



# ALL SOULS

# MISSION UNSTOPPABLE

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

LEADERS GUIDE

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# INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

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## MISSION UNSTOPPABLE

### THE TRUTH – THE SEAT BELT TEST

To explain and get the young people excited about the main themes of Acts

#### WHY BIG THEMES?

The book of Acts is one of the most exciting books to teach young people. The rapid spread of the gospel, and the big personalities involved all make for a brilliant story. The stories may be well known, but the overall purpose and theme of the book is probably a mystery to most young people. One of the best ways to help young people understand the purpose of the book, is to teach them the main themes. I have boiled them down to three, which I hope will help the young people remember and understand the book for the rest of their lives. As we journey through the book, these three themes will dominate each story.

1. The Gospel – What it is
2. The Goal – Where the Gospel goes?
3. The Gathering – How the gospel community lives?

### THE IMAGE

To help the young people to remember Acts, I want to attach a defining image to each theme. This image comes with a question, **“Will you be a gospel fool?”**

### THE GOSPEL FOOL

To embrace the gospel, and live for its advancement, is to be a fool in the eyes of the world. As we look at Peter, Paul and the devoted disciples of Jesus followers in the book of Acts, we will see how foolish they look.

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**A man who has faith must be prepared not only to be a martyr, but to be a fool. GK Chesterton**

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Only a gospel fool gets aboard the gospel train. Only a gospel fool is ready to be rejected at every stop.

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**The wisest person in the city is ‘He whom the fools hate’.**  
*Dante; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25*

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### THE MESSAGE – THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

#### 1. THE GOSPEL – WHAT IT IS

##### Four Truths That Make Up The Gospel

Throughout the book of Acts, Luke uses story after story to define what the gospel is.

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**Luke is not so much reporting the spread of the gospel as describing for us what the gospel was, and how it came to be defined. David Gooding**

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When we look at how the gospel is preached and proclaimed, we see four important truths about Jesus: His identity, the cross and resurrection, His authority, and His commands. Here are three examples from Peter, Stephen and Paul:

#### PETER’S PREACHING

##### His Identity

- God is King (2:31)
- Lord & Christ (2:36)

##### His Cross & Resurrection

- The cross is God’s eternal plan (2:23)
- It’s God that raised Him (2:24,32)
- His death and resurrection lead to glorification and enemies defeated (2:32-36)

##### His Authority

- His life was full of powerful miracles (2:22)
- His death is God’s eternal plan (2:23)
- His Resurrection (2:24, 26-28)
- It was God who raised Him (2:24,32)
- Exalted to the right hand of the Father (2:33)
- The one who gives Holy Spirit, therefore the one who judges (2:33)
- The one who triumphs over enemies (2:34)

##### His Command

- The command is to repent and be baptised (2:38)
- When you obey the command, you are forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit (2:38)

## STEPHEN'S PREACHING

### His Identity

- The promised Righteous One (7:52)

### His Cross & Resurrection

- Crucifying Jesus is the greatest evidence that they have disobeyed and rejected the law of God (7:52-53)

### His Authority

- The Son of Man stands at the right hand of God (7:56)

### His Command

Stephen calls them to repent:

- In rejecting Jesus, they have followed in the footsteps of Israel's stiff-necked leaders (7:51)
- In rejecting Jesus, they have followed in the footsteps of all those who rejected the Old Testament prophets (7:51b-52)
- In rejecting Jesus, they have followed and disobeyed the whole law (7:53)

## PAUL'S PREACHING

### His Identity

- The one who rises is the one who judges (17:31)

### His Cross & Resurrection

- Paul preaches the good news of Jesus and the resurrection (17:18)
- The resurrection confirms both that there will be a day of judgement, and who the judge is (17:31)

### His Authority

- God is creator of all (17:24, 28)
- He sustains us, we don't sustain him (17:25, 28)
- He decides where people live (17:26)
- He's knowable (17:27)

### His Command

- They must repent of making idols of gold, silver and stone (17:29)
- God commands all people to repent (17:30)
- God's set a day for judgement (17:31)
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## 2. THE GOAL – WHERE THE GOSPEL IS HEADING

### IMAGE

The image of an unstoppable train is the defining image to use here. The train's destination is Rome, which in Acts signifies the ends of the earth. As it advances it will stop off at many cities and stations along the way. Many different people and groups will seek to stop the train in its tracks, including elite religious leaders, kings and those devoted to the occult. The more they try, the quicker the train seems to advance to its final destination.

### Stations Along the Way

**Platform 1** = Antioch (Acts 13:13-52)

**Platform 2** = Corinth (Acts 18)

**Platform 3** = Ephesus (Acts 19)

**Platform 4** = Jerusalem (Acts 21-23)

**Platform 5** = The Palace (Acts 24-25)

**Platform 6** = Rome (Acts 27-28)

### THE JOURNEYS

The way Luke designs his two books is around the theme of a journey.

### Jesus Journey

The gospel of Luke is all about the journey of the Lord Jesus. His destination is the right hand of the Father (21:26-28, 22:66-70), and to get there he must go via the cross (9:51). Nothing and no one can prevent the Son of God arriving at his destination. The proof that He's arrived is that the Spirit is sent.

### The Gospel's Journey

The destination of the gospel is the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). There will be many obstacles seeking to stop the train or re-route the journey. Trying to stop the gospel train getting to Rome, is like trying to stop Jesus going to the cross and then glory, it just isn't going to happen.

### Your Journey

Only a gospel fool gets aboard a gospel train. Here's the challenge we must apply both to ourselves and the young people. To board the gospel train, is to take a journey that guarantees persecution :

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*Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems. John Stott*

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We must not flinch from bringing this challenge to our young people. As we teach Acts, we must be careful not to re-route the journey so the difficult stations and people are avoided. We must resist the temptation to leave Peter, Stephen, James, and Paul as merely spiritual cardboard cut-outs, whose lives and message remain in history. Instead we must implore our young people to get aboard the 'gospel train', whatever the present station, and follow in their footsteps.

### 3. THE GATHERING – HOW THE GOSPEL COMMUNITY LIVES

It's naive to think that the early church was problem-free. A quick look at Acts 5 & 10 reveals just some of the problems they faced. The fact that they had problems must not steer us away from realising that they are the model for us to follow.

#### DEVOTED DISCIPLES

The early church teaches us who and what to be devoted to.

**2:42** = Devoted to the apostles teaching

**2:42-45, 4:32-37** = Devoted to each other in generous living

**2:42,46** = Devoted to remembering Jesus

#### DEPENDENT DISCIPLES

On release from prison Peter and James head straight for the band of devoted disciples. What they do, and how they respond, is a model for us when we face persecution.

**4:23-24** = They pray to the sovereign God.

**4:25-28** = They understand all persecution in the light of mankind's hatred of Jesus. It's not a personal rejection but a cosmic one

**4:29-30** = However fierce the persecution may be, they never stop believing in God's sovereignty

**4:29** = They always look outside of themselves for courage to keep going

# SESSION 1

## THE GOSPEL TRAIN LEAVES THE STATION

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### ACTS 1-2

#### TEACHING NARRATIVE

As we embark on teaching this great book, here are a few tips on teaching narrative.

#### REMEMBER IT'S A STORY

Often the temptation is to treat narrative like one of Paul's letters, instead of a story to be told. Alex Motyer has this advice when teaching Exodus, but the same principle applies when teaching Acts:

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*"Exodus is a planned exercise in storytelling." - A Moytyer*

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Therefore, in preparation to teach Acts, we must constantly read and reread the story, so that we feel the heartbeat of the characters involved. Ask yourself questions like, "what are the emotions in the story? How would Paul have felt when he boarded the train to Confident Corinth? Learn to live in the skin of the characters, to love what they loved and to hate what they hated.

Once we've imagined ourselves as the characters, we must then pray that the Holy Spirit burns His truth into our very beings. The message of God's word must so inflame both our intellect and heart that it becomes what Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones called 'logic on fire':

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*The preacher [SUS group leader] must always convey the impression that they themselves have been gripped by what they are saying. If they have not been gripped nobody else will be.... They are so moved and thrilled by it themselves that they want everybody else to share in this. They are so concerned about them... They are anxious about them ... So they do it with energy, with zeal, and with obvious concern for people. M Lloyd-Jones*

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#### DON'T BE CLEVER, BE CLEAR

Our first call when teaching anyone is to be clear not clever.

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*The preacher [SUS group leader] is a bridge builder, seeking to span the gulf between the Word of God and the mind of man. They must do their utmost to interpret the Scripture so accurately and plainly, and to apply it so forcefully, that the truth crosses the bridge. John Stott*

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#### LEAVING THE STATION

##### THE TRUTH – THE SEAT BELT TEST

The gospel message is centred completely upon God's plan the cross.

- The cross reveals sin
- The cross calls us to repent
- The cross offers forgiveness and filling with the Holy Spirit

##### THE TRUTH – THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

###### A Promise – Wait

- The tension and emotion in this chapters is at fever pitch. Their leader has been the son of God, who they have watched die and rise again (1:1-3). His final act of salvation is to return to the place of honour at the right hand of the Father, but before He leaves, he promises the Holy Spirit (1:4-5). Their only responsibility is to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come. The train will not leave the station until the Spirit arrives.
- The second promise is given by the angels. As the disciples look intently into the sky they are told to stop staring and instead live for his imminent return (1:10-11).

###### A Command – Go

Along with the promise comes a command, which is to take the good news to the whole world (1:8). The apostles show they believe the promise by returning to Jerusalem (1:12). The command given (1:8), will only be achieved once Jesus sends the Holy Spirit. A bunch of ex-fishermen, ex-tax collectors and a few vulnerable women will never fulfil the command of 1:8, unless they have the divine help promised.

Straightaway the story leads to a point where God's people are utterly dependent. They have a giant task, and no power within themselves to accomplish it. For it to be achieved they have to obey Jesus and go to the first station, Jerusalem.

###### Application

Here is a clear point of application for our young people. For Acts 1:8 to be accomplished they must be completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit. For their schools, families and neighbourhoods to be reached, the power and influence of the Holy Spirit must be at the very centre.

