

# Home is where...?

A 6-part bible study for those living,  
working, and studying abroad

**ROBERT CLARKE**

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First Edition

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## ■ Introduction

As someone who is living abroad, friends, acquaintances, and relatives sometimes get in touch and ask what it is really like. Oftentimes prompted by an opportunity they themselves are considering, they ask if it is worth it. From a distance, and perhaps from conversation, they see some of the challenges my family and others they know experience, but also see that we've nonetheless decided to stay.

My response sometimes confuses them. 'You will never be able to move home,' I normally say. They interpret this in one of a number of ways. Normally, they think I'm saying they will love it so much that they do not *want* to move back. But, I point out, that is not what I said.

The truth I am getting at is that life abroad, in ways distinct from life 'at home', changes you. It forces you into uncomfortable learning places more often, and with less support, than would otherwise be the case. And in dealing with those challenges, you create shared experiences and friendships with people from the nations, all thrown together, often only for a season.

And at some point – and I am sure that where this point falls varies wildly – you start to refer to both the country you have moved to, and the country you came from, as 'home'. And you realise that there is some truth in both. You find yourself split between the two places, whether by family ties, cultural comfortability, or language.

Some people go so far as to avoid the emotional overtones of 'home' and refer instead to their 'passport country.' It takes on a different dimension for children – my six-month-old has not yet been to her 'home' country – in what sense is it her home? And so, I tell people – 'You will never be able to move "*home*" – because the concept becomes a lot less straightforward than it once seemed.



This study guide is written for the broadest possible 'audience', while remaining anchored to its purpose – a dive into parts of the Bible that might speak the most to those living, sometimes struggling, sometimes thriving, in a culture, land, and way of life that is not fully their own. As I worked through which passages would make it in, I was struck by the fact that more often than not, the people or peoples we meet in the Bible have been displaced in some way from their 'home'. From a chosen people wandering in the wilderness, to a baby left to the meanderings of a river. From ordinary men sent out to share the good news, to our Saviour, born one week's journey away from home.

Back in our international communities, there are those who have 'just arrived'; everything is new and a certain amount of novelty exists. There are the 'old-timers' who from the outside appear completely assimilated. There are those who speak the language, and those who think they never will. Those who are passing through for a matter of months, and those who have made a long-term commitment.

I hope, in these pages, wherever you fall, you will find something to encourage and to equip you. Most of all, I hope you will enjoy meeting with the God of all tribes and tongues who calls us to be His witnesses 'to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1:8)

## ■ About the Author

Robert Clarke was born and raised in the United Kingdom but had spent almost seven years living abroad by the time he turned 30. A barrister by training, he has volunteered abroad, studied abroad, and worked abroad. He now lives in Vienna, Austria, with his wife and daughter.

As a small group leader, he worked through a number of different study guides, all great, but none tailored towards some of the particular aspects of living life in a foreign culture. Like most labours of love, the idea for this study came after searching extensively for something similar and eventually coming to the conclusion that it did not exist.



## ■ Acknowledgements

This study was 'road-tested' with the home group bible study I have the privilege to co-lead at New City Wien church in Vienna. I am grateful to the members of the group for their encouragement, thought-provoking answers and – occasionally – puzzled expressions when I had tried to pose a completely unintelligible question.

I am also grateful to Pastors Brad Hunter, Eric Brauer, and JD Bautista who offered feedback on the text from a far more qualified theological perspective than my own – but, equally importantly, bringing their wisdom and life experience as pastors serving overseas to bear on the study.

Finally, thank you Aysha. Thank you for encouraging me when I was not sure this would ever make its way from scribbled notes to a study, and for all the ways that God's work in your life has spoken into these pages.

My sincere thanks go to those mentioned. Any errors remain my own!





# Home is where...the mission is?

Acts 13:42-52

## Background

Paul is on what is known as his first missionary journey, along with Barnabas. They come to Antioch in Pisidia where Paul goes to the synagogue and preaches a sermon. He is speaking to the Galatians – to whom he will come to write a letter in a few months or so time after he has moved on. The first part of the chapter recounts the sermon in quite some detail. Our passage for today focuses on the reaction of those listening.

## Opening Discussion

What are some of the particular *challenges* and *opportunities* for sharing the gospel that living abroad presents?

