



THE
WORD
UNLEASHED.

ACTS 9-20

Study One

The Word Unleashed: Changing the Hardest Hearts

Acts 9:1-31

In Acts 1:8, Jesus told his disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth.

In chapters 1-8, we have witnessed the spread of the Word around Jerusalem. After the death of Stephen, believers were scattered around Judea and to Samaria. Also in chapter 8, the story of the Ethiopian eunuch is told, showing that the Word had started to spread to other parts of the world.

Chapter 9 reintroduces the reader to the character of Saul, first encountered in Acts 7:58-8:3 at the stoning of Stephen. Saul is determined to see this movement called "the Way" (Acts 9:2) stopped and those following it to be brought to justice.

On his way to Damascus, a major town of Samaria, Saul encounters the living Jesus. As a result of this encounter, Saul is converted to the Way and commissioned as one who will take the Word to the gentiles and their kings.

1. Read **Acts 9:1-2**. How would you describe Saul in these verses? What do we already know of Saul before Acts 9?

2. Read **Acts 9:3-9**. Twice Jesus accuses Saul of persecuting him. How was Saul doing that?

3. Read **Acts 9:10-25**. What do you think of Ananias' fear?

4. Describe in your own words the job that God has for Saul?

5. Read **Acts 9:26-31**. How would you describe Saul in these verses?

6. In what ways is **verse 31** a fitting summary for the whole of Acts so far?

Going Deeper

7. Read **Acts 9:20-22**. How is it that Paul could preach so quickly and baffle the Jews? Why do you think people were so astonished?

It reflects the authority of the risen Christ that he can humble someone as intimidating as Saul. Indeed, it's not enough that Saul becomes a Christian; Christ now uniquely charges Saul to spread the very gospel which he has been trying to stamp out. It is a beautiful irony that the man who hated Christians because they weren't Jewish enough, is now going to be instrumental in spreading the gospel to the non-Jews (9:15-16)! Here is the power of the risen Christ. The master executioner is humbled and led into Damascus like a prisoner of war. Saul, the persecutor of the church, has now become Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. The man who was determined to stop Christ's ongoing work is now going to be used by Christ so as to achieve his ongoing work. We are seeing that nothing can stop the risen Christ! No wonder the church lived in fear of the Lord (9:31).

Making it Stick

8. Can you think of a time when God has worked powerfully in your life that has contributed to your story?

Mission 2020

Pray that God will be working in the hearts of family and friends so that people respond to Jesus' invitation. Pray that our testimony might be an example to others in the way we live and speak.

Study Two

The Word Unleashed: Breaking Down the Walls

Acts 10:1-11:18

Here we encounter a return to the apostle Peter who has dream about he is allowed to eat. In Acts 10:15 we hear Jesus say the very important words "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This applies to the food that was being eaten, but perhaps also to those to whom the word would now be taken.

We see in the household of Cornelius a Roman centurion; the Word being accepted as the Holy Spirit, worked through that Word with power.

We were told in chapter 9 that Saul would take the Word (the Name) to the gentiles and here was Peter, also fulfilling this role. Perhaps this is important so that the leaders of the church were aware of what Jesus was doing and it would give credibility to what Saul (Paul) would go on to do. This is also important when it comes to Acts 15 and the Jerusalem council.

Cornelius was a wealthy man and carried influence, given his position as centurion. He also did the things a Christian should do (verse 2) but God was still working in his heart.

Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.
Acts 10:15 & 11:9

1. Read **Acts 10:1-23**. What things do we discover about Cornelius in these verses?

2. Why do you think Cornelius needed a vision to encourage him to invite Peter?

3. What does Peter mean by considering some animals as "unclean" (verse 14)?

4. Why do you think Peter's vision is repeated three times?

5. Read **Acts 10:24-48**. What lesson does Peter say he learned from his vision of the foods?

6. Peter tells Cornelius about Jesus. The climax of the speech is in **verse 43**. Why does the word "everyone" have special significance in verse 43? (See also how Peter starts his speech in **verses 34-35**)

7. How do the Gentiles respond to Peter's message? How do the Jews who are there respond?

8. Read **Acts 11:1-18**. Why is Peter criticised by the believers in Jerusalem?

9. What does Peter say in response to the criticism?

Going Deeper

10. In describing these events, Luke repeats a lot of details from the previous chapter. Why do you think Luke does that?