## A Promise - Kept

As soon as we get to Acts 2 the promise is fulfilled, as tongues of fire rest upon all the believers (2:1-4), the sign that God is present (Ex 20:18-19, Heb 12:18-21). The significance of this is huge, for it points to the victory of the cross and resurrection. The great prophet John explained that the Lord Jesus would be able to baptise (send) the Spirit, and judge all people (Luke 3:15-18). The coming of the Spirit signifies that Jesus has arrived at the right hand of the Father, which is the place of all power and authority.

The other big shock in this story is that the Spirit rests on all believers. In the Old Testament the Spirit of God only came upon certain people with important tasks, like Kings or prophets. But now the story is so different, as again and again we are told the Holy Spirit is filling and giving His power to all believers, whatever gender, race, or background (2:4,17-21).

## A Promise - Obeyed

The Holy Spirit fills all believers, so as to teach all people. When Peter stands up he calls all people to get aboard the gospel train. If the sermon is successful, then many gospel trains will be filled, leaving the station to reach all parts of the world (2:5-13).

## GOD'S MAN

### His Life

In the introduction to his first book, Luke emphasises that all his stories are based on eyewitness accounts (Luke 1:1-4). It's this truth that he appeals to all the way through Peter's sermon. As Peter looks his hearers in the eye, he reminds them of the powerful miracles Jesus performed. They were powerful, and they were from God (2:22).

## His Victory

At the heart of Peter's message is the cross and resurrection of Jesus. It's not something to be ashamed of, but instead God's eternal plan (2:24).

## His Reign

Next, we have a treasure trove of titles given to the Lord Jesus. Like a warrior stepping out of the tomb, he reigns supreme.

**2:24** = He's the Conqueror of death.

**2:25-34** = His throne is greater than David's

**2:35** = He will judge His enemies

**2:36** = He's Lord and King

## His Gifts

The response of the people is exactly what it should be. They have murdered God's King and face his judgement, no wonder they plead for mercy.

## God Commands

Here Peter passes on God's command to repent. True repentance is to admit that they deserve God's anger, for it was their sin that caused Jesus' death. If they truly repent, then it is gifts they receive, not punishment. The gift of forgiveness and the person of the Holy Spirit can be theirs (2:38-39).

## Peter Pleads

Having passed on the command, Peter now pleads with all present to get aboard the gospel train (2:40). Three thousand people obey God's command, by responding to Peter's plea. The first Christian sermon is over, and dozens of gospel trains are leaving the station (2:41).

# SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

**Ice Breaker:** Would you rather? questions

**Intro Q:** Name, where you live, favourite food, superpower and why

## WHO THE HOLY SPIRIT IS

### 1. WHAT'S THE FIRST THOUGHT THAT COMES INTO YOUR HEAD WHEN YOU THINK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Power – like electricity?

Mystery – important but don't really know why?

Ghost thing?

God?

**How might these verses help you understand better who He is?**

He *speaks* and *sends* – Acts 13:2,4

He *chooses* – Acts 20:28

He *teaches* – John 14:25-26

He *gives* – Isaiah 63:14

He can be lied to and *tested* – Acts 5:3, 9

He can be *resisted* – Acts 7:51

He can be *grieved* – Eph 4:30

He can be *blasphemed* – Matt 12:31

### 2. WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT ABOUT THE WIND AND FIRE? LOOK UP EX 19:16-23, 20:18-19, HEB 12:18-21

The wind and fire are ways of God expressing his presence to His people.

In Acts, the wind and fire point to the presence of God, the Holy Spirit

## WHAT THE GOSPEL IS

### 3. WHAT TRUTHS ABOUT JESUS GIVE PETER SUCH CONFIDENCE?

**2:22** = His powerful life

**2:23** = The cross is God's plan

**2:24** = God raised Jesus from the dead (death is defeated)

**2:29-34** = His throne is eternal, greater than that of David

**2:34** = All his enemies will one day be defeated

**2:35** = He is God's King

### 4. WHAT DOES GOD COMMAND AND PROMISE?

He commands that people should repent – 2:38

He promises forgiveness and the Holy Spirit for all those who repent – 2:38-39

### 5. WHAT DOES REPENTANCE MEAN FOR THE PEOPLE PETER IS SPEAKING TO? LOOK UP 2:22-24

**Is it any different for you and me? To help answer the question look at what Paul says in Eph 2:1-5**

We were... Spiritually dead, disobedient, and living as we wanted, therefore deserving of God's wrath – 2:1-3

But God... God's great love and mercy makes us alive to God's grace – 2:4-5

## APPLICATION

### 6. HOW DOES THE TRUTH THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS POWERFUL HELP US GET ON BOARD THE GOSPEL TRAIN?

The Holy Spirit being God

Peter's sermon

God's gift of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit

### 7. WHY IS GETTING ON THE GOSPEL TRAIN SO IMPORTANT, IN LIGHT OF WHAT WE'VE SEEN IN ACTS 2?

#### WHAT TO PRAY FOR

- Praise God that the Holy Spirit gives us power to share the Gospel with our friends and family
- Praise God that the Gospel is for everyone
- Sorry for the times that we doubt that God gives us the power to share the Gospel
- Ask God to speak to us this week through his Word and all we hear and experience

#### WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOSPEL

It's for all people

#### WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOAL

It's heading to the ends of the earth

#### WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GATHERING

We are totally dependant on the person of the Holy Spirit



# SESSION 2

## THE NAME ON THE TRAIN

### ACTS 3-4

#### THE LINK

The story of Acts 1-2 is full of promises made and kept, and commands given and obeyed. The first Christian sermon is welcomed with huge success, as three thousand people get aboard the gospel train (2:41). Yet the train is hardly out of the station before the religious elite seek to stop it in its tracks.

#### THE TRUTH - THE SEAT BELT TEST

- Today we see how religion seeks to stop the gospel train.
- The name of Jesus will always bring two responses.
- Devoted, loyal love, or deep-seated hatred.

#### THE MESSAGE - THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

The whole story centres around two words: 'the name'. Throughout the book of Acts it's the name of Jesus that causes division, and often violent persecution and even death. The chart below shows how the theme of the 'name' of Jesus runs through the whole book.

TXT	THE NAME
8:12	
9:15	Summarises the whole gospel
9:28	
10:43	Brings forgiveness
22:16	
10:43-48	Fulfils the Old Testament
22:14-16	
5:28,40	
9:21,27	Singles you out as one of God's people
10:48	
16:18	Defeats evil
19:13-16	

#### THE GOSPEL - WHAT IT IS

TXT	IDENTITY	TXT	CROSS & RESURRECTION
3:13	Glorified servant	3:13	You disowned and preferred a murderer to Jesus
3:14	Holy & Righteous One	3:15	You killed the author of life
3:15	You killed the author of life	3:15	Eye witness evidence
3:15	Eye witness evidence	3:18	The Prophets spoke of Jesus' suffering
3:18	The prophets spoke of Jesus' suffering	3:21	The restorer of all things
4:2	Preaching of the resurrection lands them in jail	4:2	Preaching of the resurrection lands them in jail
3:26	The servant whom God has raised up		
4:7	It's the power and the 'name' that puts fear into the authorities		
4:11	He is the centre piece of everything God has ever done		

TXT	AUTHORITY	TXT	COMMAND
3:13	God glorified him	3:19	Repent, so your sins are wiped out
3:15	God raised him	3:22	You must listen to Jesus
3:16	The name of Jesus caused the healing	3:23	Refusal to listen to him is to exclude yourself from God's people
3:18	The prophets spoke of Jesus' suffering	4:18-20	The command of God supersedes the commands of men
3:21	He is the one who will return to restore all things		
3:23	Refusal to listen to him, is to exclude yourself from God's people		
3:24	All the prophets spoke of Jesus		
3:25	He alone brings God's promised blessing to the world		
4:10	The authority of the 'name' is what heals		
4:10	God raised him		
4:12	Salvation is found in him alone		
4:13	His authority extends to his followers		
4:14, 22	The healed man		
4:16	The authority of Jesus is undeniable		

## SURPRISE

The story starts with a glorious healing, but the real focus is the powerful 'name' that accomplishes it (3:1-8). The people's response is understandably one of wonder and amazement (3:9).

When Peter hears of their surprise at the healing, he's clearly mystified (3:11-12). He knows who the 'name' belongs to, so quickly tells them.

## YOU DISOWNED AND MURDERED

**3:13** = God's glorified servant – the one Isaiah spoke of (53:11)  
**3:14** = Holy and Righteous One – the one Isaiah spoke of (53:11)  
**3:15** = Author of Life – The one who sustains you and the whole universe  
**3:18** = The Messiah – The central person in your history, God's King  
**10**

The apostle is utterly convinced that the 'name' of Jesus is shorthand for all this. Therefore, why would you be surprised that he could heal the man?

His next response is to pass onto them God's command to repent (3:17-19). As before the command is always followed swiftly by a promise of sins forgiven (3:19). The urgency to repent focuses on both the past and the future. They have murdered the author of life who will one day return to judge (3:20-26). Within moments, the religious leaders have heard all that Peter has said.

## APPLICATION

Here Peter models to us the centrality of Jesus to the gospel message. As the train advances, Peter and all the gospel preachers will be tempted to add or subtract things from God's gospel. The gospel is centred upon the person of Christ, his work on the cross and the forgiveness it brings. No more and no less.

## SUFFERING

In the blink of an eye the religious elite are seeking to silence Peter and John by throwing them into prison (4:1-3). Yet instead of stopping the gospel train, it merely seems to speed it up (4:4).

The religious leaders first question concerns 'power' (4:7). In an instant, the Spirit fills Peter to turn the conversation quickly to Jesus. As he did with the crowd before, Peter points to the death and resurrection of Jesus again. They have murdered the most important person in their history (4:11), and the only one who can save them (4:12).

The religious leaders face two huge problems when trying to silence Peter and John:

- The supernatural courage they display (4:13)
- The evidence of the healed man (4:14)

The religious leaders command Peter and John to keep quiet. Now they have a decision to make: do they obey the author of life, their Messiah? or do they get off the gospel train and obey a few religious leaders? They make the right choice by choosing to stay on the train (4:18-22), happily remaining gospel fools.

## APPLICATION

If our young people are to be 'Gospel Fools' and remain on the gospel train, then they must look outside of themselves for the means to do that. Like Peter and John, they have to depend on the power and influence of the Spirit, and the historical facts of Jesus death and resurrection.

