

A wide-angle, high-angle photograph of a desolate, arid landscape. The terrain is composed of rolling, reddish-brown hills and valleys. A narrow, winding dirt road or path is visible, snaking through the lower part of the frame. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a clear but slightly overcast day. The overall mood is one of vastness and isolation.

TO THE
ENDS *OF THE*
EARTH

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ABOUT THESE STUDIES

Our Term 1 Bible Study series on Acts 13-20 has nine pre-written studies in total (including two studies in Week 9-10 that will be related to Generosity/Giving instead of Acts as part of a wider-Church initiative). These studies are designed to be completed by your group after you have heard the passage preached on a Sunday. Each study consists of roughly seven to ten open-ended questions for your group to discuss. It may help to think about these questions as “discussion starters” rather than a set of questions to answer one after another. You should allow about 30 to 40 minutes for this discussion.

The studies do not aim to guide your group in detailed exegesis of each passage. Rather, they aim to:

- To revisit the exegesis that was presented in the Sunday sermon
- Help your group address remaining questions that you have about the passage
- Provide your group with ample opportunity to consider possible applications of the passage

It is recommended that each group member listens to the relevant sermon before the group meeting. Members may also wish to listen to the corresponding episode of the Sermon Seasonings podcast (on the weeks when it is available).

Special thanks to Mandy Curley and Seb Lane who were involved in writing draft Studies for this term. Some study questions have been drawn from “The Message of Acts” by John Stott and “Teaching Acts” by David Cook. The studies have also been reviewed and given a final edit by Seb Lane. The study booklet has been designed by Justine Kim.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Acts shows the progress of the gospel Word following Jesus' ascension. Jesus is central and is active throughout the book, as his Spirit-empowered people bear witness to his resurrection.

Acts 1:8 is the key verse for the book and sets forth Jesus' mission for his church: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The rest of Acts tells the fulfilment of this prophecy. By the end of Acts 11, the Apostle's witness has finally moved to the Gentile world. This movement continues in the rest of Acts, as Paul departs on his missionary journeys throughout the Roman world.

Authorship

It has been understood since the time of early Christianity that Acts was written by Luke as a continuation of his Gospel. Luke 1:1-4 tells us that he was a second-generation Christian. He was not part of Jesus' ministry in Israel, but he had extensive contact with "eyewitnesses and servants of the word". Luke was a companion of the Apostle Paul and was present at some of the events described in Acts. This can be seen in parts of the book where the story is told using "we" language (first-person plural).

Date

The events described in Acts take place immediately after those in the Gospels. There is a slight overlap as both the Gospels and Acts describe Jesus' resurrection appearances and ascension. The book itself was written within the first century, probably later than the 70's AD, but it could have been written even as early as 62-64 AD (as Luke does not mention the persecution by Nero and the death of Paul).

Audience

Acts 1:1-2 mentions a man named Theophilus (also mentioned in Luke 1:1-4) as the person he is writing Luke and Acts for. Theophilus may have been a Roman official (Luke calls him "most excellent Theophilus" in Luke 1:3).

Structure

Acts is generally structured by references to the progress of the preached word (6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5). Chapters 18:23-20:38 form a climactic conclusion to all of Paul's missionary journeys. Chapters 21-28 are a new section, detailing Paul's arrest, trial and defense of his gospel and ministry.

The below diagram follows the structure proposed by David Peterson in his commentary "The Acts of the Apostles" (The Pillar New Testament Commentary).

1:1-14	1:5-6:7	6:8-9:31	9:32-12:25	13:1-16:5	16:6-18:22	18:23-20:38	21:1-28:31
Intro: The mission plan of the risen Jesus	The Word in Jerusalem	The Word goes out from Jerusalem	The Word Advances in Judea and Syria	The Word goes to Cyrus and Asia Minor	The Word goes to Europe	The Word in Ephesus: Climax of Paul's mission as a free man	Paul's final journey: To Jerusalem and Rome

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



● Sermon Seasonings

Apple iTunes, Spotify or,
online via: <https://anchor.fm/sermonseasonings/>



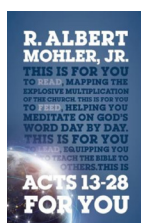
● Intro Night

David Peterson
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwAqVTJJ7CY>



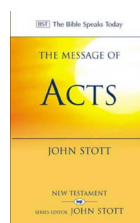
● Bible Project

Big Picture Overview
Part 1 – Overview: Acts 1–12
Part 2 – Part 2: Acts 13–28



● Acts 13–28 For You

R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
Non Technical with a
focus on application



