

**The True Story of the Whole World, pp 137-147**  
**“Into all the World”**  
**Acts 15, Acts 17**

Promised Land	Exile and Return	Jesus of Nazareth	The early church
Joshua	Samaria falls	Birth	The Great Commission
Judges	Judah falls	The Kingdom of God	The Holy Spirit
Kings	Exile in Babylon	Suffering and crucifixion	The church together
Saul	Return to Judah	Resurrection and ascension	The church scattered
David	Intertestamental period		Inclusion of Gentiles
Solomon			“Into all the world”
Divided Kingdom			

***In a nutshell....***

*The movement of the Gospel outside of Jerusalem initially happens mainly with scattered Jews, and “God-fearing” Gentiles. On the surface, the impetus for the spread of the gospel is persecution which disperses the Jerusalem believers. However, God is at work and the question of Gentile inclusion becomes urgent. The “Jerusalem Conference” of Acts 15 stunningly opens the door to full Gentile inclusion into God’s people. “All the world” is now in play.*

*After this council, the church in Antioch forms a base for organized, intentional expansion into Asia Minor and Europe, under the leadership of Paul. The text from Acts 17 gives examples of such planned ‘missional’ efforts.*

*Permeating the stories is the Holy Spirit. In both the ‘incidental’ and the planned expansion, Luke emphasizes that God’s Holy Spirit has gone ahead. Paul and the other missionaries are thus co-workers in what God has initiated “to the ends of the earth”.*

*The “True Story.....” account on pages 144 – 147 offers an unusually succinct and yet rich summary of the church from origins in Jerusalem, to intentional expansion via Paul’s three missionary journeys. Especially striking is the new definition of God’s ‘chosen people’....all who call upon the name of Jesus as Lord.*

**Sound familiar?**

- the idol to “The unknown God” (Acts 17:23)
- mob chases Paul out of town (Acts 17:5ff)
- women included among converts (Acts 17:34)
- Disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41)
- Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)

**Main ideas from “Into All the World”**

- The way forward for a fledgling church, uncertain about issues of inclusion, is found in gathering together, prayer, testimony, and discernment
- God’s Holy Spirit leads to an expanded awareness which transcends previous understandings of “God’s chosen people”
- Even among missionaries and church leaders, conflicts and differences of opinion must be dealt with
- The “Old Testament” (The Jewish Scriptures) are the foundation for Paul’s teaching of the gospel. His preaching is full of Old Testament quotations
- The paganism in the church plant locale (Athens) is named, and confronted, by Paul.

**Other Biblical references**

Our “New Testament” includes a number of follow up letters Paul wrote to the churches he established during his missionary journeys. Each new church had its own unique successes and challenges. One must read between the lines to imagine the ‘other side’ of the conversation which Paul engages in.

### **General questions for Biblical reflection**

1. What do you notice about God in this text?
2. Is there any part of the text that is surprising? Why?
3. What in this text encourages, troubles, surprises, or confuses you?
4. Is there anything in this text you had never noted before? Why do you think it stood out to you this time?
5. How does the action in this passage fit into God's salvation plan?

### **Specific to the texts for this Sunday**

1. What do you understand from Paul's ministry in Athens? (Acts 17:16ff) How might this guide our conversations with non-believers today?
2. List evidences of Paul's 'boldness'. How might that play today in a society which places high value on sensitivity and tolerance? Have you ever been 'bold for Jesus', or is this something best done by someone else?
3. Mennonites often embark on 'service trips', whereas other Christian groups will refer to "mission trips". While this may be in some cases mere semantics, it may also signify real differences in how we understand our role in God's "restoration project". Given the stories in Acts, what thoughts come to mind in this regard?
4. How did Paul use 'privilege' as a Roman citizen, to his advantage? What 'privilege' do we have that we might employ fruitfully as God's ambassadors? In what ways is 'privileged status' an impediment?