

Acts

By Dr. Alan Cobb

Title & Author

Often the title of this book is given as “The Acts of the Apostles” (Greek *πραξεις αποστολων* - *praxeis apostolon*), but we don’t know if that is the title that the author gave it or that it even had a title. The Greek word *praxeis* means deeds / actions / acts and the word *apostolon* means apostle (one sent). The Muratorian Canon (written about 170-200 AD) says this about the title and the author:

“Moreover, the Acts of all the Apostles are comprised by Luke in one book, and addressed to the most excellent Theophilus, because these different events took place when he was present himself; and he shows this clearly-i.e., that the principle on which he wrote was, to give only what fell under his own notice-by the omission of the passion of Peter, and also of the journey of Paul, when he went from the city-Rome-to Spain. . . . The third book of the Gospel, that according to Luke, the well-known physician Luke wrote in his own name in order after the ascension of Christ, and when Paul had associated him with himself as one studious of right. Nor did he himself see the Lord in the flesh; and he, according as he was able to accomplish it, began his narrative with the nativity of John.” (*The Muratorian Canon*, Roberts-Donaldson Translators)

The *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* to the Gospel of Luke (written about 150-180 AD) also refers to this book by the title “The Acts of the Apostles.” That title is not entirely accurate because it only covers some of the acts of Peter and primarily follows the acts of Saul of Tarsus who became known as Paul.

Although Luke’s name does not appear in the book, early Church Fathers attest that he is the author. Eusebius and Jerome say that Luke was a native of Antioch in Syria. There is also some early church tradition that he was from Philippi. The *Anti-Marcionite Prologues* says: “Luke is a Syrian of Antioch, a Syrian by race, a physician by profession. He had become a disciple of the apostles and later followed Paul until his (Paul's) martyrdom, having served the Lord continuously, unmarried, without children, filled with the Holy Spirit he died at the age of eighty-four years in Boeotia. [Since there were already other gospels, that According to Matthew written in Judea, that According to Mark (written in) Italy, he was urged by the Holy Spirit to write his whole gospel among those in the region of Achaea, as he indicates this in the preface that there were already other writings before him . . .]” (Helmut Koester quoting the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* for Luke in his book, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 335)

The author says this is the second book that he has written for the benefit of Theophilus. He also changes the narrative from 3rd person to 1st person plural in 16:10 which indicates he traveled with Paul. In Paul’s letter to the Colossians, he mentions that Luke, the beloved physician, was with him and sent his greetings.

Date

In Acts, Luke shows the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome (the ends of the earth at that time) which is what Jesus told his disciples just before he ascended back to heaven. Luke doesn’t mention several important events, including Emperor Nero’s persecution of Christians beginning in 64 AD, the death of Paul by beheading in 68 AD, and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus (who later became the Roman emperor) in 70 AD. There is some early tradition that Paul was released in 62 AD and that he traveled to the present day region of Spain and then was once again taken prisoner and finally beheaded in 68 AD. Luke doesn’t include any of this in his story. The story in Acts ends with the information that Paul was a prisoner in Rome for two years in his own rented home. So the book was most probably written during those two years.

Source

Some scholars think Luke used the gospel account of Mark which is based on the sermons of Peter and

probably written in Rome as one of his sources. While it is possible that he gathered some information from Peter or Mark's writings, he has more information than is included in Mark's gospel. In the beginning of his gospel account, Luke tells us that he carefully investigated everything from the beginning so that Theophilus may know the certainty of the things he has been taught. So, it appears that Luke interviewed people for his gospel account. For Acts, he walked with Paul for the events in half of the book and most probably could have discussed the earlier events with Peter since he is the primary individual whose actions are followed until Saul of Tarsus comes on the scene and becomes known as Paul.

Purpose of Writing

There have been many possible purposes for Luke writing this book that have been proposed such as: to evangelize, to defend Paul and Christianity from Jewish attacks, to explain the delay in Jesus' return, to confirm the gospel, to record the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome and throughout the Roman world, and many others. A highly probable purpose for the writing of Acts (and the gospel account) comes from looking at the wording of Luke's beginning of both books. Both are apparently intended to enlighten an individual identified as Theophilus. In Greek, Theophilus is the conjoining of two Greek words, theo (god) and phileo (love), which would mean God lover. So some scholars have presumed that Luke used this as a pseudonym for the real individual who might have been the benefactor that paid for Luke to become a physician. Some have thought he was a wealthy relative of the Emperor Nero who wanted to remain anonymous because of possible persecution.

But another possibility comes from the structure of the book and why it ends with Paul's imprisonment in Rome. In this proposal, it is noticed that Theophilus is addressed as "most excellent" which would have been a way of addressing a prominent Roman official. According to the events recorded in Acts, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and taken to Caesarea to be tried by Felix, the Roman Governor of Judea. Felix could find nothing of which Paul was guilty but was afraid of an uprising of the Jews so he kept Paul under house arrest for two years. When Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, he was not inclined to become involved and wanted Paul to agree to return to Jerusalem and be tried by the Jewish authorities. But since Paul was a Roman citizen, he appealed to have his case heard by Caesar. So Paul was then sent by ship to Rome, and along the way was shipwrecked. He and the entire crew made it safely to the shore of Malta, where they stayed for three months until they could once again sail for Rome. Then Luke records that after arriving in Rome, Paul was imprisoned in a house, for which he provided his own rent, for two years. The combination of the book of Luke and the book of Acts is seen as a legal brief to the Roman official, Theophilus, to either persuade him that Paul was not receiving a speedy trial as was expected by Roman law for Roman citizens and thus he should be released, or so that Theophilus, acting as a defense counsel, could provide evidence to Caesar that Paul had none against Roman law and should be released. In addition to being a legal brief, the two books would also be evangelistic because they told what Jesus had done for everyone who believed in him and showed how that had spread throughout the Roman world from Jerusalem to Rome and had affected the lives of individuals. This seems to be a plausible purpose which at the same time accomplishes some of the other proposed purposes.