<sup>42</sup> As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. <sup>43</sup> And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

<sup>44</sup> The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup> But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. <sup>46</sup> And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life,

behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> 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.”

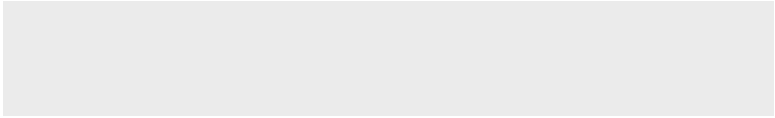
<sup>48</sup> And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup> And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. <sup>50</sup> But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. <sup>51</sup> But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup> And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

## Explore the Passage

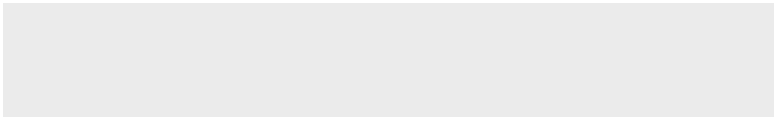
1. What was the effect of Paul's *first* sermon in Antioch in Pisidia?

2. What was the effect of Paul's *second* sermon in Antioch in Pisidia?

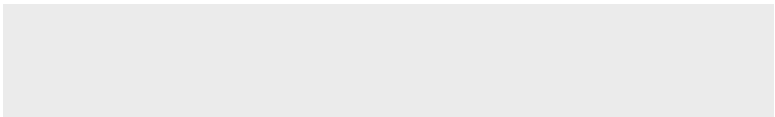
3. Why do you think the Jews reacted in the way that they did?



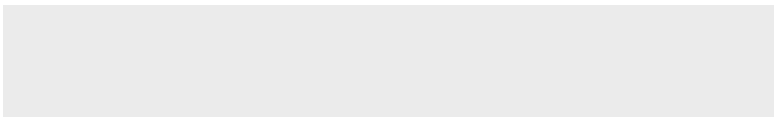
4. Who is the 'you' and 'yourselves' referred to in v 46? What does it mean to 'judge yourself unworthy of eternal life'?



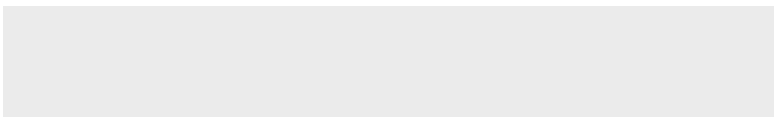
5. After the reaction of the Jews, Paul says he is 'turning to the gentiles' (v 46). Has he abandoned his mission? How is this new work similar to his 'old' work? How is it different?



6. What do you notice about the 'voice' used in v 49? Why do you think that is?



7. What is Paul's relationship to Antioch in Pisidia? (How long did he stay? How did he spend his time there? Was he a local?)

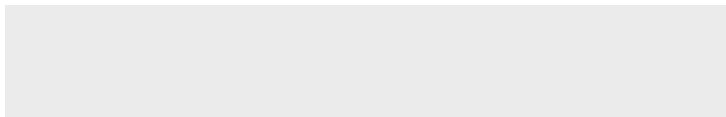




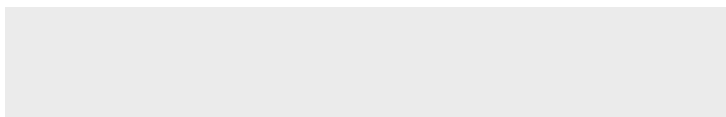
** Apply the Passage**

**8. How can this passage help us understand:**

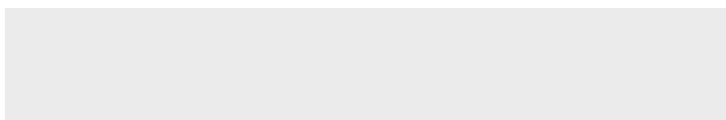
**a. Our mission?**



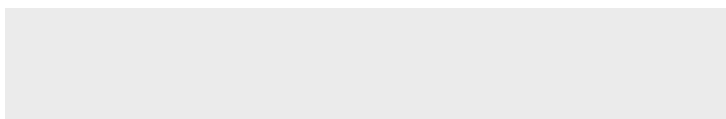
**b. How our mission may be impacted by the culture around us?**



