

## **The Story – Chapters 29: *Paul’s Mission***

### **Introduction**

This week we look at Paul’s mission to the gentiles. It involves a number of missionary journeys and a bunch of letters Paul wrote to churches he started to encourage them when he was gone and to address specific issues in these fledgling congregations.

If you want to read this material in the Bible, you can find it in Acts 13-14, 16-20; Romans 1,3-6, 8, 12,15; 1 Corinthians 1,3,5-6, 10,12-13, 15-16; Galatians 1,3, 5-6; and 1 Thessalonians 1-5. (Unlike last week, this week it’s a lot easier to read the chapter in *The Story* than all the chapters in the Bible.)

### **Summary of Chapters 29 – Paul’s Mission**

Saul began his career as a radical Jewish scholar who was so convinced this new Jesus movement was wrong that he went around imprisoning believers himself. But after an encounter with the resurrected Jesus, he became a Christ-follower and began using his Greek name Paul. Paul went from place to place proclaiming Christ to the Jews first and also to the Gentiles.

Led by the Holy Spirit, the believers in their home base of Antioch in Syria commissioned Paul and Barnabas and sent them out as missionaries to spread the news that Jesus the Messiah is raised from the dead. Their first missionary journey took them to the island of Cyprus where they encountered a Jewish sorcerer who opposed them and a Roman proconsul who embraced the gospel. They set sail for the region of Galatia (present south-central Turkey), and were invited to preach in the synagogue in Antioch. However, after an initial favorable reception, they faced persecution, so they turned their sights toward the Gentiles.

Paul was joined by other helpers – among them Timothy and Silas — for his second missionary journey. They visited many cities in Macedonia, including Philippi where a church was begun in Lydia’s home. Later, Paul and Silas were thrown in jail where their faith convicted their jailer and they were freed. In Thessalonica, many Jews and Greeks believed, but then Paul and Silas had to be sent away for their own protection. Paul then met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth where Paul was again opposed by the Jews. But many Gentiles believed, so Paul stayed and ministered there for about a year and a half.

After returning to his base of operations in Antioch, Paul set out on his third journey. As he strengthened the churches in the Galatian region, Paul then went to Ephesus and stayed more than two years teaching both Jews and Greeks. Many people from the region came to hear him as the word spread. However as new believers rejected their idols, local artisans staged a riot to drive Paul out of town.

As he was traveling Paul was also writing letters to encourage and assist the churches he had already started. (Although Paul’s longest letter (and his most theological) was penned to the church in Rome that he had not yet visited.) Paul wrote a number of letters to the church in Corinth, where he urged the believers to be united, and answered their questions about spiritual gifts and other matters. The Galatian churches were confused by Jewish Christians who insisted they practice the Jewish ceremonial rites, so Paul wrote them to clarify that they were saved by God’s grace and were called to live by the law of love and not the law of Moses.

## Discussion Questions

1. As Paul and his companions traveled from city to city, many accepted the message that Jesus was the Messiah, but many did not. How did those who opposed Paul feel? How did they act? Why? What were they afraid of? How does fear play a role in our own culture's experience of faith? Your faith?
2. Paul took three missionary journeys throughout Asia and Greece to help fulfill the mandate to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Locate some of the cities and territories that Paul visited using the map in the back of *The Story*. If you could go on a short-term mission trip to anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?
3. What differences do you find in Paul's message to the Jews in the synagogue (p. 408-409) as compared to his message to the Gentiles (p. 411, 413)? Discuss applications we might make today for reaching different people groups with the same gospel.
4. One of the key teachings Paul carried to each city was how we are "made free by Christ". However, in places like Corinth, people were living quite "freely" already, believing freedom means self-indulgence. How does Paul correct this misunderstanding of freedom by teaching about the body of Christ and love (p. 426-427, 431)? What do you think freedom in Christ means?
5. First Corinthians 13 is often called the "love chapter" (p. 427, 1 Corinthians 13). This kind of love is sacrificial and benevolent, not self-serving but doing what is best for another. Notice the list of things that love is and is not. Choose one or two to practice this week. How could your relationships with family, friends and co-workers be affected if you practiced this kind of love this week?
6. Romans 5:1-2 (p. 433) is among the most powerful summaries of the good news of Jesus (Romans 5:8 isn't bad either!). What does having "peace with God" mean to you? How does it feel? How do you experience it?