The question arises why Luke wrote two books instead of just one. One proposed answer is that he wrote the first book, his gospel account, as evangelistic and the second book, Acts, as a history of the spread of Christianity. But a better explanation is that the "books" of that day were written on scrolls and the largest scroll possible was 25 feet long. Both of Luke's "books" would have been scrolls of about 22 feet in length so it would not have been possible to have just one "book."

If, as some tradition has it, Paul was released after those two years and journeyed to Spain (which was his stated desire (Rom 15:28), then Paul was later arrested again and brought to Rome during the persecution of Christians which Nero began after he set fire to part of Rome in 64 AD and blamed it on Christians. That would account for Paul's beheading in 68 AD as a leader of the Christians which the book of Acts clearly shows.

Chapter 1

Verses 1 – 11. Luke begins by referring to his previous book and that in it he wrote about all Jesus began to do until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving instructions to his disciples. He says that after suffering (meaning his crucifixion and death), Jesus appeared to these men (apostles – the men especially selected by Jesus to be the first leaders of the Church) and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He informs us that he appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. Forty is a significant number in God's story (Bible) of his dealings with mankind. It always refers to a time of testing or preparation for what God is doing. Two examples of this testing or preparation are God instructing Moses on Mt. Sinai (Ex 24:18) and before Jesus began his ministry, he was tested in the wilderness for 40 days (Matt 4:1-2; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2).

Then Luke tells us that on one occasion while eating with them, Jesus commanded his apostles not to leave Jerusalem until they were given the gift that he had promised. Luke also reported this at the end of his first book recording the life and ministry of Jesus (Luke 24:49). John also records the promise (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) and Jesus breathing on the disciples and giving them the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). Then Jesus said that as John baptized with water they would in a few days be baptized by the Holy Spirit. This puts all the receiving of the Holy Spirit into context showing that what is to happen in a few days is not the Holy Spirit indwelling the disciples, but the Holy Spirit empowering the apostles.

With this information, the disciples wonder if that means Jesus is going to restore the kingdom to Israel. They are thinking that it means the nation of Israel will become dominant over Rome and all other nations and be ruled by God. But Jesus tells them that it is not for them to know the times or dates that things will happen according to God's own authority. That clearly indicates that Jesus' followers will not know exactly when God has determined is the time for Jesus to take control of the world and establish his kingdom rule. Instead of focusing on the establishing of rule of the kingdom of God in Israel, the apostles were to focus on something different.

Jesus goes on to say that the disciples will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and that they will be witness of what Jesus has done and can do. And he says that they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth. Since they will be in Jerusalem when empowered by the Holy Spirit that would indicate their witness would spread throughout the world beginning with what they do and say in Jerusalem. It would also indicate that wherever they went throughout the Roman world, they would provide a witness to what Jesus had done and would do for everyone who believed and accepted it. This agrees with the Greek grammar construction that Matthew used when he told the disciples "As you go, make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). The empowering of the Holy Spirit is fundamental for the apostles to accomplish what Jesus has told them they would do – be his witnesses throughout the world. With this, Luke is setting the stage to explain everything else that he records in the growth and spread of belief in Jesus and the obedient following of those believers. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that enables believers to go throughout the world telling people about what Jesus has done and by convincing proofs help them to believe and become followers of Jesus.

Then after telling them this, Jesus was taken up before their eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. As any person would do, the disciples stood in amazement, looking into the sky where Jesus had disappeared before their eyes. Suddenly two men dressed in white (indicating they were angels) stood beside them and asked why they were staring into the sky. The men said that as they had seen Jesus go into heaven, he would return in the same way. That means Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives out of the clouds in the sky. This agrees with what Daniel wrote (Dan 7:13), what Zechariah wrote (Zech 14:4), and what the gospel accounts record that Jesus said about his return (Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26; 14:62).

Luke could only have learned about these events by talking with the disciples because they are not recorded in any of the gospel accounts.

Verses 12 – 26. The disciples returned to the room (possibly where they had eaten the last Passover supper with Jesus) from the Mount of Olives where they were when Jesus ascended into heaven. Luke names the eleven who were present and says they all joined together constantly in prayer (would seem to indicate daily, perhaps at the normal times of prayer at the temple – not that they didn't do anything else but pray) along with Jesus' mother, Mary, his brothers, and other women. The names of Jesus' brothers (half-brothers) are James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matt 13:55) but we don't know the names of his sisters (half-sisters).