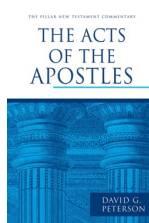
● Acts BST Commentary

John Stott
Fairly accessible with
great exegetical insights



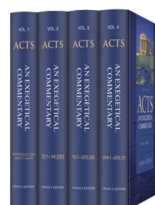
● Teaching Acts

David Cook
Helpful for anyone in
teaching roles at church



● Acts Pillar Commentary

David Peterson
(Intro Night Speaker)



● Acts (4 Volume Set)

Craig S. Keener

Highly Accessible / Non-Technical

Low / Mid Range Accessible / Semi Technical

Highly Technical Commentaries

THROUGH MANY HARDSHIPS

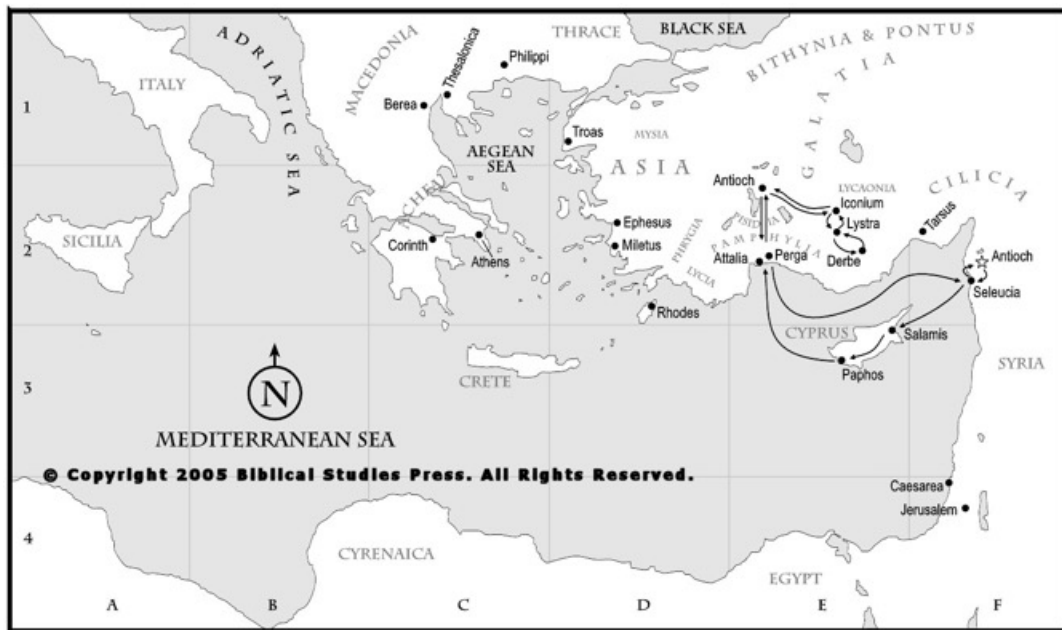
Discussion Question

Share a travel-related holiday which had some memorable highs & lows along the journey.

Paul and Barnabas' 1st Mission Journey (Acts 13-14)

* Keep an eye out for these geographical references: Acts 13:1, 4, 13, 14, 51, 14:6, 20, 21, 21, 24-25, 26.

Note: There are also 2 Antiochs [One in Syria-Mission Headquarters & one in Pisidia]



Brief Recap

What can you remember about the broad plot line in Acts 1-13 so far?

Study

Read Acts 14:1-7

1. What was Paul and Barnabas' experience of ministry like in Iconium?

2. In what ways do you notice the gospel uniting and dividing people in Iconium? Why does the gospel so often have this effect on people? (See also, 2 Cor 2:15–16, Luke 8:11–15)

Read Acts 14:8–20

3. How is Luke's account about the healing of the lame man here (14:8–13) similar and different to Acts 3:1–10?

4. What stands out to you about Paul's approach to connecting with and sharing the good news to the people here in Lystra (14:15–17) compared to his message in Pisidian Antioch (13:16–41)? Why is Paul flexible in varying his approach & emphases in some cities?