These chapters reveal a huge moment in the book of Acts. The Word is crossing boundaries that were previously seen to be off limits. It is also fulfilling Acts 1:8 as the Word goes out to the ends of the Earth.

It is unwise however to think that the experience of Cornelius and his household should be the same for all of us. The tone of this passage is that this is a remarkable and unique event. While we may see and hear of Jesus doing amazing things, there is no limit to how God does and can do these things.

The key issue throughout Acts is not whether we should do and experience what the early believers did. The key issue is: what do we discover about the risen Christ here? We discover that he does not show favouritism. His mission is for all peoples to be saved. Indeed, the next chapter shows us yet again how determined the risen Christ is about his mission!

Making it Stick

11. Peter realises that "God shows no partiality" (10:34). In what ways do we sometimes show favouritism in:

Our evangelism?

Our church relationships?

Mission 2020

Pray for Sam Chan and Glenn Davies as they preach the gospel during Mission 2020. Pray that they will be bold and that people will respond to their message as Cornelius and his family did.

Study Three

The Word Unleashed: The Unstoppable Word

Acts 12

But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

- Acts 12:24

In Acts 9:31, we are told that the church in Judea and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace following Saul's conversion. The church was strengthened and grew in number.

Acts 12 reintroduces persecution from another angle, that of King Herod. This is referring to Herod Agrippa I (reigned 41- 44AD), who was the son of Aristobulus and the grandson of Herod the great (reigned 37BC-4BC). Agrippa was the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had John the Baptist executed. Agrippa had James the brother of John put to the sword and then went ahead and arrested Peter (Acts 12:2-3).

In this chapter, we again get to see the sovereign power of Jesus at work. Not even gaol or the threat of death could stop Jesus' mission. Miraculously, Peter is freed from prison but also the believers were praying (v12).

1. Read **Acts 12:1-19**. How do the details of Peter's imprisonment (**12:4 & 6**) make his escape all the more dramatic?

2. We are told that the believers were praying for Peter (12:5 & 12). Why were they so surprised when he escaped?
Is it a lack of trust in Jesus' power? It is a surprise when prayers are answered so quickly.

3. Read **Acts 12:20-25**. Compare the attitude of Herod (**12:21-23**) with that of Peter (**10:25-26**).

4. Which king is victorious, Herod or the risen Christ?

5. In verse 21-23, why was Herod struck down?

Going Deeper

6. What does the death of one apostle (James) and the rescue of another (Peter) teach the church (**4:24-31**)?

7. What do you think it means in **12:24** that “the word of God continued to spread and flourish”?

Making it stick

9. In **12:5 & 12**, we are told that the church was earnestly praying to God for Peter. What do you think it means to pray earnestly? What do you expect of God when you pray?

10. Do you suffer persecution? If so, what does it look like?

Mission 2020

Pray for strength to remain bold when people say no to our invitations and thank God when people do respond. Pray also for your +1 (or more) that God will transform their lives in miraculous ways.

Study Four

The Word Unleashed: The Story of the Word

Acts 13:13-52

The word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region.

- Acts 13:49

In chapter 13 of Acts, we see the beginning of the journeys of Paul and Barnabas. In verses 13-52 we read Luke's account of Paul's first speech.

Luke gives much space to recording Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch. There are probably two main reasons for this:

1. This is Paul's first recorded speech in Acts, and so Luke is keen to show us that Paul preached the same gospel as the other apostles. It is, again, ironic that Paul's speech is very similar to Stephen's, as it places emphasis on Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament. It's a reflection of the authority of Christ that Paul is spreading the same message as the man he once helped to execute.

2. Luke probably also records this speech in detail to show that Paul's expulsion from the city was totally unjustified (verse 50). As we will see, Paul's blamelessness will develop into a major theme.

1. Read **Acts 11:19-30** and **Acts 13:1-3**. What impressions do you have of the church at Antioch?

3. What do we discover from Paul's speech about Jesus' place in God's plans? (**verses 23 & 32-33**)

2. Read **Acts 13:4-52**. Trace Paul and Barnabas' route on the map provided.

3. What do we discover from Paul's speech about Jesus' place in God's plans? (**verses 23 & 32-33**)

4. In his speech, Paul quotes several sections from the Old Testament. What is his point in each case?

Psalms 2, quoted in verse 33.