Peter, who the disciples recognize as the leader of the apostles since Jesus restored him and gave him the command to “feed my sheep” (John 21:17), begins to lead the group of disciples as they wait in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded. Luke tells us that the disciples in this group numbered about 120 at that time. Paul reports that after his resurrection Jesus appeared to 500 of the brothers (followers) at the same time and that most of them were still living when he wrote it (1 Cor 15:6), so we can conclude that the number of believers in Jerusalem at this time was more than 120. But this was the group that was gathered around the apostles and joining them in praying for the promised empowering of the Holy Spirit. Peter reminds the group of disciples of that what David had written in Psalm 41, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had been fulfilled by Judas when he guided the guards to where Jesus was so they could arrest him. Peter was referring to verse 9 of Psalm 41 which reads, “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”

Then, as a piece of information, Luke tells us about the death of Judas. He says with the reward he received for his wickedness in betraying Jesus (30 pieces of silver – Matt 27:3) Judas bought a field and there he fell headlong, his body burst open, and all his intestines spilled out. Luke says everyone in Jerusalem heard about this so the field was called the “Field of Blood.” Perhaps the people called it this because it had been purchased with blood money (the 30 pieces of silver). This account differs somewhat from what Matthew records (Matt 27:5). Matthew says Judas tried to return the money and when the priests refused it, threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. Since it was forbidden to put “tainted” money in the temple treasury, the priests used it to buy a potter's field to use as a burial place for foreigners. And Matthew says that was a fulfillment of prophecies written in Jeremiah (Jer 32:6-9 and also Zech 11:12-13). Both accounts can agree when you understand that the money used to buy the field still technically belonged to Judas even though he had thrown it into the temple, and if you consider that when he hanged himself he probably fell to the ground where his body burst and spilled his intestines out.

Peter reminds the disciples of two passages from the Psalms (69:25; 109:8) which he says indicates it is necessary to replace Judas with another follower who had been with them and heard Jesus' teaching beginning with John's baptism all the way to Jesus' resurrection. He says that one of them must become a witness with them of Jesus' resurrection. When Luke says “they” proposed two men, Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias, it isn't clear whether “they” refers to the whole group of disciples or just the Eleven who had been specifically called and appointed to leadership by Jesus. It is probably safe to presume that “they” refers to the Eleven because it is unlikely that the entire group would know which of the group had actually been with Jesus from his baptism to his crucifixion. But when Luke says “they prayed” it is safe to presume that he means the entire group of disciples asked Jesus to indicate to them which of the men should be chosen to take over the apostolic ministry that Judas abandoned when he betrayed Jesus. This is the first use of the term apostle to refer to the twelve men Jesus had chosen to disciple in a special way and to which he gave leadership of the Church in the beginning. Apostle is from the Greek “*apo stello*” which literally translated is “from sent.” This individual would join the other eleven men in their appointed mission of going throughout what was then the known world to tell people about Jesus and his resurrection so that people could believe and become followers. All believers will be witnesses for Jesus by the way they live for him, whether good or bad, but these twelve men have a specific ministry and will have a prominent place in the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns to establish his rule on earth because they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel during that the Millennium. (Matt 19:28) Paul (Saul of Tarsus) never claimed to be one of the Twelve Apostles although he did claim that his apostleship was a direct commission from Jesus and thus he considered himself as “one abnormally born” (1 Cor 15:8). So, after praying, they cast lots (like voting) and by this method chose Matthias to be one of the Twelve.

Chapter 2

Verses 1 – 13. Now, Luke tells us that when the day of Pentecost came (33 AD), the Twelve apostles were gathered together in one place. We know from verse 14, later, that the Twelve were together and there is nothing to indicate that the rest of the 120 previously meeting together were there. Again, Luke describes events that he could have only learned about from interviewing the Twelve apostles who were present. He says there was suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind from heaven that filled the whole house where they were sitting. And they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them are filled with (empowered by as Jesus said in Acts 1:8 and Luke 24:49) the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Pentecost was an annual spring feast when the Jews presented the first fruits of their wheat harvest to God. It was also called the Feast of Harvest and the Feast of Weeks in earlier times (Ex 34:22). It was called the Feast of Weeks because it was celebrated immediately following a week of weeks (49 days) after Passover, so on the fiftieth day after Passover. The word Pentecost is transliterated from the Greek and means fifty. Since Jesus spent 40 days teaching the apostles more about the Kingdom of God, some people think that Jesus' ascension described in chapter 1 occurred 10 days before Pentecost. But that is incorrect because Jesus wasn't resurrected until on the second day after Passover and then spent 40 days with the apostles so the ascension occurred on the 42nd day after Passover and 8 days before Pentecost. The Jews also celebrated Pentecost as the anniversary of the giving of the Law to Moses in the third month after they left Egypt (Ex 19:1). Since this was a major festival for the Jews, there were Jews there from every nation throughout the known world of that time. When the Twelve apostles left the room and mixed with the crowds, they were now empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak to all the people in their native language. This would make the presentation of the gospel about Jesus easier for the people to understand.

This filling (empowering) by the Spirit was not a one-time event. We will find believers being filled by the Spirit a number of times throughout Luke's description of the acts that Peter and Paul did. In every case, it shows the Spirit's presence and enabling of the believer to share the gospel or perform some specific service related to outreach to people. Filling of the Spirit is never shown as something that is private to the individual or in any way edifies or brings honor to the believer that the Spirit fills. Acts is not the only place in Scripture that we learn about the filling of the Spirit. We see it in the Old Testament as people, especially the prophets, were filled by the Spirit so they could do what God has directed them to do. Here are a couple of examples: Ex 35:30-34; Num 11:26-29; and 1 Sam 10:6, 10. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he told all believers to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). Just like the first disciples were indwelt with the Spirit the first night after Jesus' resurrection, every person who becomes a believer is given and indwelt by the Spirit when they believe and accept Jesus as their Lord and Master. But believers only experience the Spirit's power as they yield to his control. Believers are never the ones who control whether they speak in tongues or perform other miraculous things. It is always God's decision to have the Spirit empower a believer to be able to do something special, like speak in a language they don't know to share the gospel or perform some miracle that God's wants done to reach out to some group or individual. On this Pentecost day, the Twelve were assembled and yielding to the control of the Spirit and that is the reason they could be empowered as they were to speak in languages they didn't know and share the gospel with people in those languages. This speaking in tongues was not a worship language but a miraculous gifting at a particular time to enable the Twelve to share the gospel. We have no evidence that the Twelve continued to be able to speak in those or other tongues that they didn't know.