5. Luke's record of Paul's speeches in Acts show his willingness to vary his approach, points of connection & emphases to sharing the gospel message depending on his audience. In what sense, does Paul's gospel not change in the process? (See also, Acts 13:26–30; 14:3; 13:48–49; 14:7; 14:21; Gal 1:6–9, 1 Cor 1:22–24; 1 Cor 15:3–5; 1 Thess. 1:8–10)

Read Acts 14:21–28

6. What are some different ways Paul & Barnabas strengthen the recent Christian converts here in this section? What role do hardships play in Christian discipleship? (See also, 2 Tim 3:10–12)

7. Why is strengthening and encouragement an important part of Christian ministry?

Application

8. When have you seen God use the sufferings and hardships of a Christian to strengthen and encourage believers?

9. What can we learn from Acts 14 about local and global mission? How might we proactively support, encourage & pray for our own group's link mission partners this year?

Pray in Response



EXTRA NOTES

Study Two | Acts 15

SAVED BY GRACE

Discussion Question

Share a memorable time when something was a 'non-negotiable' for you or someone else?

A Watershed Moment in Acts

This section has been called the centrepiece, the watershed and the turning point of the book of Acts. The meeting of the church at Jerusalem is framed by Paul's first and second missionary journeys. It is in the context of this work of mission that the church Council meets to consider the issue of the nature of the true gospel. Things which go without saying need to be said! Since God is the author of truth and the gospel is his gospel, he will not bless a counterfeit gospel which is contrary to truth. Therefore, there is no more important issue than preserving the authenticity of the message which is to be preached.

Cook, David . Teaching Acts: Unlocking the book of Acts for the Bible Teacher (Teaching series) (p. 172). Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition.

Brief Recap

What has been happening in the narrative of Acts in the last two chapters?

Study

Read Acts 15:1-4

In between the 1st and 2nd mission journeys is the very important "Jerusalem Council."

1. After just one mission journey, what problem arose? Why was this so serious?

Read Acts 15:5-21

2. In Jerusalem, what were the arguments from:

Believers from the party of Pharisees	Peter
Paul and Barnabas	James

3. What is some of the background to James's statement about the Gentiles in verse 14 (See also, Acts 15:7-9; 10:15, 28-29; 11:12-17). Why does he go on to quote from Amos 9:11-12? How does it help confirm that the inclusion of the Gentiles has always been part of God's plan?

Read Acts 15:22-35

4. Do you find any parts of the Council's letter surprising?

5. James' judgement (15:19-21) includes a request that Gentiles abstain from four things and is included at the end of the letter (15:29). What are they? Why these four?

6. Circumcision is unlikely to be a primary pastoral issue at Christ Church today, but how might we also be tempted to 'add to' the gospel? (See also, Acts 15:11 & Galatians 2:15-16)

Read Acts 15:36-41

Paul's 2nd mission journey starts in controversy.

7. What was Paul's goal? What was the dispute about? (See also, Acts 12:12, 13:13)

8. How did Paul & Barnabas resolve their dispute? (See also, 2 Tim 4:11, written much later)

Application/Implications

9. Are there any ways you restrict your own freedoms in order to make fellowship easier with people from a different background to you (1 Cor 9:19-23)? Are there any potential dangers in doing this?

10. What do we learn about the reality of gospel relationships from Paul & Barnabas? Have you had any first-hand similar experiences?

Pray in Response



EXTRA NOTES

SPIRIT-LED MISSION

Discussion Question

Share a time when you couldn't get somewhere despite your best efforts?

A Word Goes to Europe

“The second missionary journey involved an initiating work of the Holy Spirit, as the first one did (13:1-4). However, the issue here is not commissioning and release by the church, but unexpected guidance for missionaries already journeying beyond boundaries previously reached (16:6-10). As in the previous campaign, Paul and his team continue to preach to Jews first, wherever possible (16:13; 17:1-4, 10-12, 17; 18:4, 19). However, encounters with Gentiles outside the synagogue are more in evidence in this section of Acts and are more varied in character.”

Acts (Pillar Commentary), p.453, David Peterson

Brief Recap

What has been happening in the recent narrative of Acts so far?