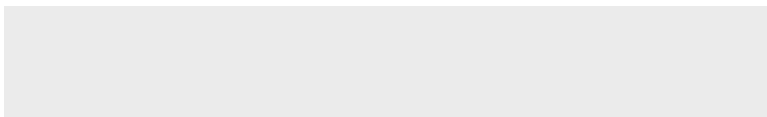
**c. Possible responses from those with whom we share the gospel?**



**d. How we react to the responses of those around us?**



**9. What is the legacy of Paul's brief stay in this city (v 50)? What can we learn from this?**



## **Share**

**10. Do you have any examples of opportunities you have had to share the gospel precisely because you are *not* 'a local'? How did they come about, and what was the reaction?**

## **Pray**

- Thank God for the privilege of being able to live and work or study in a foreign culture.
- Pray that He would open your eyes to the unique opportunities that this provides to share the gospel.
- Pray that you would be emboldened by challenges, and continually joyful at the sight of Him at work wherever you may be.



# Leader's Guide

Whether you are using this as part of a personal devotional, or with a group, you know the end-user best! That means you should feel free to adapt or adopt parts as you see fit. While the study is written principally for those living, studying, and working abroad, there is immense variation even within that group in terms of length of time already spent abroad, length of commitment to living abroad, and the similarity between one's 'home' and host cultures.

There may also be those in an otherwise international group that do not identify in that way. That should not be a bar to following this study, after all, it is a study of God's word which was not intended for only one narrow audience. Similarly, even the particular questions outlined here almost all have broader application. The yearning for 'home' and feeling that things on Earth are not quite as they were supposed to be is universal. We can all relate to the calling to find our truest identity beyond our immediate geography, while also seeking His will in the place in which He is has put us.

Each study is structured in the same way:

## **Background**

This section provides a short summary of important events or relevant context leading up to the passage being studied. Given this study draws from different parts from the Old and New Testaments, this helps us stay grounded as we parachute into a passage.

## **Opening Discussion**

This is a question aimed at provoking discussion within the group. With quieter groups, it provides a way to help people start opening up on a topic perhaps less intimidating than biblical interpretation. I would recommend opening with this even before you have read the passage.

### **Explore the Passage**

These are questions that draw from the passage being studied (or occasionally from elsewhere in scripture). They tend to start off as merely observational questions – encourage your group that there are no tricks! – before later requiring a little more thought. I have tried to limit cross-references to other passages to only the most relevant after finding most small group bible studies lose momentum once you start flicking (or clicking!) back and forth between multiple passages.

### **Apply the Passage**

These questions take some of the things identified in **Explore the Passage** and open up the question of how they apply to us. The sequence is important. Only after understanding what the passage is saying can we start to unpick how it might help, guide, or challenge us today.

### **Share**

Each study has a **Share** question which provides a prompt for one or more person (or just yourself if you are studying alone) to reflect on a time they have experienced God at work in one of the ways explored in the passage. You will want to consider the degree of vulnerability that exists within your group when deciding how these are best handled.

### **Pray**

The **Pray** section provides some bullet points as a place to start when closing out the study in prayer.

I hope the questions and structure help you. But my ultimate hope is that the questions will fade away; they are simply a means to an end. My prayer is that they will help you engage with God and his Word and that it is ultimately Him that will encourage you, and those you are studying with, as much as He has encouraged and equipped me while developing it.



# Home is where...the mission is?

Acts 13:42-52

## Explore the Passage

### 1. What was the effect of Paul's *first* sermon in Antioch in Pisidia?

Many of those who had been listening followed Paul and Barnabas, it would appear as a positive reaction to what was heard. Similarly, by the next Sabbath, word had spread such that 'almost the whole city' (v 44) had gathered 'to hear the word of the Lord.'

### 2. What was the effect of Paul's *second* sermon in Antioch in Pisidia?

We are not sure if he got to say much. The Jews became jealous at the sight of the crowds. They started 'contradicting' and 'reviling' him (v 45). When Paul then shares that the Jews have judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, and that he will instead preach to the Gentiles, the Jewish anger remained, but the Gentiles 'rejoiced' (v 48).

### 3. Why do you think the Jews reacted in the way that they did?

This was their city, and they met on the Sabbath every week and could never draw the kind of crowds that these visitors had. The root of this kind of reaction is pride.

### 4. Who is the 'you' and 'yourselves' referred to in v 46? What does it mean to 'judge yourself unworthy of eternal life'?