The tongues that the Twelve spoke were languages that someone in the crowd understood even though everyone didn't understand them. So some of the people who heard languages they didn't understand mocked the Twelve and said they must be drunk to be "babbling" like they were doing. But people who did understand they were speaking in languages that people around them understood were amazed and wondered what this happening could mean.

Verses 14 -41. So Peter stood up and addressed the crowd and especially the Jews who were saying the Twelve

were drunk. He says he wants to explain what is happening and begins by saying they are not drunk because it is only 9 a.m. He says what is happening was spoken of by the prophet Joel and then quotes Joel 2:28-32. Just because Peter says this was spoken of by Joel doesn't mean he is saying that it is a complete fulfillment of what Joel wrote. In fact, the last two verses that he quotes from Joel specifically speak about events that will occur just before the return of Jesus that is the great and glorious day of the Lord. Peter's quoting of Joel seems to be for the purpose of showing the people that the Twelve speaking in tongues was evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit.

After quoting Joel, Peter goes on to speak about Jesus and the fact that the Jewish leaders were instrumental in his crucifixion by the Romans. Of course we know that it was ultimately God's plan and Jesus was in control of his life and gave it up freely as he specifically said. And Peter goes on to say that God raised Jesus from death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. And he quotes David's Psalm 16:8-11 to prove it was God's plan. Then he reminds them that David had received God's promise that one of his descendants would be on his throne and, as a prophet seeing what was ahead, wrote about the resurrection of the Messiah and that his body would not see decay. Then Peter plainly says that God has raised Jesus from death to life and that they (the Twelve) are all witnesses of that fact. Then he says that since Jesus has been exalted to God's right hand, he has received and poured out the Holy Spirit upon the ones they now see and caused this thing (speaking in tongues) that they are witnessing. Then he again quotes a psalm of David after reminding them that when David wrote it he did not ascend to heaven and yet he wrote "The Lord said to my Lord; 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" (Psalm 110:1)

When the people heard all of what Peter was saying, they were "cut to the heart" (meaning they were deeply moved) and they asked Peter and the other apostles (the Twelve) "What shall we do?" This shows many in the crowd were ready to believe in Jesus and his resurrection, so they wanted to know what action they should take. Peter replies that they should repent (change their minds about how they were living) and be baptized in the name of Jesus so that their sin could be forgiven (meaning they accepted Jesus' death as payment and forgiveness of their sin as the sacrificial lamb as at Passover). Then he proclaims that they will receive the Holy Spirit (just as the disciples did on the night after Jesus' resurrection). Peter says that this promise is for all of them, their children who are far off (at home wherever they lived) and for all people who are called by God (everybody who will believe and accept Jesus' death). Peter warned them with many other words that Luke didn't record for us and pleaded with them to save themselves "from this corrupt generation."

Then Luke tells us that those who accepted his message (meaning they believed Jesus was the Messiah whom they were seeking) were baptized and that the number of those new believers was about 3,000.

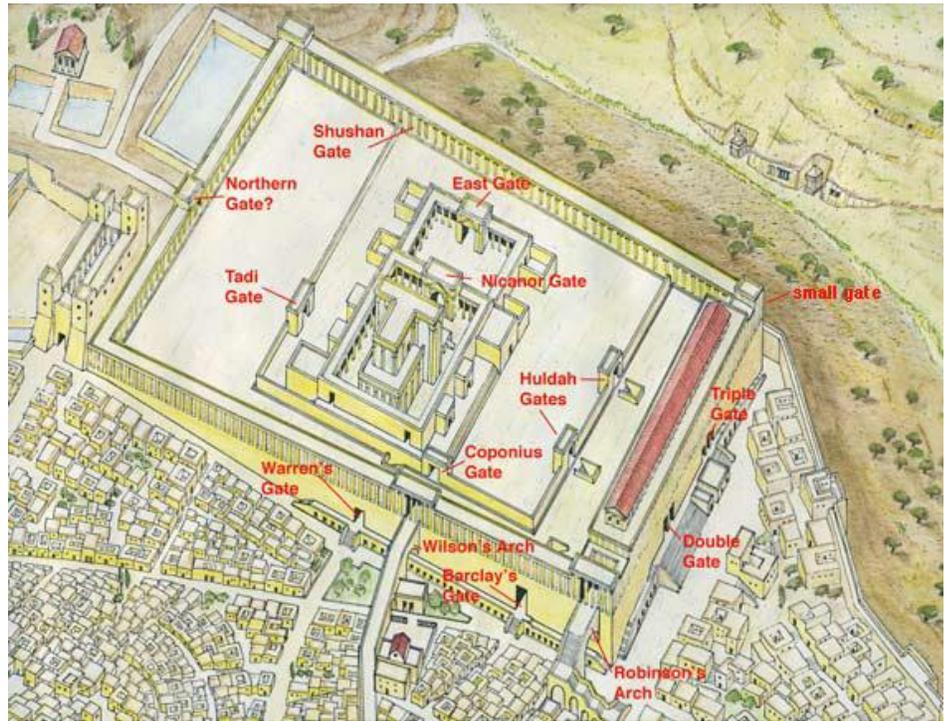
Verses 42 – 47. When Luke now says "they" he must be referring to the believers who lived in Jerusalem because those of the 3,000 who lived in other lands would have returned home. But those who lived in or near Jerusalem devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship with the other believers, to breaking of bread together (eating a meal but specifically in observing what Jesus told them during his last Passover supper with them to observe to remember his death and the forgiveness of sin until he returned), and to prayer. Since the group of believers, even just in Jerusalem, would have been too large to gather in one house that means the apostles each went to be with a group of believers and share Jesus' teaching with them and celebrate the breaking of bread to remember his sacrifice. Luke says all the believers were in awe and saw many wonders and miraculous signs done by the apostles. Notice he doesn't say the wonders and signs were done by all the believers. Most of those believers were new converts to following Jesus and needed to grow in maturity and their obedience to Jesus' teaching so that they allowed the Holy Spirit to have control of their lives as the apostles had before they were empowered by the Spirit on Pentecost.