Study

Read Acts 16:1-5

Paul recruits a gospel partner.

1. What do we learn about Timothy elsewhere in the New Testament? (See also, Acts 17:14-15, 18:5, 19:22, 20:4, Rom 16:21, 1 Cor 4:17, 16:10, 1 Tim 1:2-3, 1:18, 6:20, 2 Tim 1:2)

2. What surprises you about what happens to Timothy here in light of the last chapter? What was the purpose?

3. How is gospel partnership with other Christians a priority in your own life (or family)?

Read Acts 16:6-15 (To Philippi)

The gospel spreads. See Appendix 1, Map 2.

4. Who is determining the itinerary of the mission journey? What are we told and not told about the divine guidance Paul & his companions receive here?

5. How long did Paul and his companions stay in Philippi (16:12-15)? Where did they preach? Who came to faith? And how is this experience described?

Application/Implications

6. When has God closed a door in your life and opened up another one instead? How did you respond in faith or otherwise at the time? Have you ever seen this happen in a church or mission context too?

7. How do we see both human responsibility & God's sovereignty at work in Lydia's conversion (16:13-14)? What are any implications for our personal & corporate evangelism?

8. "Lydia then invited Paul and his companions into her house (which probably became the Christians' meeting place), for once the heart is opened, the home is opened too." (Acts, p.263, J. Stott).

How highly do you value hospitality in your own life? What does it look like?

Pray in Response



EXTRA NOTES

THE WAY OF SALVATION

Discussion Question

Share a time you lead someone to Christ, or witnessed their conversion first-hand?

The Way of Salvation

["Sirs, what must I do to be saved" (v30)?...] The way a person answers the jailer's question demonstrates their entire understanding of the gospel. Moreover, everything a person understands about the gospel, Jesus Christ, sin, and salvation comes down to how a person answers the jailer's question.

Mohler, R. Albert. Acts 13-28 For You: (God's Word For You) (p. 56). Kindle Edition.

Brief Recap

What has been happening in the recent narrative of Acts so far?

Study

Read Acts 16:16–40

1. List the different types of people Luke records were converted at Philippi including Lydia's from last week (16:11–40, assume that the slave girl is one though we're not explicitly told). What does this suggest about the unifying power of the gospel?

2. What were Paul and Silas like in prison? Why did they behave in this way?

3. How are you proactively cultivating a heart like Paul & Silas' that no matter your circumstances wants to tell others about the only way of salvation in Jesus?

Read Acts 17:1-9 (Thessalonica)

See Appendix 1, Map 2

4. What was Paul's custom when he came to Thessalonica? Why? (See also, Romans 1:16)

5. What is the response to Paul's message in Thessalonica? How long did Paul stay in Thessalonica? What was the long-term outcome? (1 Thess. 1:4-10, 2:1-2,13)

Read Acts 17:10-15 (Berea)

6. What was the believers' response to the persecution? (v10, 14-15) How is this similar to what we've been seeing so far throughout the narrative of Acts?

7. . Why were the Bereans of "more noble character"? What was the result?

Application/Implications

8. How might you practically 'lead someone to Christ' if God gave you the opportunity with someone who wanted to know how to become a Christian?

9. The Bereans "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (17:11). What is your own attitude to Scripture like when it comes to personal Bible reading, Growth Group engagement & Sunday Sermons? Do you have any practical habits or strategies in place to help you?



EXTRA NOTES

Study Five | Acts 17:16–34

MAKER & JUDGE

Discussion Question

What's a city you have travelled to (or would like to visit) which impresses you a lot? Why?

Paul in Athens

There is something enthralling about Paul in Athens, the great Christian apostle amid the glories of ancient Greece. Of course, he had known about Athens since his boyhood. Everybody knew about Athens. [...] Now for the first time Paul visited the Athens of which he had heard so much, arriving by sea from the north. His friends, who had given him a safe escort from Berea, had gone. He had asked them to send Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible (17:15)... Meanwhile, as he waited for their arrival, he found himself alone in the cultural capital of the world. What was his reaction? What should be the reaction of a Christian who visits or lives in a city which is dominated by a non-Christian ideology or religion, a city which may be aesthetically magnificent and culturally sophisticated, but morally decadent and spiritually deceived or dead?