## SALVATION

This story gives us a huge window into what motivated Peter and John to face such hostile opposition. They believed that the one they served was the author of life, and the only saviour (3:15, 4:12). They believed that through the cross and resurrection their sins were wiped away (3:18). This is what fuels their excitement, passion and progress. It's what drives

them to stay aboard the gospel train whatever destination, and whatever opposition they may face.

### APPLICATION

Nothing has changed today. Like the first followers we live in a culture where false religion opposes the precious name of Jesus. If our young people are to become 'Gospel Fools' and remain upon the gospel train, then they must learn to love Jesus. They must learn to love and enjoy the truth that Jesus is the author of life, God's King and the only saviour.

### SOVEREIGN

On release from prison Peter and James head straight for the band of devoted disciples. What they do, and how they respond, is a model for our young people today.

**4:23-24** = They pray to the sovereign God.

**4:25-28** = They understand all persecution in the light of

mankind's hatred of Jesus. It's not a personal rejection but a cosmic one.

**4:29-30** = However fierce the persecution, they never stop believing in God's sovereignty.

**4:29** = They always look outside of themselves for courage to keep going.

**4:30** = They continue to rely upon the 'name' of Jesus.

**4:31** = They are filled with the Spirit, so the gospel train moves on.

From here on the opposition to the advance of the gospel train will get more and more intense. Yet nothing stops its advance as Jerusalem is filled with the teaching of Jesus (5:27-28).

### APPLICATION

If our young people are to be 'Gospel Fools' and stay aboard the gospel train, then they must have a growing conviction that God is sovereign. He was sovereign in Christ's death (2:23), and just as sovereign in getting Acts 1:8 accomplished.



# SESSION 3

## RESURRECTION PEOPLE

### ACTS 12

#### THE LINK

The plot to murder Jesus was a combination of powerful religious leaders, working hand in hand with powerful politicians (4:25-28). Yesterday in Acts 3-4 we saw the religious leaders seeking to stop the gospel train, today it's the turn of the politicians.

#### THE TRUTH - THE SEAT BELT TEST

Political powers will always seek to undermine or aggressively oppose God's people and the progress of the gospel train.

The people of God have the resurrection life of Jesus within them, therefore nothing or no one can stop them.

#### THE MESSAGE - THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

##### 1. THE ENEMIES OF GOD ARISE (12:1-4)

The guy introduced to us here is the nephew of King Herod who tried to murder baby Jesus. The Herod Dynasty clearly has a rich history of destroying anyone who threatens their power or popularity. Here Herod sees the energy and unstoppable motion of the gospel train as a threat. First, he arrests a group of God's people, and then murders their leader James (12:1-2). The applause from the Jews lead to him arresting Peter (12:3). Everything about the story oozes death, as James is dead and Peter is next in line.

To help us tell the story, we need to put ourselves firmly in the shoes of the early church. They are 'Gospel Fools' committed to staying on the gospel train, but their leader has been murdered, and Peter is next in line. Will the gospel train finally be stopped? Is God in control? Will Acts 1:8 be realised?

#### APPLICATION

When our young people look at their class, year, or maybe their whole school, they might be the only Christian. The school system seems to be opposed to the Christian message. As they ponder life, it may feel like the gospel train is not even out of the station.

When a young Christian in China, North Korea, or Russia watch their church leaders or parents oppressed and even arrested for following Jesus, it must feel like the gospel train has come to a halt.

##### 2. THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARISE (12:5-17)

Herod stands before us with the might of the Roman army on his side. In stark contrast Peter is banged up in prison, hemmed in by a small army of soldiers (12:3-4), while the band of believers are showing their dependence upon God and each other (12:5).

In the eyes of the unbeliever, Herod looks like he's here to stay while Peter and the church are on their way out. The gospel train has entered a tunnel, and no one knows whether it will reappear.

Here Luke wants us to picture three things:

1. Peter symbolises the church.
2. The cell is a picture of the tomb of Jesus.
3. Peter's release is a picture of the resurrection.

In place of death, Peter suddenly encounters the angel of the Lord who tells him to get up. As soon as he obeys, the chains fall straight off (12:6-9) and the gospel train comes full speed out of the tunnel. From now on everything seems effortless as they stroll past the guards and through the once locked gate (12:10). When Peter gets himself together after the shock release, he returns to the believers (12:11). Below are the striking similarities between Jesus' resurrection and Peter's release.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN JESUS' RESURRECTION & PETER'S RELEASE	LUKE	ACTS
The first person to meet Jesus and Peter is a woman	24:1-7	12:13
The women run to tell the disciples	24:9-10	12:14
When the disciples are told they disbelieve the women	24:11	12:15
Jesus tells his disciples to tell Peter and the others that he has risen. Peter tells the disciple to tell James and the others that he has been released	Mark 16:7	12:17

#### APPLICATION

Luke's aim is to show that the people who live for a resurrected Jesus can never be beaten. The religious leaders kill the author

of life, and political leaders seek to destroy the churches leaders. But neither religion nor political power can halt the gospel train (4:26-28).

### 3. LIFE & DEATH SIDE BY SIDE (12:18-24)

When a political system tries to stop the gospel train, it will nearly always be marked by one thing 'death'. This is what we

see here, as Herod first kills James (12:2), and then his own soldiers (12:18-19).

This is followed by Herod's blasphemy as he accepts and welcomes the people's praise and worship (12:19-20). The first angel came to set Peter free, the second to bring judgement (12:21-23). The political system sought to destroy the work of God, but all it accomplished was to advance its cause (12:24).

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

**Ice Breaker:** Set a number of endurance tests (e.g. planking, squats, etc) to help set a focus on giving up

**Intro Q:** Can you give an example where you've been given a hard time for believing in Jesus? Did it make you want to give up? (If your group is struggling, think of some examples when they may be)

### GET OFF

#### 1. READ ACTS 12:1-6.

*What are the similarities between the story in Acts and what is happening in North Korea and Russia?*

##### North Korea

All citizens of North Korea live under constant scrutiny and surveillance. Groups of 15-30 families living close to each other (called inminban groups) are headed by a female official who must look out for suspicious activities and makes sure there are no forbidden items in the homes, e.g. tuneable radio sets, Western DVDs, Bibles, so there are random midnight searches of homes. Twice a week people must attend lectures about the greatness of the Kim family, who have led the state in turn since 1946 and are venerated almost as if they were gods. Every Saturday, people must attend public criticism sessions to criticise themselves and one other for their failings in the previous week.

##### Russia

Christians in Russia continue to be the main targets of the 2016 Religion Law, often called the "Yarovaya Law" in Russia, after the person who first proposed it in the Duma. The law is ostensibly an anti-terrorist law but most of the cases are accusations of illegal missionary activity, of holding activities without the proper permissions, or of failing to put up a sign displaying the full name of their organisation. The Christian community is asking for amendments to the law, which is so vague it is virtually impossible to avoid being accused. Out of the first 280 cases filed against Christian believers under the 2016 Religion Law, only about 10% were won by the Christians. The other 90 lost their cases and were fined.

#### 2. TRY YOUR BEST TO PUT YOURSELVES INTO THE SHOES OF THE CHRISTIANS IN JERUSALEM, NORTH KOREA OR RUSSIA.

*On a scale of 1 to 10, would you get off or stay on board the Gospel Train - 1 being totally getting off, 10 being staying on?*

*What different factors would make you decide?*

### STAY ON - THE RESURRECTION LIFE

#### 3. WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN JESU'S RESURRECTION AND PETER'S MIRACULOUS RELEASE?

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN JESUS' RESURRECTION & PETER'S RELEASE	LUKE	ACTS
	24:1-7	12:13
	24:9-10	12:14
	24:11	12:15
	Mk 16:7	12:17

#### 4. HOW SHOULD JESUS' RESURRECTION AND PETER'S RELEASE HELP YOU STAY ON THE GOSPEL TRAIN?

### STAY ON - GOD SMASHES HIS POLITICAL ENEMIES

#### 5. READ ACTS 12:19B-24. HOW DO WE SEE GOD BEING MORE POWERFUL THAN HIS POLITICAL ENEMIES?

*Herod is struck down and eaten by worms, the Gospel keeps spreading*

#### 6. HOW DOES THIS ENCOURAGE YOU TO NOT GIVE UP AND GET OFF THE GOSPEL TRAIN

**WHEN IT DOES GET HARDER TO LIVE AS A CHRISTIAN, WHETHER THAT'S AT SCHOOL, HOME OR IN THE FUTURE?**

**WHAT TO PRAY FOR**

- Praise God that Jesus' resurrection means we're safe and secure in him
- Praise God that nothing will stop the Gospel from spreading
- Pray that God would strengthen us to not give up when we experience hard time living for him
- Sorry for the times when we've wanted to or have given up

**WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOSPEL**

The Gospel is resurrection life

**WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOAL**

Resurrection life guarantees our Gospel future

**WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GATHERING**

God's people are indestructible



# SESSION 4

## THE WOLF GETS ON THE TRAIN

### ACTS 9

#### THE LINK

One of the ways Luke structures Acts is to be a defence of Paul's ministry to convince us that he's a true apostle. One of the ways he does this is to show that everything God does through Peter, he also does through Paul. The table below shows just how skilfully Luke does this.

PETER		PAUL
3:2-8	Healing of a lame man	14:8-10
5:15	Miracles at a distance	19:12
5:16	Exorcising of demons	16:18
8:18	Confronted a sorcerer	13:6-11
9:36-40	Raises the dead	20:9-12
10:9-10	Heavenly vision	16:9
5:19, 12:7	Miraculous release from jail	16:25
2:27	Preaches to Jews (same text Ps 16:10)	13:35

Today we move onto the life and ministry of the great Apostle Paul.

#### THE TRUTH - THE SEAT BELT TEST

- God changes Saul from an angry wolf to a caring shepherd
- If the gospel train is to reach its destination, we must follow Paul's example

#### THE MESSAGE - THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

##### THE ANGRY WOLF

We will never know for sure whether the young apostle Paul saw Jesus or heard his teaching. What we do know about Paul is that he sat under the teaching of Gamaliel, one of Israel's greatest teachers (Acts 5:34, 22:3). This led to Saul becoming one of the finest Pharisees in the whole of Jerusalem (Phil 3:4-6). His career path was mapped out as he was heading for the Jewish

Supreme Court the Sanhedrin.