Luke says the believers were in such unity of desire to follow Jesus' teaching that they sold possessions they had so that those who were in need would have the need met. That doesn't mean they sold everything they had and gave it all to the apostles to use as they decided. We will see this clearer in chapter 5. Luke clarifies that the believers met together in the temple courts which was the common place for teaching to be done, especially

by larger groups. And he says they broke bread in their homes (smaller groups) and ate together (fellowship) with glad and sincere hearts (their unity in desire to obediently follow Jesus' teaching). And Luke says they were praising God and enjoying the favor of all people. The favor of all people couldn't have included the Jewish religious leadership for we will see that Peter and John are called before the Sanhedrin in chapter 4 and told to quit speaking about Jesus. But many of the other Jewish people were convinced by what they heard and saw because Luke says that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." So again we see that the wonders and miraculous signs the apostles (Twelve) did was for outreach and sharing of the gospel about Jesus.

Chapter 3

Verses 1 – 10. Now Luke describes for us an event that shows the Apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform miracles. He doesn't specify when or how long after Pentecost this happened, but we can see the Apostles doing just as Luke said in chapter 2, verse 42 and 46. Peter and John were going to the temple for prayer at the normal time of 3 p.m. and were headed for the gate called Beautiful. There is no way to tell which gate this is because none of them were called by this name. The name appears to be more descriptive but we know that the gate led to Solomon's Colonnade because in verse 11 people come running to them there because of the miracle that has occurred. The double gate and the triple gate of the south side of the temple compound had wide steps approaching them making it easier for more people to enter and thus would be an ideal place for a man crippled from birth to be placed to beg from people entering the temple. And the stairs from the gates up to the temple level exited just below the royal porch called Solomon's Colonnade.



As Peter and John were about to enter the gate, the crippled man begged from them to give him money. Peter's reply indicates that he wanted the man's full attention and not just a passing look while begging. The man obliged probably because he expected to get a good handout. But Peter, under the power of the Holy Spirit isn't going to give a handout but a hand up. Since this man has been crippled since birth (over 40 years by verse 22), the bones of his legs would not have matured and grown strong as he matured. His leg muscles would have been atrophied and not able for him to walk. His brain would not have developed the pathways for him to be able to balance upright, let alone walk or jump. And yet, when Peter takes him by the hand and commands him to walk, the man instantly has his feet, ankles and everything else necessary for walking and jumping become a reality in his life. This is the same power over the material world that Jesus showed and the power of God in creation. This miracle could not have been done by the will of Peter but by the will of God through the power of the Holy Spirit working through Peter's obedience. The previously crippled man goes through the Beautiful gate with Peter and John praising God for what has happened. The people recognize the man as the one they have just passed as they entered the Court of the Gentiles and are amazed (wonderment) at what had happened to him.

Verses 11 – 26. When Peter sees a crowd gathering in Solomon's Colonnade, he uses the opportunity to tell the people about Jesus. He first asks them why they are surprised and why they stare at us (Peter and John) as it

they had done this amazing thing by their own power. Then he points them to Jesus, saying that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has glorified his servant Jesus through this. Then he reminds them of their part in disowning him before Pilate and asking for a murderer to be released (over 50 days previously) and so the author of life was killed. But then he says God raised him from the dead and announces that they (Peter and John) are witnesses of this (thus fulfilling the requirement that there must be two witnesses for something to be judged true). Peter says it was by (through) faith in the name of Jesus that the man was made strong and has given him the complete healing that they can see.

Peter tells his audience that they and their leaders (priests, scribes, and Pharisees) acted out of ignorance in disowning Jesus and having him killed. Then he says this was how God fulfilled what he had foretold through the prophets that the Messiah would suffer (Isa 52:13 – 53:12). That the Messiah should suffer was a problem for the Jews to believe and even the disciples who walked with Jesus as he taught and performed miracles had some difficulty accepting it. Peter took a very gentle approach with the people by saying they acted out of ignorance, probably because he expected it to help them repent, accept Jesus so that their sins may be wiped out, times of refreshing may come, and God may send the Messiah, Jesus, at the appointed time. But until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago by the prophets, Jesus must remain in heaven. Then he reminds his hearers that Moses had said that the Lord would raise up for them a prophet like him and everyone must listen to him or be completely cut off from among his people (Deut 18:15, 18, 19). Peter says all the prophets from Samuel on have foretold these days and that the people are heirs of them and the covenant God made with their forefathers. He reminds them of God's promise to Abraham that through his descendants all peoples on earth will be blessed. And he says that when God raised his servant (Jesus) he sent him first to them (Jews) to bless them by turning each of them from their wicked ways.