The Message of Acts (BST), p.276, J. Stott.

Brief Recap

What has been happening in the recent narrative of Acts so far?

Study

Read Acts 17:16–21

1. Why was Paul in Athens? What sort of a place was Athens?

2. Why was Paul greatly distressed? How did he respond to his distress? Where did he speak?

3. How do you react to modern expressions of idolatry? When has been a time when you felt great distress for the lost or entrapped? (17:16)

Read Acts 17:22-34

4. In the Areopagus, how does Paul explain their “Unknown God”? Try to simply summarise his argument (vv22-31).

5. What stands out to you in Paul’s speech? Why is repentance commanded? (See also, 2 Tim 2:24-26, 2 Pet. 3:9. God’s sovereignty & human responsibility emphasised respectively)

6. What was the Athenians’ response to Paul like? (17:32-34) Have you encountered similar responses to the gospel before?

Application/Implications

7. What are you most tempted to worship instead of God? What might a step of repentance look like?

8. 'We do not speak as Paul spoke because we do not feel as Paul felt' (Acts, p.290, John Stott). Why might this be so?

Pray in Response



EXTRA NOTES

Study Six | Acts 18-19 (Focus on 18)

KEEP ON SPEAKING!

Discussion Question

At what time of day do you tend to speak most? Why?

God's Purposes Prevail

At every mission stop there is proclamation of the gospel, a response of faith from some and vigorous opposition from others. But God is sovereign, and his purpose is not thwarted. He uses the bad reception as much as the glad to see his purposes fulfilled.

Cook, David. Teaching Acts: (p. 191). Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition.

Brief Recap

What has been happening in the recent narrative of Acts so far?

Study

Read Acts 18:1-22 (Corinth)

1. Who did Paul stay with in Corinth (vs1-3)? (See also, Acts 18:18-19, 26, Rom 16:3, 5, 1 Cor 16:19, 2 Tim 4:19)

2. Why might Paul have focused on cities? What was significant about Athens, Corinth & Ephesus (from anything you know about these cities)? (See also, Appendix 1, Map 2)

3. What was the initial focus of Paul's ministry in Corinth? (18:4-6) How are the responses to Paul's message similar & different to what we've been seeing so far in Acts?

4. After meeting resistance from the Jews, Paul turned to the Gentiles. In what ways does God encourage Paul and protect him during his time in Corinth (Acts 18:9-17)? How was it a reassuring message?

Read Acts 18:23-28 (Apollos, beginning of 3rd Mission Journey)

5. What do we learn about Apollos? What was the "baptism of John"? (Cf Acts 13:24, 19:4)

6. What do we learn about Christian fellowship in v26a-28? What did Priscilla & Aquila teach Apollos (Cf Acts 8:15-17)?

Application/Implications

7. When are you tempted to be afraid to speak up about Jesus yourself? How might remembering God's presence & his election of people (Acts 18:10) be an encouragement to keep speaking as a Spirit-empowered witness to Jesus too, wherever he has you currently?

8. What can we learn from the ministry of Priscilla and Aquilla? In what ways, can we be more like them? How can we be more deliberate to also "strengthen all the disciples"?

Pray in Response



EXTRA NOTES

SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK

Discussion Question

When was saying a 'Goodbye' to someone difficult? Did they share any parting words?

God's Plan Unfolds

Chronology is important in the book of Acts because it demonstrates God's sovereign plan for the world as it unfolds through the lives of the apostles. Paul likely left Ephesus in May of AD 55. That date is assumed because Paul mentioned his intention to leave Ephesus after Pentecost in his first letter to the Corinthian believers (1 Corinthians 16:8). The events of Acts 20:1-3 are also explained in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 1-7. Reading these in tandem, we can see that the following events occurred during the three months between Paul's arrival in Greece and his intended departure toward Syria mentioned in Acts 20:3:

Mohler, R. Albert. Acts 13-28 For You: (pp. 105-106). Kindle Edition.

Brief Recap

What has been happening in the recent narrative of Acts so far?

Study

Read Acts 20:1-12 (Greece, Macedonia & Troas)

1. What is the style of Paul's ministry in v1-2?

2. Why does Paul talk until daylight? What happens after Eutychus comes back to life?

Read Acts 20:13-38

3. Why is Paul in a hurry (20:13-16)? Why does he send for the Ephesian elders? (v16)

4. In Paul's farewell speech (20:18-35), what are some things we learn about:

How Paul lived?	Paul's view of his life?
The responsibilities of Christian elders?	How God builds up his church?