Isaiah 55, quoted in verse 34

Psalms 16, quoted in verse 35

Habakkuk 1, quoted in verse 41

Isaiah 49, quoted in verse 47

5. How do the following groups respond to Paul's message?

The Jews

The Gentiles

Going Deeper

6. In these verses (**23 & 32-33**), what are we told about Jesus as Messiah?

7. What does Paul mean by justification in **13:39**?

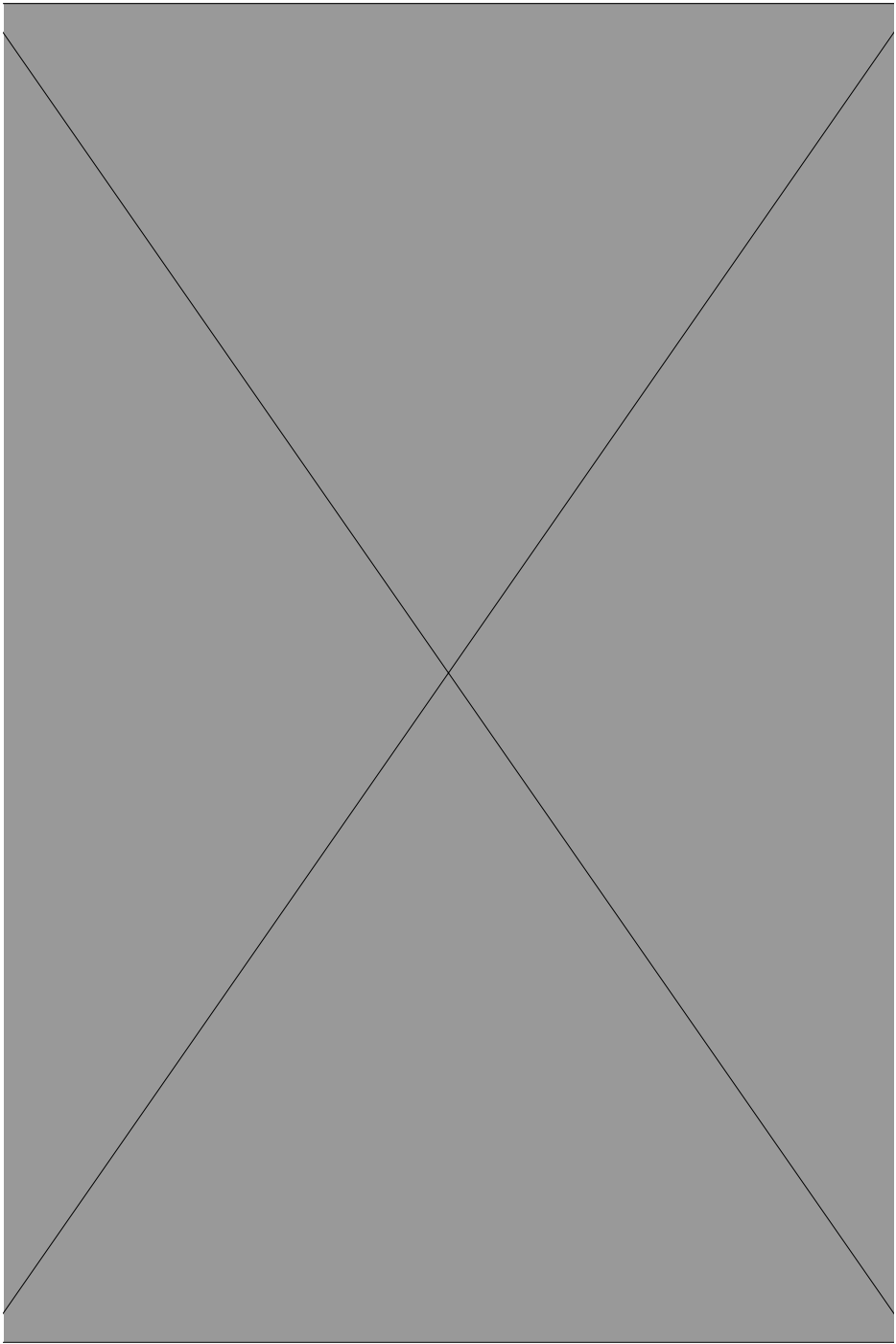
Making it Stick

8. Does the spread of God's word bring you joy?

9. In what ways have you seen the spread of God's word happening where you live, work, worship?

Mission 2020

Thank God for his message of salvation. Ask for boldness to proclaim the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.