We need to use our imagination and picture this young zealous Pharisee, hungry to live for God. His leaders had got rid of the young Galilean preacher who claimed to be the Messiah. As far as Saul is concerned, Jesus was a blasphemer and the cross a deserved punishment. His one passion is to stop this gospel train as quick as possible. When Saul, a Benjamite (Phil 3:5), describes himself in Galatians 1:13,23, the depiction of Benjamin as a 'wild, ferocious wolf' comes to mind (Gen 49:27).

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*His heart was full of hatred and his mind was poisoned with prejudice. J Stott*

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##### SAUL'S CHARACTER HAS TWO SIDES

- a. An immensely bright Pharisee passionate about defending God's honour
- b. A ferocious wolf desperate to stop the gospel train

##### 1. THE ANGRY WOLF ATTACKS THE SHEEP

The tipping point for Saul comes when he hears Stephen's message. As Saul listens, he hears Stephen declare that...

- a. ...in rejecting Jesus, Israel's leaders reveal that they are stiff-necked (7:51)
- b. ...in rejecting Jesus, Israel's leaders are the same as those who rejected the Old Testament prophets (7:51b-52)
- c. ...in rejecting Jesus, they have disobeyed their whole law (7:53)

On hearing this, Saul joyfully holds the coats of those who throw the stones (7:58, 22:20). This is the CV of the great Saul, who has dedicated his life to stopping the gospel train (8:1).

##### The Train Stopper

Here we have Saul standing on the tracks in front of the gospel train, thinking he can prevent it from reaching its destination. If we had belonged to the baby church, maybe we would have been tempted to think that a derailment was on the cards.

##### 2. THE ANGRY WOLF BECOMES A CARING SHEPHERD

The next city on Saul's extermination list is Damascus. In his hand is permission from the High Priests to arrest as many Christians as possible (Acts 9:1-2).

### THE VOICE (9:1-3)

The first thing Saul encounters is a light from heaven (9:3), brighter than the noonday sun (22:13). The King who gave the command to his people (Acts 1:8), is about to remove the wolf from the track.

#### APPLICATION

The voice that spoke creation into being, raised the dead, and gave the command of Acts 1:8 is speaking. This is who Saul is taking on, and whose mission he is trying to stop.

### THE VICTIM (9:4-5)

The first words Jesus speaks will encourage every Christian who faces opposition. Those who seek to stop the gospel train are enemies of God, for when you hound and hurt His people, you are hounding and hurting Him (9:4).

#### APPLICATION

In our secular culture, opposition to the gospel is slowly changing from a position of apathy to one of antagonism and anger. Therefore, our young people need to know that they are the apple of Christ's eye.

### THE VICTOR (9:6-19)

The story begins with Saul looking like the powerful one, and the church vulnerable and weak, but once the Messiah speaks the tables are turned. It's the enemy of God who's on his knees before his conqueror (9:4). No longer is he barking out threats, but instead obediently listening to the King. Saul the great persecutor of God's people is now unable to do anything else but obey the voice of the true Messiah (9:6-9).

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*He who had expected to enter Damascus in the fullness of pride and prowess, as a self-confident opponent of Christ, was actually led into it, humbled and blinded, a captive of the very Christ he had opposed. J Stott*

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*God ties the jaws of the greedy wolf just as he is ready to enter the sheepfold. Calvin*

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With Saul humbled, and the jaws of the wolf securely closed, the King is now ready to change Saul into a caring shepherd. The means of the miracle is a humble servant of God named Ananias. When faced with the prospect of meeting Saul, Ananias is understandably fearful (9:13-14), yet he obeys the command to 'go' (9:15-17).

#### APPLICATION

Here lies a whole host of vital truths concerning the God we worship. He is the King, and nothing and no one can prevent the

gospel train getting to the ends of the earth. It would be worth thinking about the challenges that our young people face in their lives, and all the things that stand on the track. If the Son of God can move and change Saul, then he can change anyone. This should give our young people immense confidence (9:18-19).

### 3. THE CARING SHEPHERD SEEKING SHEEP

We finish with the King giving Paul his mission.

- He is God's chosen instrument (9:15)
- His job is to take the 'name' to Jew, Gentile and Kings (9:15)
- In the process of achieving God's goal he will suffer (9:16)

### FROM NOW PAUL HAS TWO MAJOR CONCERNS

- a. As a shepherd of God's people, he will lead, guard and protect the sheep by teaching them God's Word. His attitude towards them is one of humble service and deep devotion.
- b. Secondly, we will see Paul constantly seeking to win more and more sheep. We see this immediately after Saul is converted as we view him going straight to the synagogue to preach and prove that Jesus is the Son of God (9:20), and God's risen King (9:22). As soon as he does this he is persecuted, thus fulfilling 9:23.

# THE GOSPEL TRAIN'S JOURNEY PLANNER

## ACTS 13

### THE LINK

The wolf who wanted to stop the gospel train is now aboard it

### THE TRUTH - THE SEAT BELT TEST

- The Apostle Paul shows how the gospel train's journey started in Genesis not Acts

### THE MESSAGE - THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

#### INTRODUCTION

The first destination that the gospel train arrives at is Antioch. As soon as Paul arrives, he heads straight for Antioch's synagogue (13:14) and, knowing the tradition, Paul has his sermon notes ready (13:15).

#### 1. GOD PLANS THE JOURNEY

The people in the congregation clearly know their Bibles (13:43). In the light of that, Paul wants to convince them that the gospel train's journey began at Genesis.

TEXT	THE OLD TESTAMENT GOSPEL ROUTE PLANNER
13:17	God chose their ancestors
13:17	God made them prosper
13:17	God lead them out of Egypt
13:18	God was patient with them in the desert
13:18	God defeated their enemies
13:20	God gave them their leaders
13:21-22	God gave then took away King Saul
13:22	God raised up King David

So far, all those present in the Synagogue are agreeing with everything Paul has said. But why the long history lesson? Surely everyone present already knows Israel's journey planner? Why tell them what they already know?

#### 2. THE JOURNEY THAT LEADS TO A CROSS AND CROWN

The reason Paul shows them the route the gospel train took through the Old Testament was to show that its destination was always heading towards Jesus. Here is Paul's first Christian sermon, and the message he preaches is the same as Peter in the early chapters of Acts.

HIS IDENTITY	HIS CROSS & RESURRECTION	HIS AUTHORITY	HIS COMMAND
13:24-25 Israel's promised Saviour	13:28 Innocent before His accusers	13:26-27 God's last great prophet pointed to him	13:38-41 Come to Christ to gain forgiveness and justification
	13:29 His cross fulfilled perfectly all the prophets said	13:28 Innocent	13:38-41 Don't become a scoffer
	13:30 God raised Him	13:32 His Good News was what the prophets foretold	
	13:31 People saw him	13:36-37 His resurrection makes him greater than King David	
13:34,37 God raised him			
	13:38-39 His death and resurrection bring forgiveness and justification		

#### 3. THE JOURNEY THAT LEADS TO A DECISION

All the way through Acts Paul brings people to a decision. His aim is never merely to inform people with truth or to stretch their minds with clever intellectual arguments; his passion is to get people aboard the gospel train. His sermon has a clear sting in the tail, as he finishes with a verse from the Old Testament that contains a sharp warning.



## ACTS 13:41 = HABAKKUK 1:5

- Don't be a scoffer; instead, accept God's journey was always leading to Jesus. It may seem too good to be true, but history declares it to be so.
- The initial response from the people is positive, as they drift out of the Antioch synagogue (13:42-43). A week passes and the gospel train again steams into the synagogue, though this time the reception is altogether different.

## 4. A JOURNEY THAT LEADS TO A CHURCH

The first sermon has had a huge effect, as the whole town comes to hear Paul (13:44). What we see here in Antioch is a model of what will happen to Paul in the rest of Acts.

### A CHURCH IS PLANTED

The first result of the gospel train arriving at Antioch is a church being born. The seed that Paul planted the previous week (13:44), bears fruit. The pattern Paul follows is to always go to the Jews first. Sadly, they nearly always reject him, which leaves the door open for the Gentiles. This small, mainly Gentile church quickly grows under Paul's leadership and teaching (13:48-49).

## A CHURCH IS PERSECUTED

As with Peter so with Paul, the first people to attack him are the Jews (13:44-45). This jealousy does not merely remain in hearts, but is seen in the 'God-fearing women of high standing' (13:50). The persecution results in the gospel train having to leave Antioch (13:50-51), but the new followers are left at the station, full of the Holy Spirit and joy (13:52). As Paul leaves and looks back to the station, he sees a small band of believers waving him off, as the church continues to grow (13:49).

# SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

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**Ice Breaker:** Split the group into two teams. Play Old Testament 'Who Am I' using OT characters from Acts 13, e.g. Abraham, Moses, David. Give out clues. If they guess after the first clue, they get 10 points, after the second clue - 8 points; third - 6 points; fourth - 4 points; fifth - 2 points. Repeat with each character, ending with Jesus.

### 1. WITHIN YOUR GROUP WORK OUT WHO HAS BEEN ON THE LONGEST JOURNEY.

*Would you rather have spent the entire journey awake, or asleep? Why? (Explain that by being awake you see the detail, which is what happens when we look back at the OT through Acts 13)*

### 2. FOLLOW THE OLD TESTAMENT TRAIN JOURNEY THAT PAUL TAKES YOU ON.

Supply timeline pictures to stick up:

#### Station 1 - 13:17

Read Genesis 12:1-3

What does God do? (He makes promises)

#### Station 2 - 13:17

Read Exodus 14:29-31

What does God do? He saves his people

#### Station 3 - 13:18

Read Numbers 21:4-9

What do the people do? What does God do (He judges yet provides a way of rescue)

#### Station 4 - 13:18

Read Judges 3:7-11

What do the people do? What does God do (He judges yet provides a way of rescue)

#### Station 5

Read 2 Samuel 7:10-13

What does God do? He promises a forever King in David's family

#### Station 6 - 13:23

How do these destinations take us to Jesus?

Fill in the table below which will help you answer the question.