The 'you' is in the plural form and it refers to the Jews. They have quite clearly 'thrust...aside' the word of God as is clear from their active undermining of Paul's preaching. Of course, when it comes to

eternal life, God is the only judge. But these Jews take themselves out of the running by rejecting the word of God as they reject His messenger.

5. After the reaction of the Jews, Paul says he is 'turning to the gentiles' (v 46). Has he abandoned his mission? How is this new work similar to his 'old' work? How is it different?

Paul makes clear that the mission is to 'bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' The mission is the same, but he has a new focus – one that he says comes from God (v 47).

6. What do you notice about the 'voice' used in v 49? Why do you think that is?

The passive voice is used: 'the word of the Lord *was spreading...*' This contrasts with the rest of the narrative which explains what Paul and Barnabas, or the Jews, did (see vv 43, 46, 50). The spread of the gospel was not a work of Paul or Barnabas' hand, but of God's.

7. What is Paul's relationship to Antioch in Pisidia? (How long did he stay? How did he spend his time there? Was he a local?)

This was a foreign city for Paul. He could move in Jewish circles as a result of his background, but instead of just slotting in, he was making waves in the Synagogue. As for the Gentiles, he was developing a relationship with them and spending his time sharing the gospel, as well as working alongside fellow believers. We are not told here exactly how long he *planned* to stay, but we know that they did not end up spending very long before moving on to Iconium (v 51). In many ways, he was an expat with a fixed-term contract (and perhaps one that ended earlier than expected!)

## **Apply the Passage**

### **8. How can this passage help us understand:**

#### **a. Our mission?**

We too are called to 'bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' For those who received the gift of faith in a home country and have now travelled to another country, there is a particular opportunity to live out that mission given the natural curiosity people around us have for other cultures. This is a good opportunity to deal with the possible objection that Paul was a missionary, and we are not. At the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, he makes it clear that the 'Great Commission' is for all of us, and into all of the world. As believers that have already been 'dispersed', we have an incredible opportunity to play a role in that, and have things in common with the early believers who were scattered and learning how to live, and how to remain faithful, in the new places in which they found themselves.

#### **b. How our mission may be impacted by the culture around us?**

If it is helpful, refer back to question 5, above. Paul was wanting to share the gospel with any who would listen. The reaction of the Jews helped redirect him towards his calling to minister to the Gentiles. We too have to seek, and make, opportunities. Paul was proactive in positioning himself at the temple and setting up a regular time.

#### **c. Possible responses from those with whom we share the gospel?**

In these few short verses, Paul both draws an unprecedented crowd and is reviled. We can expect every response in between.



**d. How we react to the responses of those around us?**

Paul re-aligned his priorities in line with where he saw God working. There also came a time for him to continue on his missionary journey after the Jews stirred up persecution against him and Barnabas (v 50).

**9. What is the legacy of Paul's brief stay in this city (v 50)? What can we learn from this?**

The new believers (disciples) were filled with joy. The tense used denotes a continuing state – this was their new normal. That must have had an effect on their lives, but also the city itself even long after Paul had left. Although Paul moved on, we know that he stayed close in heart and was grieved to write the challenging words we find in the letter to the Galatians not long after. Paul travelled with a great sense of mission. He believed he was sent to each place he visited, and believe there was a time to move on. To what extent do we live like we are sent to the places we are in?

Life abroad, in ways distinct from life 'at home', changes you. It forces you into uncomfortable learning places more often, and with less support, than would otherwise be the case. And in dealing with those challenges, you create shared experiences and friendships with people from the nations, all thrown together, often only for a season.

This study guide is a dive into parts of the Bible that speak the most to those living, sometimes struggling, sometimes thriving, in a culture, land, and way of life that is not fully their own.

More often than not, the people we meet in scripture have been displaced in some way from their 'home'. From a chosen people wandering in the wilderness, to a baby left to the meanderings of a river. From ordinary men sent out to share the good news, to a Saviour, born one week's journey away from home.

Across six studies, this guide challenges us to reflect on what God is teaching us about 'home'.

- For use by individuals or groups
- Leader's Guide included

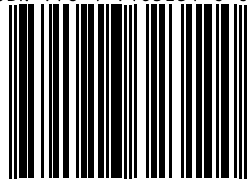
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