Chapter 4

Verses 1 – 4. While Peter is still talking with the crowd, the priests (at least some of them), the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John and seized them because they were greatly disturbed because the Apostles were teaching and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees didn't believe the soul was immortal and thus there was no life after death and no punishment. This was a major point in which they disagreed with Jesus' teaching and why they would not accept him as Messiah. Therefore, they also opposed the Apostles because they taught that Jesus was resurrected, there is life after death, and rewards and punishments. Peter and John were going to the temple for prayer at 3 p.m. but when they are seized it is evening so Peter had been talking with the crowd for several hours. And since it is evening, both men are put in jail until the next day when the Sanhedrin can question them and rule whether they have done something wrong. But of the crowd that heard Peter speak, many believed what they heard. Luke tells us that because of this healing and Peter's addressing the crowd, the number of believers increased to about 5,000. Three thousand had believed on Pentecost but many of them, because they were pilgrims from distant lands, would have returned to their homes before this event happened.

Verses 5 – 22. The next day, Luke tells us that the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law met. Those individuals would have been the high priest as presiding officer of the Sanhedrin which was composed of 70 men, mostly the aristocratic Sadducees, and lay leaders, who were mainly Pharisees (teachers of the law). Luke specifically mentions Annas, calling him the high priest, along with Caiaphas, John, and Alexander as members of the high priest's family. The official record of the individuals who served as high priest from 6 AD to 36 AD are as follows. Annas served from 6 to 15 AD until he was deposed by the Roman procurator. Ishmael, the son of Annas, served for one year, 15 to 16 AD. Eleazar, the son of Annas, served for one year, 16 to 17 D. Simon, the son of Camithus, served for one year, 17 to 18 AD. Joseph Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, served from 18 to 36 AD so he was the high priest during all of Jesus' earthly ministry. . Even though Caiaphas was the official high priest, Annas, as patriarch of the family, was still considered by most to be the true high priest and thus held much power behind the scenes. But although Luke calls Annas the high priest, it would have been Caiaphas who led the Sanhedrin in trying Peter and John.

We know from verse 14 that the previously crippled (lame) beggar who had been healed was also present. The Sanhedrin wanted to know by what name (by what authority) or by what power Peter and John had done this healing. The rulers were following what was commanded in Deut 13:1-5, which says if anyone announces (or does) a miraculous sign or wonder they should be investigated to see if they are leading the people to follow gods other than Yahweh (YHWH). And if they are found to be leading the people away from Yahweh, they should be stoned to death to purge the evil from among the people.

Jesus had promised the disciples that when they stood before hostile adversaries, the Holy Spirit would give them the words to speak. (Matt 10:18-20; Mark 13:11; Luke 21:12-15) So Peter and John weren't worried about what to say, they just allowed the Holy Spirit to have control and said what he put into their mind. That's why Luke wrote that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter refers to what the rulers are doing as "being called to account" which indicates a preliminary hearing (Gk *anakrinometha*). Peter's answer was straight forward that their act of kindness shown to the crippled man was accomplished by the power of the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, whom they had crucified but whom God had raised from death. He tells them that there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved. We should remember that this group was the most powerful men in Israel except for the Romans, and it was the group that had condemned Jesus just a few weeks earlier. So, Peter was being quite bold to accuse them of condemning Jesus to death and quite literally subjecting himself to their possible retribution.

The leaders recognized the boldness of Peter and probably from his language that he was not a learned individual (unschooled), but since the evidence of the healing was standing before them, they couldn't say it hadn't happened. They also recognized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. But for the rulers to agree that the healing had happened by the power of Jesus' name meant affirming Jesus as Messiah. So they had a problem. They wanted to stop the spreading of any belief in Jesus as the Messiah so they needed to stop the disciples from declaring healing in Jesus' name. If the rulers could produce the dead body of Jesus that would have stopped the Apostles from teaching in Jesus' name and proclaiming that he was resurrected from death. But they didn't which means they knew the tomb was miraculously empty. So, since they had no way of disproving what the Apostles were teaching, they commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

Peter's and John's reply is classic because the Sanhedrin's command contradicted the command that Jesus had given them in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8 to be his witnesses around the world and to teach and baptize in his name. Since Jesus is the Messiah, God in the flesh (Immanuel), the command of the Sanhedrin was a command against God. Thus they told the rulers to judge whether it was right for them to obey the Sanhedrin's command or God's. Even in the face of such open defiance, the Sanhedrin could not do anything more than threaten the Apostles. There was nothing for which they could punish them. And finally, we are told that the man who was healed was over forty years old.

Verses 23 – 31. When Peter and John are released by the Sanhedrin, they return to the other Apostles and disciples and report all that had happened. The disciples all raise their voices in prayer to God and quote Psalm 2:1-2 about rulers being against the Lord and his Anointed One (Messiah). They recount that Herod and Pilate conspired together against Jesus, but that it all happened according to God's will that had been decided beforehand. Then, they asked God to enable his servants to speak with even more boldness and to perform miraculous signs and wonders in Jesus' name. They didn't ask for the persecution to end or for retribution on their persecutors, but for boldness to follow Jesus' commands even while being persecuted. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the power of the Spirit and spoke God's word boldly.

Luke was not present to witness these events for himself, so everything he has written is a compilation of what he learned by interviewing Peter, John, the other Apostles and disciples, and maybe even the crippled man. He may have even learned some of it from Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, or from what Saul (Paul) may have seen or heard from Gamaliel. But it is what the Holy Spirit wanted recorded for us to learn.