**3. READ 13:26-39**

JESUS' IDENTITY	JESUS' CROSS & RESUR-RECTION	JESUS' AUTHORITY	JESUS' COMMANDS

**4. WHAT DECISION DOES PAUL LEAVE WITH THE JEWS HE IS PREACHING TO?**

Read 13:40-41

**5. WHAT IS THEIR RESPONSE TO HIS CHALLENGE?**

Read 13:42-48

**6. WHAT DID PAUL AND BARNABAS LEAVE**

**BEHIND?**

Read 13:49-52

**7. FROM ACTS 13, WHAT REASONS DO WE HAVE TO REJOICE EVEN WHEN PEOPLE REJECT THE GOSPEL AND TREAT US BADLY?**

God is faithful, keeps his promises, provides a Saviour, frees us from our sin, etc. And some will believe, some want to talk further, a church is planted)

**WHAT TO PRAY**

- Praise God that he keeps his promises and we can trust him
- Praise God that he is building his church
- Ask God that he would give us confidence as we seek to

build his church

**WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOSPEL**

The whole of the Bible points to Jesus' death and resurrection

**WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOAL**

To bring people to a decision to follow Jesus

**WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GATHERING**

Abraham, Moses and King David all belonged to God's people

# SESSION 5

## THE GOSPEL TRAIN ENTERS CONFIDENT CORINTH

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### ACTS 18

#### THE LINK

When the gospel train left Jerusalem, it had three thousand Spirit-filled passengers ready to tell the world about Jesus (Acts 2:40-41). Since the train left, different people have done all they can to prevent its progress. The religious leaders tried to silence Peter and John by threats, and Herod through brutally murdering one of the churches' leaders. In both cases instead of stopping the train, the persecution merely helped it along the way (2:47, 4:31).

The greatest individual seeking to stop the gospel train was Saul. This young man had three things in his favour, a brilliant intellect, an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Old Testament and authority to exterminate the followers of Jesus (9:1-2). But his meeting with the risen Jesus changed everything. Instead of breathing out murderous threats like a vicious wolf (9:1), he is now shepherding the very people he tried to exterminate (20:36-38).

As the train leaves the station we now have Paul on board, ready for all that lies ahead. At Antioch, Paul showed us the journey of God's people through the Old Testament. The farther the train advanced, the nearer it got to the coming of Jesus, the people's Messiah (13:23).

Today, the train arrives at a new station, Corinth. Our man Paul is ready to step off the train and take God's good news to this great city.

#### THE TRUTH - THE SEAT BELT TEST

- On the gospel train there are no superheroes, only dependent disciples

#### THE MESSAGE - THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

##### 1. FEAR

To fully understand this story, we have to get a grasp of the kind of city Corinth was. Below are the four things Corinth was famous for:

#### CONFIDENT CORINTH

The people of Corinth bristled with confidence, as their city stood at the top of the cultural tree.

#### PROUD OF THEIR INTELLECT

What is clear from Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, is that intellectual pride dominated their culture.

#### PROUD OF THEIR CITY

The city's intellectual arrogance was followed by pride in their city. Every two years it held the Olympics of their day, the prestigious Isthmian games. Their city had recently been beautifully re-built by Caesar in 46BC, leaving it the envy of many. As a political city it was the capitol of Achaia, surpassing the great city of Athens. It also had two ports, making it brilliant for trade. It stood like a proud peacock, culturally rich and extremely wealthy.

#### PROUD OF THEIR SENSUALITY

The third thing that set Corinth apart was its passion for sensuality. At the summit of the city was the temple of Venus, the goddess of love, which stood 2000 feet above sea level. From the temple each night came a thousand female slaves who worked as prostitutes. All around the world, Corinth was famous for its goddess and all she offered.

#### APPLICATION

The connection and similarity to modern day Britain is striking. Therefore, how Paul felt as he entered Confident Corinth is vital. What was it that gave him confidence? What was it that kept him going?

#### IS PAUL A SUPERHERO?

If we are going to follow Paul as a great example then he has to be both accessible and attainable. Paul is a hero, but he's not a superhero; instead he's just like you, me and the young people we serve.

#### Superheroes have power

The first thing that marks out superheroes is their supernatural power.

#### Superheroes depend on no one

Secondly, they are dependent upon no one. Their power means they are reliant upon no one but themselves.

#### Superheroes nearly always win

Thirdly, superheroes always win. The battle may be fierce, and the scars deep, but they always seem to triumph.

If we treat Paul like a superhero then he will be neither accessible nor attainable. Instead, when we teach Acts, we must show to our young people that:

- The only power Paul has is from Christ
- His strength comes from his dependence upon God
- Victory is guaranteed because it's God's mission not his

### A Message that challenges self-confidence

As Paul approaches Corinth he quickly enters the train toilet. As he looks in the mirror what he sees is a face full of weakness, fear and trembling (1 Cor 2:3). He knows that when he enters Corinth, the message he brings will collide with the confidence Corinth exudes. Asking proud people to repent will lead to either persecution or praise.

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Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value systems. *John Stott*

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### A Message that challenges their corruption

The Corinthian culture was based upon a self-made morality. If a Corinthian is to enter God's Kingdom then their morality needs repenting of (1 Cor 6:9-11).

### APPLICATION

The picture of a trembling Paul is a perfect one to bring before our young people, for they are living in a culture so similar to Corinth. To have a hero who trembles with fear is an encouraging picture. So what was it about the gospel that got Paul off the train?

## 2. FAITH

The one central truth that gives Paul confidence is the message. If we look at the graph below we see clearly how Paul understood the reality of what Stott says: "Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems."

1 COR	GOSPEL WISDOM	CORINTHIAN WISDOM
1:18	Wisdom and power to the saved	Foolishness to perishing
1:19		God destroys and frustrates man's wisdom
1:20		God makes the worlds wisdom look foolish
1:21	God saves people through the foolish message of the cross	
1:22		Jews demand signs Greeks (Corinthians) demand wisdom
1:23	Christ crucified	Stumbling block to Jews Foolishness to Gentiles (Corinthians)
1:24	Christ is the power and wisdom of God	
1:25	God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom	
1:25	God's weakness is stronger than man's strength	
1:27	God chooses the foolish to shame the wise	
1:27	God chooses the weak to shame the strong	
1:28	Lowly and despised to nullify the things that are	
1:29	<b>The Reason</b> So that no one boasts	<b>The Reason</b> So that no one boasts

The challenge is simple: will Paul put his confidence in what seems utterly foolish to the world? Will he preach the cross of Christ as the only hope for a lost world? Will he be a gospel fool? The Dante quote makes perfect sense here:

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The wisest person in the city is 'He whom the fools hate'. *Dante*

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The great apostle knows that as soon as he opens his mouth people will think him a fool. His confidence therefore must be in something outside of himself. As Paul steps off the train his confidence is in the Spirit of God and the message of the cross, and not his own intellect, preaching skills, or wisdom. The last thing Paul has is self-confidence.

### APPLICATION

This has to be the message we long for our young people to embrace. We follow no superhero, but instead a man who trusts completely in the power of his message, and the Spirit who gave it to him. He does not rely upon his gifts, intellect or personality, which is a great model to our young people.

### 3. FRUIT

#### GOD PROVIDES A TEAM – 18:1-3

The first thing God provides for Paul is a team of people who love both God and tent-making (18:1-3). Soon after meeting them God sends two of Paul's closest gospel workers, Silas and Timothy, to him. All the way through the New Testament we always see Paul working in teams. The great apostle knows that a group of fools is stronger than one who is on his own.

#### APPLICATION

- You need God's people and they need you if Acts 1:8 is to be accomplished
- If you don't have any Christian friends at school, then pray God provides some
- Like Paul we need God's people to help, support, and even to protect us when we face opposition (18:6, 12)

#### GOD PROVIDES FRUIT – 18:5-8

The first place Paul seeks to persuade people to follow Christ is in a synagogue (18:4-5). Sadly, the Jews reject God's message, so Paul goes next-door. The warning Paul gives to the Jews is chilling; yet sadly appropriate (18:6).

The synagogue's next-door neighbours receive the good news. The first people to put their trust in Christ are a family, followed by many Corinthians (18:8). Just as in Antioch, so here, persecution and praise go hand in hand.

#### GOD PROVIDES A COMMAND – 18:9-11

Here God commands Paul to stay in Corinth (18:9-11). Wonderfully there is far more here than first meets the eye, as the meaning for 'many people' actually means 'nations'. The message may seem foolish to some, but for many it becomes the very wisdom of God. When Paul left the train, he was full of fear. Yet his obedience leads to fruit, and God lets him know more is on its way (18:10).

#### APPLICATION

The fact that the gospel produces fruit MUST be a message our young people hear loud and clear. Many of them will find it hard at school, therefore the encouragement that God's Gospel produces fruit is essential. Gospel fools see gospel fruit.

#### GOD PROVIDES A LAW – 18:12-17

The final story seems slightly weird and may make you wonder why Luke includes it. The best way to explain it is through the words of John Stott:

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**Gallio's refusal to take seriously the Jewish case against Paul or adjudicate was immensely important for the future of the gospel. In effect, he passed a favourable edict on the Christian faith and thus established a significant precedent. The gospel could not now be charged with illegality, for its freedom as a religio licita had been secured as the imperial policy. Luke's concluding comment is logical: Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time (18), not now because of his vision of Jesus, but because of the judicial decisions of Gallio. Jesus would keep his promise to protect him; the chief means of his protection would be Roman law.**

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# SESSION 6

## THE GOSPEL TRAIN ENTERS EVIL EPHESUS

### ACTS 19

#### THE LINK

When the gospel train entered Corinth, the major thing that concerned Paul was their confidence. The city of Corinth was confident of its achievements, intellect and morality. It was this confidence which led the great apostle to both fear and tremble (1 Cor 2:3).

This week the gospel train is entering Ephesus, a different city altogether. Like Corinth, the city is full of lost people, therefore ripe for church planting. Last week the temple of Venus dominated the skyline, today the temple of Artemis, the largest building in the Greek world, does. This breath-taking building was made of solid marble and boasted 127 columns, soon to become one of the Seven Wonders of the World. At the centre of the temple was the goddess Diana, the many-breasted cult figure.

*She was thought of as both a chaste virgin and yet at the same time the mother of all. In both cases she was thought to be the goddess of protection D Gooding*

It cannot be overstated just how powerful a figure she was, as today's story will reveal.

