:39; 22:3, 25-29)		

Do you think 21:26 is a compromise from Paul? What may have guided his response here?

As we see in chapters 21-23, even Paul's defence of his Gospel-sharing rights is shaped by the Gospel. Imagine you started a Bible study group with a few Christians at work, and your boss told you that a few of your co-workers had complained about it? How might this passage help shape your response?

For Paul, it isn't his personal freedom that's most important, it's his faithfulness to Jesus.

How would you feel if Christian freedom continues to be limited in Australia?



WEEK 8
THE GOSPEL ON TRIAL

Acts 24-26

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Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?"

STUDY QUESTIONS

Read Acts 26.

Things are escalating quickly! Paul's been on trial before the Jewish leaders (chapter 23), then two Roman governors (chapter 25), and now before a king.

How would you describe Paul's manner in this chapter?

From this chapter, draw or describe Paul:

<u>Before meeting Jesus:</u>	<u>While meeting Jesus:</u>	<u>After meeting Jesus:</u>

How does Agrippa respond to the Gospel (verses 28-29)?

Half-way through Paul's defence, Festus interrupts. What does he find so unreasonable and offensive in what Paul's saying?

This chapter shows us how important personal testimony is to sharing the Gospel. Have you ever shared your testimony to someone? What parts of your story can you see God's hand at work in your life most powerfully?

For Paul, the resurrection is the greatest scandal in his culture, and standing up for it is what brings him before trial. Yet for us, the resurrection is hardly a scandal. At worst, people might think we're a bit daft if we speak to them about it. But what are some other barriers that people in our culture have to embracing the Gospel?

Paul is repeatedly put on trial despite being declared innocent over and over again. Yet, his main concern at his trials isn't his safety or freedom. What is his main concern?

WEEK 9

GOSPEL UNSTOPPABLE

Acts 27-28

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Paul stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.."

STUDY QUESTIONS

Read Acts 28.

The first three words of Acts 28, “once safely ashore” come after Paul’s boat has been shipwrecked. But things don’t get much easier for him—he goes straight from shipwreck to snake bite.

When a snake bites Paul, the islanders think it must be a murderer, because “justice has not allowed him to live.” But when he survives, they “changed their minds and said that he was a god.” Do people today ever think like this (if someone is fortunate, it must be because they’re a good person, and vice versa)?

What does Paul mean by his chains being “the hope of Israel” in verse 20?

Read the summary of verses 23-24. What do you imagine that some of Paul’s key points may have been in this day of teaching?

Read Matthew 13:1-15. What is the quote from Isaiah saying to the listeners in Matthew 13, and to the Jewish leaders here in Acts 28?

Do you think verses 30-31 are an appropriate ending to Acts?

If there was an Acts 29, what do you think would happen in it?

Were there any particular passages or themes in Acts that brought the Gospel home to you in a fresh way?

In the book of Acts, the church has met with many obstacles, and God has overcome them all. The Gospel is being taken to the ends of the earth. What’s one lesson from studying the book of Acts that you want to cling to in your life?

Spend some time praying for the Gospel to flow on from you to the ends of the earth, in your personal relationships and beyond.



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