Verses 32 – 37. These verses expand upon what Luke wrote previously in Chapter 2:42-47 about the unity of the disciples which extended beyond spiritual matters to physical matters as well. The economic situation in Jerusalem was deteriorating due to famine and political unrest. The rest of the Jews would have been putting economic and social pressure on those who became followers of Jesus. The disciples recognized that everything they had was a gift from God and not something that should be hoarded and used exclusively for private use. Thus, whenever any one of them had a need, someone who had the ability would sell or otherwise contribute what they had to assist with meeting that need. If some had extra property, they might sell it and bring money for the Apostles to distribute to meet the needs. Luke tells us of a specific instance when Levite from Cyprus, whom they called Barnabas (Son of Encouragement) sold a piece of land that he had and gave the money to the Apostles. This doesn't imply everyone's property was lumped together for everyone's use and the Apostles decided how it would all be used. That is a communal, socialistic idea that many cults use to hold control over their members. In fact, the next event that Luke describes directly contradicts that type of interpretation of this passage. This voluntary sharing was a witness with their actions as well as their words that they loved one another. This was what Jesus meant when he said, "All men will know you are my disciples if you love one another." (John 13:35)

Chapter 5

Verses 1 – 11. From verses 32 to 37, one might try to conclude that this first community of believers was sinless. But Luke shows with this story of the Holy Spirit's work that to make that conclusion would be wrong. This story shows that God was working in the early Church to judge disobedience just as he blessed obedience.

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, also had a piece of property like Barnabas did and decided to sell it like him. But they conspired together to keep part of the money from the sale but tell the Apostles and the Church that they were giving all of it. This was a lie not only to the Apostles and the Church, but was a lie before God because they wanted acclaim like Barnabas had received. Once again, Peter, because he was allowing the Holy Spirit to control his life, was shown that Satan had prompted them to lie to the Holy Spirit. He confronts Ananias with the fact of the lie and points out to him (and us) that the property belonged to him before he sold it and the money was his to use as he desired after he sold it. That refutes the idea that the believers held all their possession in a communal agreement with the Apostles determining how it should be used. Peter explains that Ananias' lie about giving all the sale proceeds was not to the Church or the Apostles but really was a lie to God. When Ananias hears what Peter has to say, he falls down dead and some young men come in to remove the body. When Sapphira comes to see Peter about three hours later without knowing what had happened to her husband, Peter asks her if the money was the price she and Ananias received for the land? This gave her a chance to tell the truth, but she lied. Peter asks how she could agree with her husband to test the Spirit and announces that the men who removed his body will come and remove hers. And she falls down dead. Notice Luke doesn't say Peter spoke anything to cause Ananias or Sapphira to die. It was the work of God judging their disobedience. That put all of the believers on notice that you can't lie to the Holy Spirit because he is God and knows the hearts and thoughts of individuals.

Verses 12 – 16. Then Luke again states that the Apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people (not just the believers but the masses). They also continued to meet in Solomon's Colonnade to talk about Jesus, but the people of Jerusalem didn't join them, even though they regarded them highly, because they were afraid of what the religious leaders might do. Still, people heard and people were becoming believers and followers of Jesus. The people brought sick people and laid them in the streets where Peter's shadow might fall on them as he walked along in the hope that they would be "magically" cured. Luke says nothing about any of those people being healed from that, but he does say that people from outlying towns brought their sick and those tormented by evil spirits and gathered so that the Apostles might heal them, and they were healed. Again, the work of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 17 – 42. There is no indication how much time has passed from the healing of the man born crippled and this event. But we need to remember that when the Sanhedrin interrogated Peter and John with the intent to

punish them and stop them from speaking about Jesus and especially his resurrection, they could find no justification for punishment because the healed man stood before them as positive proof of the miraculous healing that had happened in Jesus' name. Now, with the Apostles performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people (verse 12), the high priest (Annas or Caiaphas) and all his associates (members of the Sadducees) were filled with jealousy because of what the Apostles were doing.

During Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees appeared to be his most vocal opponents because he opposed their reliance on tradition and rituals to make them right with God. Now, after his resurrection, the main opposition to Jesus and his teachings appear to be the Sadducees because of their rationalism that denied the eternity of the soul and the possibility of resurrection. Jesus' resurrection was a direct denial of their beliefs.

It is not just Peter and John who have been performing miraculous signs and wonders but all the Apostles, so the high priest has all the Apostles arrested and put in jail. During the night an angel appeared, opened the doors of the jail, and brought the Apostles out. Then he told them to go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of the new life that is available through Jesus' resurrection. This means the Apostles would be directly resisting the opposition of the Sadducees. So, at daybreak the Apostles entered the temple courts and began to teach people. This teaching would have taken place in the Court of the Gentiles and probably Solomon's Colonnade.

When the high priest and his associates (Sadducees) called the full Sanhedrin (council of 70 leaders) together, they didn't know the Apostles were in the temple courts teaching. So they sent some of their officers to the jail to bring the Apostles to them. When the officers returned, they reported that the jail was securely locked with guards standing at the doors, but the Apostles were not inside. This made them all wonder what had happened. Then someone came and informed them that the Apostles were teaching in the temple courts. The captain of the temple guards went to bring the Apostles to the Sanhedrin meeting but they did not use force because they feared that the people might stone them. The high priest confronts the Apostles with the fact that the Sanhedrin had commanded them (actually Peter and John) not to teach in "this name" (they wouldn't even say the name Jesus) and now he finds that they have filled Jerusalem with teaching about Jesus and make them (religious leaders) guilty of his blood (death). When those same religious leaders stood before Pilate several weeks earlier and said Jesus' blood was their responsibility, they answered: "Let his blood be on us and on our children." (Matt 27:25) Now they claim that the Apostles are unfairly trying to make them guilty of Jesus' blood.