Paul jumps off the gospel train to view the awesome temple and the worshippers of Diana running to her shrine. What will he do? What is Paul's strategy? Let's find out.

#### THE TRUTH - THE SEAT BELT TEST

- We must be flexible in our method but not our message
- The name of Jesus is 'all powerful'
- Nothing and no one can stop the gospel train

#### THE MESSAGE - THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

##### 1. ONE NAME - 19:1-7

The first story Luke presents us with is a little strange, as Paul seems to enter a time warp. The people he meets are still living in the days of John the Baptist where the promise of the Messiah and Holy Spirit was promised but never realised (19:1-4). So what will Paul do? The answer is simple, he does the same as what Peter did.

TXT	PETER	TXT	PAUL
2:21	He commands them to call on the name of the Lord	19:4	He calls them to trust in Jesus as the Messiah
2:28	He commands them to repent and trust in 'the name' of Christ for their forgiveness	19:5	He baptises them 'in the name of the Lord Jesus'
2:38	If they obey then the Spirit fills them		When Jesus is accepted as Messiah they are then filled with the Spirit

Now why is 'the name of the Lord Jesus' so vital to being baptised? Two reasons:

- Baptism into the 'name' of Jesus is a declaration of who you are. In the New Testament the public way someone declares themselves a follower of Jesus is to be baptised.
- Secondly, baptism into 'the name' of Jesus is a declaration as to who you now belong to. Baptism is a public declaration that you belong to Jesus. No longer are you free to make your own decisions, for Jesus is your master. As we journey through Acts 19 we shall see how important this is.

##### 2. ONE MESSAGE - 19:8-10

How Paul goes about reaching Ephesus is a brilliant example of how our young people should reach their school, and future life at university or the workplace.

##### DON'T COMPROMISE 19:8-9A

The first thing Paul teaches us is never change or compromise the message, no matter what pressure is put upon you. How Paul packages the message and even himself will change (1 Cor 9:21-23), but the message never does. The Jews will always hate Paul for what he has to say, but it is God's gospel and therefore unnegotiable.

Which station Paul stops at and what kind of people he's speaking to dictates what clothes he wears and how he presents the message.

## APPLICATION

Here Paul is our great teacher. What will it mean for our young people to become all things so as to save some? What will that look like at school, sports club, friendships, family life?

## BE CONTEMPORARY 19:9A-10

When Paul wants to meet and speak to Jews he goes to the synagogue, but to win Gentiles he has to be a little more creative... In this case Paul finds a lecture hall, hires it out and plonks himself there for two years:

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*Paul exchanges his leather work for lecture work. John Stott*

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He makes sure that the time he lectures is when most people are available, i.e. during their siesta. The result of Paul's creative evangelism is that the whole province of Asia hears God's message (19:10).

## APPLICATION

This principle is something we must model and train our young people to follow. The media works its socks off finding creative ways of getting its message across, so must we. After facing rejection in the synagogue, he simply brushes himself down and gets on with the work. He looks for the best and most contemporary place to share God's good news. We must teach our young people how to follow Paul's example.

## 3. ONE POWER – 19:11-22

The next two stories are making one point, that God's power and name are supreme.

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*Ephesus was famous even in the ancient world for every form of magic and occult practice; and that is saying something, when the whole world was awash with it. Gooding*

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### STORY ONE – GOD'S POWER – 19:11-12

The mistake we can make here is to concentrate on Paul or the miracles themselves. Instead the emphasis is that 'God did them'. As we read this short story, we are to see that even in Acts these miracles are classed as 'extraordinary'. The purpose of the story is to show us that the gospel is a work of God and no magic show.

### STORY TWO – GOD'S NAME – 19:13-22

The second story is teaching the same as the first, just more dramatically. The key theme throughout is 'the name of Jesus' which comes out three times (19:13,17).

The seven sons are attracted to the power Paul has, so they try an exorcism (19:13-14). Instead of seeing the demons flee they receive a severe beating from them (19:15-16). As with the last story the easy thing is to be attracted to the wrong thing.

The first reason why the 'seven sons of Sceva' fail, is they have no relationship with the one who bears the 'powerful name'. Merely speaking the name of Jesus is not enough, if you don't belong to him:

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*They were no more interested in the moral character of God than a modern man is concerned about the moral character of the electricity he plugs into. Indeed, it was not God as a person that they were interested in; it was simply his name, used as a spell or incarnation. Gooding*

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To treat the precious all-powerful 'name of Jesus' in this way brings disaster and judgement.

The second crucial lesson is to focus on the people's response. You would expect people to be fearful of the demon-possessed man, but instead we find something very different. What the people fear is the 'name of the Lord Jesus'. The sons have treated 'the name of Jesus' with contempt, which has led to their beating. The response of the people is to fear the Jesus (19:17).

This fear leads to an outpouring of visible repentance, as all the people burn their occult memorabilia rather than getting on the wrong side of Jesus (19:17-20).

## APPLICATION

This gives us two major applications:

- When young people mess with the occult, they are playing with something more powerful than they could ever imagine.
- Whatever you do, don't miss use the name of Jesus. He is God Almighty, so never think of him as a play thing to advance your agenda.

## 4. ONE RESULT – 19:23-41

As with the last story, 'fear' is what seems to dominate this last story. The great apostle has been preaching in Ephesus for the last two years, and the fruit of his ministry is beginning to blossom (19:10,20). The influence is not only felt in the synagogues (19:8), lecture halls (19:9) and houses (19:16), but the market – the business world. The preaching of Paul is causing all sorts of problems (19:23).

### HIS MESSAGE – 19:26

Paul's message is simple: "You can't make gods with human hands; they are idols, so don't worship them". It's a simple and straightforward message, but its impact is massive.

### THE PROBLEM OF A BRUISED BUSINESS – 19:23-34

The preaching of Paul has led to people not buying idols which causes a major recession.

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*It was inevitable that sooner or later the kingly authority of Jesus would challenge Diana's evil sway. John Stott*

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Their response to Paul's preaching is anger and a passion to halt its influence.

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*At root its cause was neither doctrinal, nor ethical, but economic. John Stott*

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This leads to a riot, with people fearing that Diana would lose her divine power (19:27).

So, what will happen now? We had an angry wolf standing in the way of the gospel train, and some intellectual Corinthians. Now the obstacle seems to be a silver smith, angry at the loss of trade.

The answer strangely comes from the same place as last week, the Roman Empire. Clearly God raises up a Roman official to smooth over the problem, paving the way for the gospel train to continue its unstoppable journey (19:35-41).

So, Paul jumps back on the gospel train after two successful years in Ephesus (20:1). He's baptised confused believers (19:1-7), preached in both synagogue and lecture hall, and seen conversion in all of them (19:6,17,20). Another church is planted, so Paul presses on to the next station.

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

### ICE BREAKER / ACTIONARY

Split into two teams. Have a list of 'good news', e.g. free chocolate, birthday party, etc. They roll a dice: odd number - act, even number - draw.

Intro Q: Come up with a way you could share God's good news, the Gospel, on your social media account

### READ ACTS 19:8-10

Here we see Paul's strategy for planting a church.

#### 1. WHERE DOES PAUL GO TO FIRST AND WHY?

**Read Acts 19:8 and Romans 1:14-16**

Paul is indebted to all.

But when Paul enters any new town or city, the gospel must always go first to the Jews.

#### 2. WHAT WORDS ARE USED TO DESCRIBE HOW PAUL SPEAKS AND SHARES THE GOSPEL?

**READ 19:8**

The words used to describe Paul are 'spoke boldly', 'argued persuasively'.

#### 3. WHEN REJECTED IN THE SYNAGOGUE WHAT DOES PAUL DO?

**Read 19:9-10.**

#### 4. HOW CAN YOU FOLLOW PAUL'S EXAMPLE IN FINDING CONTEMPORARY PLACES FOR YOUR FRIENDS TO HEAR ABOUT JESUS?

### READ ACTS 19:11-20

#### 1. WHAT POWER DOES GOD SHOW THROUGH PAUL (V11-12)

#### 2. HOW IS JESUS' NAME MISUSED IN ACTS 19:13-16, AND WHAT HAPPENS?

#### 3. HOW DO PEOPLE RESPOND TO THE POWER IN JESUS' NAME? (V. 17-20)

#### 4. IF DOZENS OF PEOPLE IN YOUR SCHOOL BECAME CHRISTIANS WHAT EFFECT MIGHT THAT HAVE UPON YOUR SCHOOL?

*How might it change your friends?*

*How might it change the atmosphere in the class?*

*How might it change attitudes towards teachers and work?*

*What things might they and you want to burn?*

#### WHAT TO PRAY FOR

- Praise God that the name of Jesus is more powerful than evil
- Say sorry for the times we have misused Jesus' name
- Write down the names of 3 people you know that you'd love God to move in

#### WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOSPEL

Never change it

#### WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOAL

Evil is real, but the Gospel is more powerful

#### WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GATHERING

God's people teach God's word and another church is planted

# SESSION 7

## PAUL MEETS THE JERUSALEM MOB

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### ACTS 21-23

#### THE LINK

One major issue we may increasingly face when discipling young people is a crisis of confidence. Our culture seems to constantly challenge the foundations of their faith, which leaves them feeling vulnerable. As youth leaders we must prepare them for such a challenge. So far, we have seen the gospel train face significant obstacles.

- Religious power in Acts 1-4
- Political powers in Acts 12
- A vicious wolf in Acts 9
- Angry Jews in Antioch in Acts 13
- Confident Corinthians in Acts 18
- Evil Ephesian businessmen in Acts 19

Today when Christians face opposition they often respond in two ways. They retreat into Christian ghettos, rarely venturing out into the evil world, or they become aggressive, marked more by what they are against than by the good news God wants them to share. Today, Paul shows us how we hold out the gospel of grace with a Christ-filled confidence.

#### THE TRUTH – THE SEAT BELT TEST

#### THE MESSAGE – THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

##### 1. THE MEMORIES

As the gospel train pulls into Jerusalem so many memories would have raced through Paul's mind and imagination.

##### DAVID

This was the place King David established God's rule, building the great temple.

##### JESUS

This is the place where God's eternal King, the Messiah, was crucified.