5. What does Paul urge the Ephesian elders to watch out for? (20:28-30) Why?

Application/Implications

6. From this whole passage what should a church want its leaders to be and do?

7. How can we be an encouragement to the Christian pastors & leaders God has put over us?

8. Paul clearly teaches that the church of God is very precious to him (20:28). What are your own attitudes to church & God's people (the sheep) like at the moment?

9. What has been a key personal take-away from our Acts 13-20 series for you?

Pray in Response



EXTRA NOTES

Study Eight and Nine

GIVING/GENEROSITY

A note for Growth Groups: in Weeks 9 & 10 we are dedicating two focused Growth Group studies on the topic of 'Giving/Generosity' as part of a wider-Church initiative. This teaching material will be released to Growth Group leaders directly during Term 1.

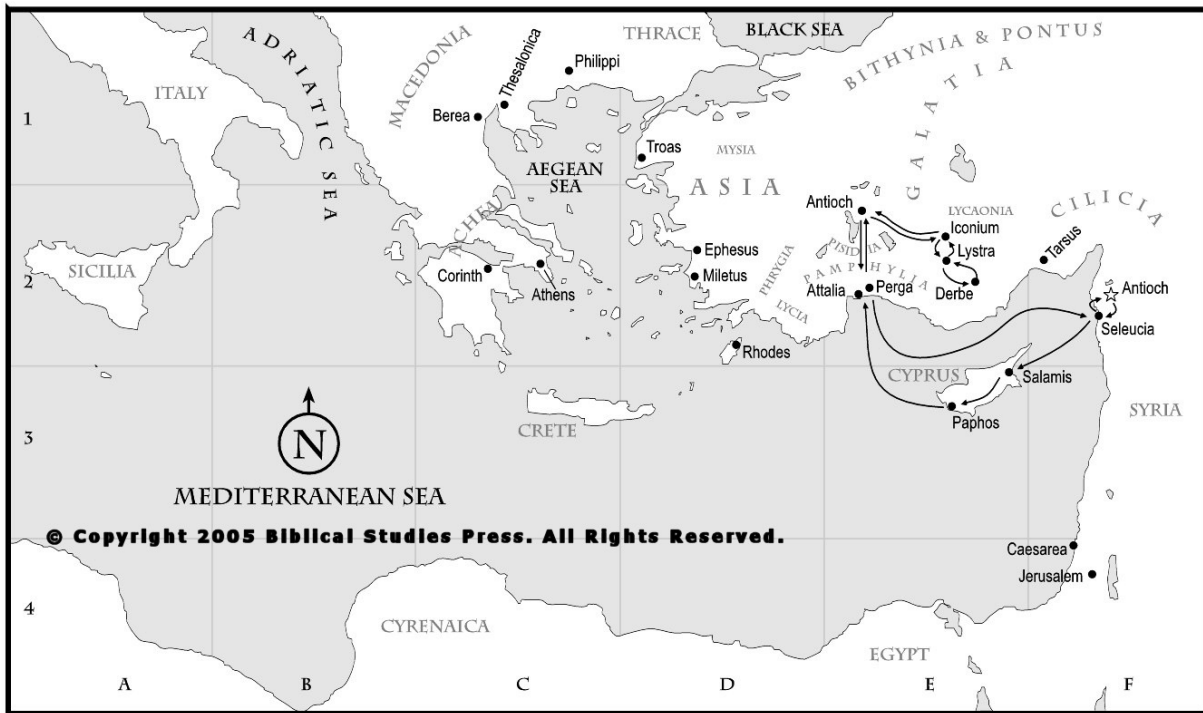
Appendix One

MAPS OF MISSION JOURNEYS

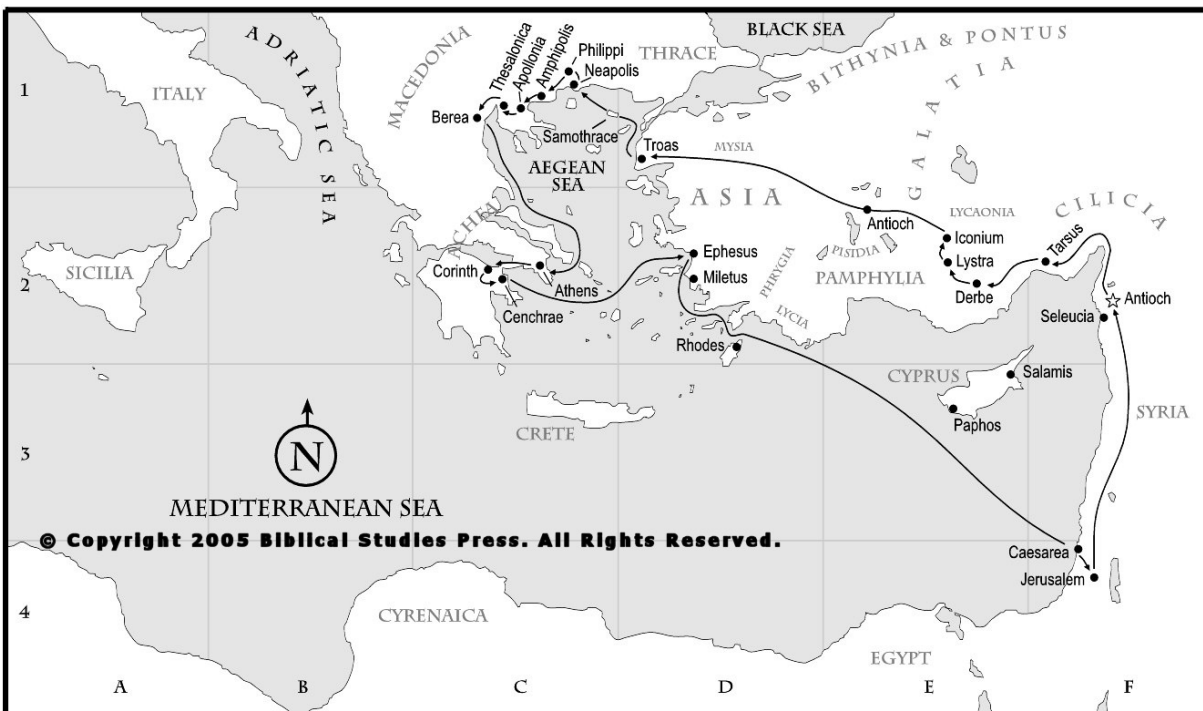
1st Mission Journey (13:1, 4, 13, 14, 51, 14:6, 20, 21, 24-25, 26)

Note: there are 2 Antiochs:

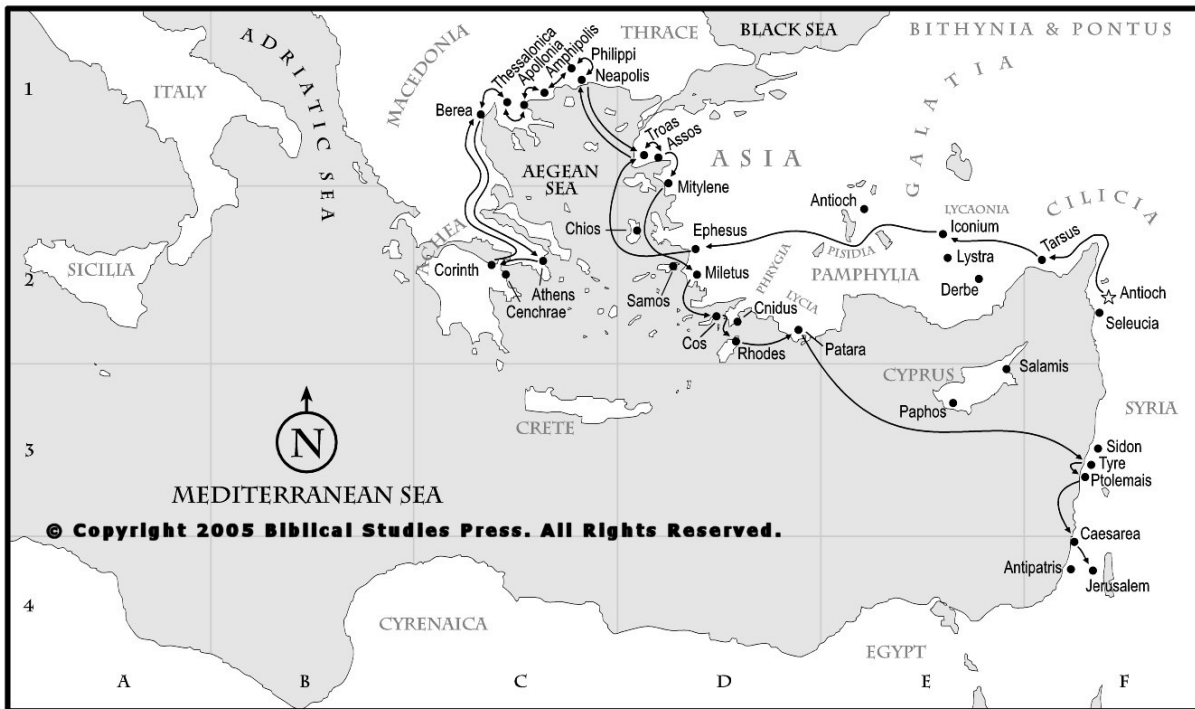
1. One in Syria - This was the Mission Head Quarters.
2. One in Pisidia.



