

# The Spreading Light

## Overview of the Module

### Objective

*For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." (Acts 13.47)*

The aim of the worship in this half-term is to learn from **The Acts of the Apostles** how the first followers of Jesus spread the message about Him. There are traditions around many of first disciples of Jesus and where they went sharing the good news. But in the Bible, particularly in the Acts of the Apostles, the focus is on how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome, and on the ministry of Paul, who had not known Jesus 'in the flesh'.

Paul and Barnabas quoted an Old Testament prophecy about Jesus, but because they were like ambassadors for Christ, they said the words were also about them: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles (ie other nations), that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13.47). Therefore a helpful way to think about Acts is how **the light of Christ was spread by his first followers**.

Acts contains a lot of narrative explaining events. (Paul's letters add some further details.) The **notes below** give a **summary of the main events**, which can be narrated with assistance from the children. There are maps available of Paul's missionary journeys in many Bibles, or online, and it is suggested that a lantern or similar is used as a visual aid. The notes highlight how the light was spread.

Note that in the New Testament, and today, the name Jews is often used to refer to Israelites. However, Jews, meaning Judahites, were originally just one of the twelve tribes of Israel. In these notes the names are used interchangeably, though that can be a bit confusing.

### Plan (New Testament 3)

As the date of Pentecost varies from year to year it is unlikely that unit 1 will coincide with the actual festival but the unit follow the order in Acts.

1. Pentecost
2. Peter and John
3. Stephen
4. Philip
5. Saul (Paul)
6. Cornelius
7. James and Peter
8. Pisidian Antioch
9. Lystra
10. Philippi
11. Athens
12. Ephesus
13. Going to Jerusalem
14. Arrest and Trials
15. Rome at Last
16. Paul's Final Years

## Outline

Jesus told the disciples “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*” (Acts 1.8) and we can see how that gradual spread in the Acts of the Apostles. Below is an outline of events with some rough dates following the traditional reckoning.

### **In Jerusalem** (Acts 1-8) (circa AD30)

From Pentecost to the stoning of Stephen

### **In Judea and Samaria** (Acts 8-12)

Paul converted circa AD32

Philip in Samaria and the Ethiopian official converted

The Roman centurion and family converted

### **And to the ends of the earth** (Acts 12-28)

#### **Paul’s first missionary journey** (Acts 13-14) (AD45-47)

Antioch in Syria, Seleucia, Salamis, Cyprus, Paphos, Perga, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Pamphylia, Perga, Attalia and back to Antioch.

The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)

#### **Paul’s second missionary journey** (Acts 16-18) (AD51-54)

Antioch in Syria, throughout Syria and Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia, Galatia, Troas, Samothrace, Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Appolonia, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Caesarea and back to Antioch.

*It is thought Paul wrote his letter to the Thessalonians not long after visiting them.*

#### **Paul’s third missionary journey** (Acts 19-21) (AD54-58)

Antioch in Syria, Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece, Macedonia, Philippi, Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Samos, Miletus, Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Phoenicia, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, Jerusalem.

*It is thought that during this journey Paul sent letters to Corinth, Galatia (Lystra, Iconium etc) and Rome.*

#### **Paul’s arrest, imprisonment and trials** (Acts 21-26) (AD58-61)

Jerusalem and Caesarea

#### **Paul’s journey to Rome** (Acts 27-28)

Later than Acts:

#### **Paul imprisoned in Rome** (AD 61-63)

*Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, Ephesians and Philippians*

#### **Paul’s release and later travels** (AD63-66)

Rome, Greece, Macedonia, Asia Minor (and some say Spain)

*First letter to Timothy and Titus*

The Jewish Revolt against Rome (AD66)

#### **Paul arrested and martyred in Rome** (AD67 or 68)

*Second letter to Timothy*

The Romans destroy Jerusalem and the Temple (AD70)

It is worth remembering that we know virtually nothing about the history of Britain at the time of Acts or how the gospel later spread here - though it obviously did. By contrast Acts is an extraordinarily detailed account written by someone who was an eyewitness to some of the events. Other ancient sources, including writings of second generation Christians, give further evidence and fill in some of the gaps.