##### PAUL

This was the place where Paul dreamed and longed to be; where the Jewish elite lived at the High Priest's Council.

- So how will Jerusalem respond to the message of the gospel? Will it be the same as what Jesus and Peter received, or will it be different?

##### 2. THE MOB

As we enter the story, we must remind ourselves of how much the Jews hate Paul and the gospel he brings. First, they want to get rid of him (21:27-36), but when that fails, they desire his death (22:22-23). Their desire becomes so strong that they promise to fast until he's dead (23:12-22). Here we have the biggest obstacle to Acts 1:8 being achieved so far.

#### THE LYNCH MOB – 21:27-22:29

We have already observed that both Luke and Acts follow a journey theme. Just as nothing will stop Jesus going to the cross and then the Father's right hand, so nothing will stop the gospel getting to the ends of the earth. As we follow the journey, it becomes clear that Paul getting to Rome, and the gospel getting to the ends of the earth, are the same thing. Just as nothing will stop Paul getting to Rome, so nothing will stop the gospel getting to the ends of the earth.

As Luke weaves these themes together, he also shows how the life of Jesus and Paul merge together.

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It would capture the essential geographical outlook of Luke to entitle the Gospel of Luke "From Galilee to Jerusalem" and the book of Acts "From Jerusalem to Rome", for Jerusalem was the goal of Jesus' ministry, while Rome was the goal of Paul's. Although the journeys of Jesus and Paul differed from one another in their ultimate direction and destination, they also resembled a resolute determination, an arrest, a series of trials in Jewish and Roman courts and even a death and resurrection. For Paul's descent into the darkness and danger of the storm was a kind of grave, while the rescue from shipwreck and later springtime voyage to Rome were a kind of resurrection. Luke's 'highest apology for Paul was to portray him as 'so conformed to the life of the Lord that even his sufferings and deliverance parallel'. *John Stott*

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	JESUS IN LUKE	PAUL IN ACTS
Arrested without cause	22:52-53	21:33
Rejected by the Jews	23:23	21:27, 30-31, 35
Imprisoned unjustly	23:25	21:34
Hated by the crowds	23:18-23	21:35-35
Crowds scream for his death	23:18-23	21:36

- As we listen to the violent crowd baying for Paul's blood, Luke wants us to hear the echo from his previous book. Thankfully the lynch mob is denied as Roman authorities save Paul's life (Acts 21:31-33,35-36).
- The great apostle bravely defends his corner, by telling the story of his conversion. This may seem strange, but here are the reasons why:

### PAUL'S TESTIMONY

- Paul shows them that he's a true Jew - 21:39, 22:3
- Like them Paul is zealous for God - 22:3
- Like them he once hated 'the Way' Christianity - 22:4-5
- The person God sent to give sight was a Law loving Jew 22:12
- The one who spoke through Ananias was the God of Israel- 22:14
- His mission, to go to the Gentiles, was given to him by the God of Israel- 22:21

Now they have a decision to make. Is Paul's message and mission from God? Their response is one of increased hatred and opposition (22:22-23). Like his saviour the apostle has moved from a prison cell to a courtroom (21:23, 30). Their aim has been to throw him off the gospel train, but failed.

### THE RELIGIOUS MOB - 22:30-23:35

From the lynch mob we now move to the Religious Mob. Their passion matches the first group, to stop the gospel train. As with the last episode we are supposed to hear echoes ringing back thirty years.

	JESUS IN LUKE	PAUL IN ACTS
Handed over to the chief priests	22:66	22:30
Struck in the face	John 18:22	23:2
Declared innocent	23:4,13-15,22	23:25-30

The environment Paul enters is full of tension and hatred, which takes us back to the trial of Jesus. His message is the same as before "I represent the God of the covenant" (23:1). As soon as he speaks the High Priest responds aggressively (23:2,10).

If there was any doubt in Paul's mind as to whether or not he would finally get to Rome, that's answered (23:11). The Lord Jesus draws near to Paul and reminds him of His promise: "Yes Paul, the whole world seems to hate you, but nothing will stop you speaking to Jews, Gentiles and Kings; and the gospel train arriving in Rome."

### APPLICATION

We began by thinking about how hard it is for our young people to follow Christ. What gave Paul courage was the promise of God, and His sovereign power (1:8, 23:11). We need to constantly train our young people to look away from themselves to the Sovereign God who gives promises.

### THE HUNGRY MOB

Just when you thought the pursuit of Paul was over, up pop the fasting fundamentalists (23:12-14). As the story develops, Luke draws back the curtain so that we get an inside view of the Roman court. As we peer through, we see an ambush being prepared.

Luke introduces us to one of Paul's relatives as he hears of the Jews plotting to capture and then murder Paul (23:16-22). The young man flees straight to his uncle to warn him of the danger ahead, an intervention that saves Paul from certain death.

### SO WHY IS PAUL SAVED FROM THE ATTEMPTED AMBUSH?

- Paul is saved because his nephew heard the plot (23:16).
- Paul is saved because God promised that he would preach the gospel in Rome (23:11).

Paul continues his journey on the gospel train with a letter in his pocket from the Roman governor (23:26-35). The opposition Paul has faced has been intense, but not strong enough to halt the gospel train.



# SESSION 8

## PAUL MEETS THE DYNASTY OF DEATH

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### ACTS 24-26

#### THE LINK

The Story So Far

#### 1. THE GOSPEL

We started with the early church in Jerusalem obeying Jesus' command to wait for the Spirit to come. Once He arrived, the gospel train was ready to leave the station, as three thousand new members jumped aboard. The command was to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (1:8), the very thing the Spirit began to do (2:47, 4:4).

As soon as the church was born, huge obstacles began to arise seeking to stop it in its tracks, the greatest being a young Jewish leader called Saul. The Lord Jesus quickly changed Saul to Paul, from a wolf to a shepherd. We then watched him plant churches in Antioch, Corinth and Ephesus. As we listened to Peter and Paul, we learned what the gospel is and how to apply it to different cultural contexts.

#### 2. THE GOAL

From Acts 1-8 the focus was primarily Peter and the people of God spreading the gospel, but once we hit Acts 9 the focus becomes the life of Paul. It's his example we follow, as he becomes the embodiment of what it means to follow Christ and getting the gospel to the ends of the earth.

#### WHY ACTS 1:8 & 9:15-16 GO TOGETHER

Just as 1:8 mentions Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth, so 9:15 mentions Gentiles, Kings and Israel.

#### WHY ROME & JERUSALEM GO TOGETHER

Luke wants us to see Paul getting to Rome as the same as the gospel getting to the ends of the earth. Just as nothing will stop the gospel, so nothing will prevent Paul reaching Rome. Within the life of the great apostle, we are to see the bigger picture of the mission of all of God's people.

#### 3. THE GATHERING

In every place that Paul has gone three things have been present:

#### OPPOSITION

- In Jerusalem, Peter faced the elite religious leaders that told him to never mention the name of Jesus
- In Jerusalem, James was murdered by Herod and Peter was banged up in prison
- In Antioch, Paul faced Jews who were filled with jealousy (13:45)
- In Corinth, Paul faced Jews who gave him abuse and sought to attack him (18:6,12)
- In Ephesus Paul faced Jews who were obstinate and refused to believe (19:9), and then anger from Gentile businessmen (19:23-27)
- In Jerusalem the opposition grew to a climax, as they did all they could to kill Paul (21:31, 22:22, 23:10,12-14)

#### PROCLAMATION

None of the opposition has ever prevented Paul from proclaiming the good news of God.

- In Antioch - 13:16-17
- In Corinth - 18:4,11
- In Ephesus - 19:8, 9-10
- In Jerusalem - 21:40

#### EXPANSION

Instead the one certainty is the gospel train continues as the church of God grows.

- A Church in born in Antioch - 13:43,48-52
- A Church in born in Corinth - 18:7-8,18
- A Church in born in Ephesus - 19:5-6,10,17-20

#### THE TRUTH - THE SEAT BELT TEST

- The next part of Paul's mission is fulfilled as he speaks boldly before kings
- Nothing and no one can stop Paul getting to Rome

#### THE MESSAGE - THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

#### 1. THE TREE

Eventually Paul arrives in Caesarea with the Roman escort of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearman (23:23-24). In the hands of the soldiers is a letter from the Roman Commander guaranteeing Paul a hearing

and trial before Governor Felix. On arrival, Paul waits five days for the Jews to arrive (24:1). Their disappointment must have been huge, knowing that their plot to kill Paul had been a failure (23:12-15). What follows are three trials; we will look briefly at the first two, then spend most of our time on the last one.

Before we get into the trials, here is a little cameo on the characters involved:

## THE HEROD DYNASTY

### Herod the Great

- The king who tried to kill the baby Jesus (Matt 2:3, 16)

### His son – King Herod Antipas

- The King who was rebuked by John the Baptist for his sin, who then imprisoned him (Lk 3:20) before finally murdering him (Lk 7:9)
- The King who wanted to kill Jesus (Lk 13:31)
- The King that Jesus calls a fox (Lk 13:32)
- The King who Jesus remained silent before (Lk 23:9)
- The King who ridiculed Jesus (23:8,11)

### His grandson – Agrippa I

- His grandson happily carries on the work of his grandfather and father as he seeks to exterminate the baby church
- He persecutes the church – Acts 12:1
- He murders James – Acts 12:2
- He arrests Peter – Acts 12:3-4
- He receives a severe judgment from God – Acts 12:21-23

### Drusilla Agrippa's granddaughter

- The wife of Felix is Drusilla, who is the daughter of Herod Agrippa I of Acts 12

### His great grandson – Agrippa II

- The son of Agrippa I and great grandson of Herod the Great is Agrippa II. It's his job to give council to the Roman Governor Festus on whether Paul should go to Rome.

## 2. THE TRIALS

### TRIAL 1 – ACTS 24:1-27

#### The Judge – Felix

Felix was famous for using his power in an immoral and brutal way

#### The Accusers

The religious leaders accuse Paul of being:

1. ...a troublemaker – 24:5
2. ...a ringleader – 24:5
3. ...a desecrator of the temple – 24:6

### The Defendant

Paul's answer is to show Felix and the Jews that he has ...