Study Five

The Word Unleashed: Wonders and the Word

Acts 14

We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

- Acts 14:15

In this chapter, we are told by Luke that the proclamation of the word is again confirmed by miraculous signs and wonders. However, this leads to people attempting to worship the created rather than the creator or the vessel through which God works rather than He who is doing the work.

This is a trap that many fall into and here in chapter 14, Paul is adamant that he and Barnabas should not be worshipped. It is still difficult to stop people from sacrificing to them and they are even persecuted greatly for it.

1. Go to map from the previous study and trace out Paul and Barnabas' route as described in chapter 14.

2. Read **Acts 14**. In what ways are the experiences of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch (**13:13-52**) repeated in other towns?

3. What do we learn are the priorities of Paul and Barnabas in **14:1-7**?

6. In **verse 15-17**, what things does Paul say about the living God? Why is this important in the light of the miracle in **8-10**?

Going Deeper

7. How is the doctrine of creation used in Paul's encounter with the people of Lystra (**14:15-17**)? Why do you think Paul appeals to creation in this encounter?

8. Throughout this first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas have encountered some heavy opposition and it often becomes physical. Why do you think such opposition is incited in chapters 13 and 14? (try to stick to the text and not speculate)

Making it Stick

9. What can we do to become bolder in our proclamation of the gospel?

10. How do we avoid a situation where we worship the created rather than the creator, or worship the vessels used by God to bring us the truth?

Mission 2020

Spend some time praying for people who you would like to invite to the mission next year.

Study Six

The Word Unleashed: Removing Obstacles to the Word

Acts 15

Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.

- Acts 15:10-11

After being away for about two years and travelling approximately 2000km, Paul and Barnabas are back home in Antioch. Their first missionary journey is now finished.

In many ways, the trip has been a victory parade for the risen Christ. In city after city, Paul and Barnabas have proclaimed the greatness of Jesus and the victory that he has had over death. Along the way, the risen Christ has also displayed his power and authority many times. As sorcerers are struck down with blindness, as cripples are healed, as Paul receives strength to go on even after a massive beating, as the hearts of both Jews and Gentiles are stirred and lives are changed, the risen Christ broadcasts his greatness - reflecting the truth that he really is at the centre of everything that God has ever planned (13:32-33).

As we will see, though, not everyone was impressed with this emphasis on Jesus.

1. Read **Acts 15:1-35**. What problem comes to the fore after Paul and Barnabas' trip (**13:39, 15:1 & 5**)?

2. Why do you think this issue is serious enough that Luke would include it?

3. What does Peter say regarding the necessity of Gentiles to be circumcised (**verses 6-11**)?

4. What do you think Paul and Barnabas would have said regarding the necessity of Gentiles to be circumcised (**verses 2 & 12**)?

5. What does James say regarding the necessity of Gentiles to be circumcised (**verses 13-21**)?

Going Deeper

6. Read **Galatians 2:11-21**. What new facts does this add to the events of Acts 15?

7. In what ways does **Galatians 2:15-16** provide a good summary of the issues raised at the council of Jerusalem?

8. If we're saved by what Jesus does and not what we do, what does it matter how we behave? Why can't we 'sin all the more'?

9. Is it arrogant to be confident about going to heaven?

Making it stick

10. Can you think of any issues that have arisen that the church has to contend with these days that undermine the idea that we are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus?

Mission 2020

Pray that the gospel will be proclaimed clearly by all our speakers for the mission. That we too will remember that what Jesus did is enough for us to be reconciled to God and that people will respond in repentance and faith. Pray particularly for Sam Chan and Glenn Davies.

Study Seven

The Word Unleashed: The Word Stretching it's Wings

Acts 16

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

- Acts 16:5

The first five verses of chapter 16 show how Paul's second missionary journey began with a visit to strengthen existing congregations in Syria and Cilicia, and then Derbe, Lystra and Iconium. By doing this, Paul is showing the importance of pastoral oversight, especially as the Word continues to be proclaimed in these places.