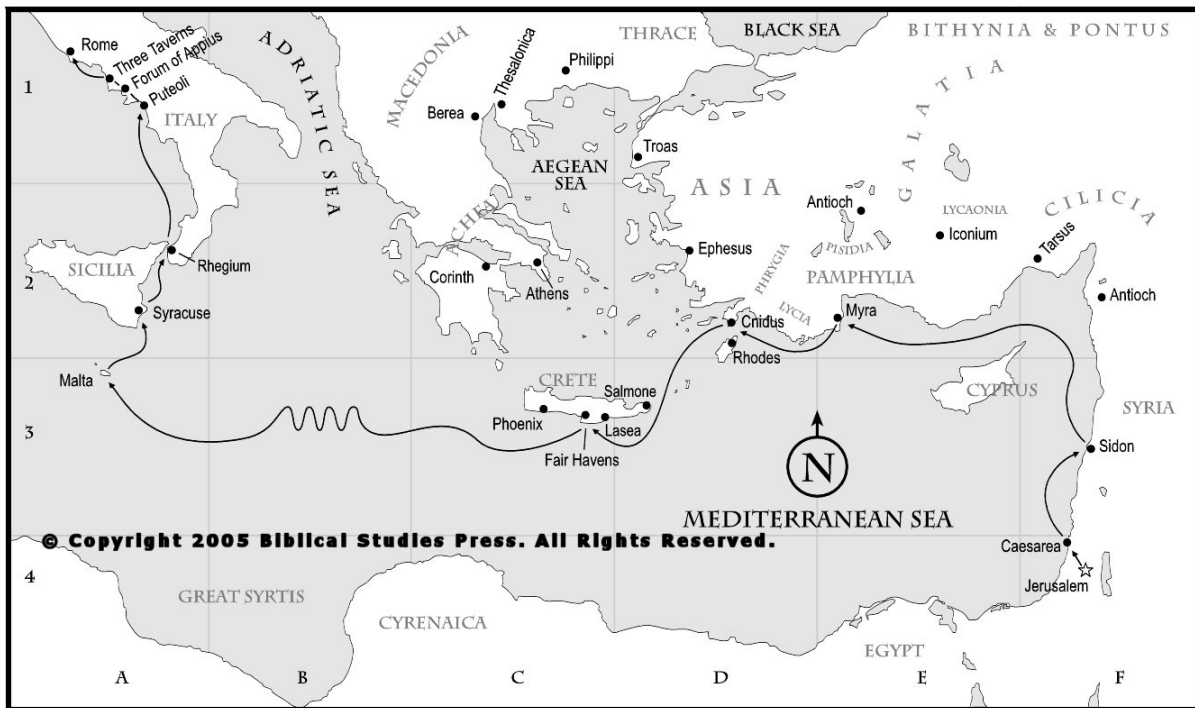
2nd Mission Journey (15:36-18:22)



3rd Mission Journey (18:23-21:2)



4th 'Mission' Journey (27:1-28:16)





EXTRA NOTES