1. The same God = God of our Fathers – 24:14
2. Believes the same truths = Law and the Prophets – 24:14
3. Has the same hope = Resurrection – 24:15
4. Has the same Ambition = Clear Conscience – 24:16

### The Mystery

#### They meet privately with Paul

- Just as her grandfather liked to meet privately with John the Baptist, so Drusilla and Felix meet privately with Paul. Here Paul follows in the footsteps of John the Baptist by calling those before him to repentance (24:24-25).

#### They refuse to make a decision

- On 24 August 79AD, Drusilla's life came to a sudden end when she died along with the inhabitants of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Like her great grandfather, she had the opportunity to repent but refused. She could have tasted the grace of God, but instead she experienced the judgement of God.

#### He waits for a bribe

- The preaching of Paul is a little too hot for Felix, so he asks him to stop (24:26). The message clearly gets under his skin, as his conscience is set on fire. Instead of repenting he spends his time looking for a bribe. He knows that what he is listening to is true, yet still spends his time thinking about money. He quickly finds out that Paul is not budging, so he leaves him in prison for two years until the next guy comes along to sort it out.

### TRIAL 2

- Paul's stay in prison in no way dampens his love for the gospel (25:1-2).

#### What will Festus do?

- He refuses to bow to the Jewish leaders' demands – 25:1-7
- He allows Paul to defend himself – 25:8-11
- He realises that he is out of his depth and asks King Agrippa for help – 25:13-22

So, the gospel once again meets the Dynasty of Death. Throughout their family history they have always sought to stop the gospel train. What will the latest person in the Herod dynasty do? What will Agrippa say?

### TRIAL 3

#### The Judge

- His dad murdered Christians – Acts 12:1-4.
- His dad was judged by God – Acts 12:21-23.
- He arrives with great pomp, royalty and splendour – 25:23.
- The court is filled with all the most important people – 25:23.
- His job is to decide whether Paul is guilty, and whether he should be allowed to go to Rome – 25:24-27.

## The Accusers

- The accusers bring the same old charges - 25:2,7.

## The Defendant

- Everything in the story speaks of power, wealth, and authority. The power of the day meets an unimpressive apostle. Here is an ancient description of Paul:

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According to tradition, he was only a little fellow and unprepossessing in appearance, balding, with beetle brows hooked nose and bandy legs, yet "full of grace".

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So, what will this insignificant little man say? And once said, what influence will it have?

## THE TESTIMONY

### Paul the Pharisee

As Paul looks at the scene it would have taken him back to the time when he was a Pharisee (26:1-5). As he looks at them there are two truths he focuses upon:

- He believes the same Scripture as the Jewish leaders (26:6-7).
- The resurrection of Jesus (26:8).

### Paul the Persecutor

- His obsession (raging fury) was to destroy God's people, just like Agrippa's dad (26:9-11)

### Paul the Preacher

- The third thing Paul wants them to know is that he met the risen Jesus. The heart of Paul's sermon is based on what he saw and what he heard from the risen Jesus.

## What Paul Saw

- He saw a light brighter than the sun (26:13)
- He saw the risen Jesus (26:14-16)

## What Paul Heard

- Paul knew that the Messiah had confronted him (26:14-16).
- Paul knew that God was going to protect him (26:17).
- Paul knew his life's mission was to take God's message to the Gentiles (26:17).
- Paul knew that God's calling was to call Gentiles from darkness to light (26:18).

## What Paul Did

- It's the implication of these events that Paul wants to bring before all the people in the courtroom (26:19).
- All people need to hear God's message (26:20a).
- Repentance is the only evidence that you have believed it (26:20b)
- This message led to Jews rejecting him (26:21)
- His message is the same as that of Moses and the prophets (26:21-22)
- His message centres upon Jesus' death, resurrection, and proclamation to Jews and Gentiles (26:23).

The reaction from Festus is to declare Paul mad (26:24). The response of Paul is to basically remind all present that he's talking about historical fact (26:25-26). The life of Jesus was lived before them just a few years ago, so they know what Paul is saying is true. Just maybe Paul is hinting at the Dynasty of Death that King Agrippa comes from, therefore applying the gospel to his conscience. The challenge is designed to bring the king to a position of repentance (26:27).

The king's response is similar to Felix's, as it seems his conscience is also inflamed (26:28). The response in no way intimidates Paul, instead he is inspired to hammer home the king's need to repent (26:29).

Whether Agrippa or Festus repented only eternity will reveal. What we do know for sure is that Paul has a ticket to Rome (26:31-32).

# SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

**Ice Breaker:** Young people take it in turns to imitate different leaders on camp. Others have to guess who it is.

**Intro Q:** Discuss who would you most like to imitate in the world and why?

## 1. DRAW A FAMILY TREE TO HELP PUT AGRIPPA IN HIS CLAN CONTEXT

### **Herod the Great**

The Big Daddy Herod who wanted to murder Jesus as a baby- Matt 2:3, 16

### **His son – King Herod Antipas**

The Herod who met John the Baptist – 3:20, 7:9  
Like his dad he wanted to kill Jesus – 13:31  
What Jesus thought of him – 13:32  
What Jesus had to say to him? – 23:9  
He ridicules Jesus – 23:8,11

### **His grandson – Agrippa I**

He continues in the family business of opposing the gospel train – Acts 12:1-4.  
He meets a nasty end – Acts 12:21-23

### **Drusilla Agrippa's granddaughter**

The wife of Felix is Drusilla, who is the daughter of Herod Agrippa I of Acts 12.

### **His great grandson – Agrippa II**

The guy in today's story who judges Paul.

## 2. READ ACTS 26:15.

**What does Paul say about his upbringing?**

## 3. READ ACTS 26:9-11

**What does Paul say about his attitude to God's people?**

## 4. READ ACTS 26:12-18

**What did Paul see and hear that changed him?**

## 5. READ ACTS 26:19-23.

**What is the challenge Paul gives to Agrippa and all those in the courtroom?**

## 6. HOW DO FESTUS AND AGRIPPA RESPOND?

## 7. IS THE GOSPEL TRAIN STILL ON TRACK TO GET TO ROME?

## 8. THESE ARE PROBABLY PAUL'S FINAL WORDS, WRITTEN WHILE IN A PRISON IN ROME. HOW CAN WE IMITATE TIMOTHY AS HE IMITATES PAUL?

**Brainstorm answers from 2 Timothy 4:1-8**

**Who do we stand before? – 4:1**

**What are we to learn to do? – 4:2**

**What will people always want? – 4:3-5**

**What must we aim for? – 4:6-7**

**What must we wait for? – 4:8**

**...And what is waiting for us? – 4:8**

## WHAT TO PRAY

- Praise God that opposition to the Gospel is actually an opportunity
- Say sorry for the times we want to imitate celebrities more than Jesus
- Share one thing each from 2 Timothy 4:1-8 that you would like others in the group to pray about as you seek to imitate Paul, like he imitated Jesus.

## WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOSPEL

The Gospel Train is unstoppable

## WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GOAL

The ends of the earth will be reached

## WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE GATHERING

God's people must wait for God's return

# SESSION 9

## THE GOSPEL TRAIN ARRIVES IN ROME

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### ACTS 27-28

#### THE LINK

Today we come to the end of Acts and Mission Unstoppable. The question that we should be asking is, will the gospel get to the ends of the earth? Will Paul get to Rome?

#### THE TRUTH - THE SEAT BELT TEST

- Paul reaches Rome, the gospel reaches the ends of the earth
- God keeps His promise

#### THE MESSAGE - THE MEAT OF THE PASSAGE

##### 1. GOD'S PROMISE GIVES CONFIDENCE

If Paul thought the journey towards Rome was going to get any easier once he left the courtroom he was in for a shock. From the storm in a courtroom, we are now experiencing a storm in a boat. As we read this story, two things strike us:

#### THE SAILORS ARE FEARFUL

The poor sailors are facing the worst storm nature can throw at them (27:18, 29). Their fear sends them into a frenzy of action.

- They seek to make the boat secure - 27:16
- They throw cargo over board - 27:18
- They are ready to kill all the prisoners - 27:42

All this action makes no difference, so in the end the sailors give up all hope of being saved (27:20).

#### THE APOSTLE IS FREE

The contrast with the sailors and Paul is startling, as every word he speaks brims with confidence (27:22, 34). What is it that gives the apostle such supreme freedom and confidence? The answer to that question is nothing new. All the way through the journey, the promises of God have given Paul mighty confidence.

The first time the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul was to give him his mission (9:15-16). When Paul faces a life-threatening storm, the angel tells him exactly the same as what the Lord Jesus had already told him (27:23-26).

This takes us back again to how Luke crafts both Luke and Acts:

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It would capture the essential geographical outlook of Luke to entitle the Gospel of Luke "From Galilee to Jerusalem" and the book of Acts "From Jerusalem to Rome", for Jerusalem was the goal of Jesus ministry, while Rome was the goal of Paul's. Although the journeys of Jesus and Paul differed from one another in their ultimate direction and destination, they also resembled a resolute determination, an arrest, a series of trials in Jewish and Roman courts and even a death and resurrection. For Paul's descent into the darkness and danger of the storm was a kind of grave, while the rescue from shipwreck and later springtime voyage to Rome were a kind of resurrection. Luke's 'highest apology for Paul was to portray him as 'so conformed to the life of the Lord that even his sufferings and deliverance parallel'. *John Stott*

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The promises of God free Paul never to fear the present or the future. However dark or bleak they may seem, Paul always views them alongside the reality of God's promises. This is one of the major reasons for teaching Acts, to teach ourselves and the young people to believe the promises of God.



## 2.GOD'S PROMISE IS FOR YOU

The second volume of Luke finishes in the same fashion as the first. Here are four examples.

	LUKE	ACTS
Jesus reaches Jerusalem	19:28	
Paul reaches Rome		28:16
Jesus shows that the Old Testament is fulfilled in him	24:25-27, 45-49	
Paul shows that Jesus is fulfilment of the Old Testament		28:23
Jesus declares judgement upon Israel for rejecting the Messiah	20:9-19	
Paul declares judgement upon Israel for rejecting the Messiah		28:25-27
Jesus celebrates the gospel going to the world	24:45-47	
Paul celebrates the gospel going to the Gentiles		25:28

As we finish Acts, we need to remind the young people that God fulfilled his promises. The great apostle reached Rome, which signified 1:8 being fulfilled.