Before seeing the Word spread into Europe (16:6 onwards), we are confronted with the introduction of Timothy into the narrative. Commentator David Peterson points out two important points regarding this:

First, there is the introduction of Timothy, who figures significantly in the subsequent narratives as a member of Paul's new team. His circumcision by Paul is explained in terms of his family situation and Paul's concern to facilitate the team's acceptance in Jewish contexts (16:1-3). Once more, Luke demonstrates Paul's desire to keep the way open for the evangelisation of Jews.

Second, there is the note about delivering the decisions reached by the Jerusalem council, thus strengthening the churches (16:4-5).

After this, Paul is instructed by the Holy Spirit to go to Macedonia and we witness the first town visited in this area which was Philippi.

1. Read **Acts 16:1-5**. After the events of Acts 15, why did Paul circumcise Timothy?

2. What was the result of Paul delivering the decisions from the Jerusalem council to the churches?

3. Read **16:6-40**. In every other city Paul has visited so far, he has started his preaching at the synagogue. How is Philippi different? What does this suggest about Philippi?

4. List all the different people who are converted at Philippi (assume the slave girl is one). What does this suggest about the diversity of the Philipian church?

5. What was the motivation for the arrest of Paul and Silas? What reasons do you see today for people rejecting the truth?

Going Deeper

6. What do you think was on the mind of the jailer when he asked Paul 'What must I do to be saved?' (**verses 26 and 27**)

7. Paul was later to write to the Philippian church:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

- Philippians 2:1-2

Why would these words have been particularly appropriate, given what we have discovered of this church? What lessons are there for us in these words?

Making it Stick

8. What do you think about and how would you respond to the statement: "Christianity is just a blind leap of faith"?

Mission 2020

Pray that God will give us the words to say when we have opportunity to speak the truth to people who are lost. Pray the prayer from Philippians 1:9-11 for each other.

Study Eight

The Word Unleashed: The Relevance of the Word

Acts 17

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

- Acts 17:30-31

In this chapter, Luke reminds us again that Paul's custom is to go to the synagogue and preach first to the Jews. In **Acts 17:1-15**, he focus's again on Paul's synagogue ministry, highlighting the contrasting responses to the gospel in Thessalonica and Berea. The fact that Paul faced jealous, persecuting Jews in Thessalonica and, in contrast, reflective Jews in Berea shows that "the narrator has not completely stereotyped Diaspora Jews."

Having restated the Jewish foundation for his mission, Luke provides Paul's Areopagus' speech as a model of the way Jesus and his resurrection might be proclaimed to Gentiles with no relation to Judaism. Without quoting scripture, this speech confronts people with the God of the Bible and His claim on their lives and points them to the resurrected Jesus as the one in whom they can find a true and lasting relationship with God.

1. Read **Acts 17:1-15**. What words are used to describe the manner in which Paul shared the gospel at Thessalonica (**verses 2-4**)? What do these words tell us about the nature of the gospel?

2. What range of reactions does the gospel receive in both Thessalonica and Berea? How reasonable do you think each of these reactions are?

3. How long did Paul spend in Thessalonica? Given the events of his stay, what do you think might be the dangers and challenges for the new church there?

4. Why do you think we are specifically told that in both cities prominent women and God-fearing Greeks believed (**verses 4 & 12**)?

5. Read **Acts 17:16-32**. What was it about seeing idols that would have made Paul feel so distressed (**verse 16**)?

6. What does Paul's distress cause him to do? What reactions did he receive?

7. In Paul's speech in **verses 24-31**, what things do we learn about God? What things do we learn about humanity? Are there any similarities between what is said in **17:3, 18 & 28-31**?

Going Deeper

8. Some people suggest that Paul's Speech at Athens is a good model for our own evangelism. What do you think?

Truth Out

9. As Paul wandered around Athens, he was distressed at all their idols. If Paul was to wander through your home, what idols might he see there? How distressed are you about them?

Mission 2020

Pray that we will have the same level of confidence in the Word that they had in the early church. Pray for boldness to proclaim it. Pray that the Holy Spirit will be poured out, softening hearts to hear the truth.



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