Peter, as spokesman for the Apostles, doesn't defend what they have done, but states again what he had told them the first time – that they must obey God rather than men. Then Peter proclaims that God had raised Jesus from the dead (resurrection from death to new life) and that they were guilty of having him killed by "hanging on a tree" (crucifixion). A person committing a capital crime and hung to death on a tree was considered to be cursed by God. But instead of being cursed by God, Jesus was exalted by God through resurrection and being sat on his right hand as Prince (ruler of God's kingdom) and Savior (Messiah) so that he (Jesus) might give repentance and forgiveness of sin to Israel (people, not nation). Then Peter proclaims that they (Apostles) are witnesses of these things (Jesus' resurrection and glorification) and also says the Holy Spirit (God himself) is also a witness and is given to everyone who obey him (Jesus). When Jesus was asked by the people what they "must do to do the works of God," he replied, "the work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28 – 29) This is what Peter is implying that the Sanhedrin need to do.

When the Sanhedrin hear what Peter says, they are so furious they want to have the Apostles killed. According to Roman rules, no one had authority to inflict capital punishment but the Romans. So the Sanhedrin would have needed to find some pretext to convince the Romans to do it for them like they had for Jesus. But Gamaliel, a Pharisee, stood and ordered that the Apostles be put outside for a while. The Pharisees were the minority party of the Sanhedrin. The title "Pharisee" probably comes from the Aramaic verb "peras" which means "to separate." They attempted to separate themselves to live holy before God by their traditional rituals, and thus studied God's Word (Torah, Prophets, and writings) to learn how God has said to live. Thus they had a lot of influence with the people and consequently in the Sanhedrin. Gamaliel was the most respected Pharisee

and teacher of God's Word, so although he had no position of authority to tell the temple guards to remove the Apostles, his stature as a leader allowed him to order it.

Then Gamaliel addresses the Sanhedrin to encourage them to consider what they intended to do to the Apostles. He reminds them of two other movements to lead the people in revolt that ended when their leaders died. Historians do not know anything about someone named Theudas and his leading a revolt but suspect it might have been shortly after Herod the Great's death in 4 AD. Josephus mentions a revolt by a Theudas but it occurred more than 10 years after Gamaliel's speech. The revolt led by Judas of Galilee was probably the one that occurred in 6 AD when Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, was deposed and a Roman put in charge of the province of Judea. Gamaliel suggests that in this present case it would be wise to leave the men alone and see what happens. If what they are doing is just of human origins, then it will fail like the others, but if it is of God, then they will not be able to stop it and will find themselves fighting against God. Not much later, Saul of Tarsus who was a disciple of Gamaliel and taught by him, led the fight against the believers with letters of authorization from the Sanhedrin to capture and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and punishment by stoning as we will shortly see was done to Stephen – capital punishment not stopped by the Romans. Gamaliel's speech persuaded the Sanhedrin so instead of death they had the Apostles flogged and again ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus. According to Deuteronomy 25:3, a flogging (whipping with a lash – not the Roman flaying with metal attached to the lash) was not to exceed 40 strikes so the one being whipped was not degraded in the sight of the community. The Talmud (Rabbinic teachings) said to reduce that from 40 to 39 to keep from accidentally doing more than 40. So the Apostles each would have been whipped with 39 strikes of the lash.

The Apostles left from the flogging rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus. And day after day they continued in the temple courts and from house to house they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus had said people would hate and persecute him disciples but that they should rejoice in this. (Matt 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23) Peter would later write that Christians should count it a privilege to suffer for Christ so that they may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1 Pet 4:13)

Chapter 6

Verses 1 – 7. Now Luke describes a problem that developed within the early groups of believers as their numbers grew. There were two groups of Jews in Jerusalem – the Grecian (Hellenistic) and the Aramaic speaking. The Grecian Jews would have been Jews that had at one time lived outside of Israel but were now living in the Jerusalem area. They would have spoken Greek primarily along with the language of whatever country in which they had previously lived. They probably used the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Aramaic speaking Jews would have been those who were native to the area, mainly spoke Aramaic but also may have known Hebrew for reading the Hebrew Scriptures. Some, like Saul of Tarsus (Paul) may have been born and lived for a time outside of the area but came with their families or were sent to live with relatives in the area while they were children. Like Saul, they may have spoken Roman, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic.

A conflict arose between the two groups of Jews because the Grecian Jews thought their widows were being overlooked by the Aramaic speaking Jews when food was being given to provide help to them. So the Apostles (the Twelve) called all the disciples living in the area together to discuss the issue. This would have been a difficult undertaking to get all of them together in one area because of the large number of disciples. So it may have been done in some other manner other than one large meeting, but the exact method is not described. But the Apostles told them it would not be the right thing for them to do to neglect the work to which Jesus had commanded them (teaching, preaching, and prayer) just to wait on tables (distribute food). So they told the disciples to choose seven men from among themselves that the people knew (recognized) were full of the Spirit (giving the Spirit control of their lives) and full of wisdom (given wisdom by the Spirit) and the responsibility of insuring equitable care of all the widows would be their responsibility while the Apostles did their work.

Since the proposal was approved by the whole group, we see that the wisdom for it came from the Holy Spirit and he moved through the people to have it approved. So the people selected Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch who was a convert to Judaism. The people presented these men to the Apostles who prayed and then laid their hands on them symbolizing they were set apart for their specific work as servants of the people. This whole episode is similar to the advice given to Moses by Jethro, his father-in-law, that he should select capable men from all the people and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens to serve as judges for most disputes and only bring to Moses the most difficult ones which he would decide as God commanded him. (Ex 18:13-26) This “laying on of hands” was not a formal ordination (which came later in church history) but a granting of authority to act to solve this problem. Although these men are never called deacons (Greek *diakonos*) their selection probably served as the model for what became the office of deacon.

This episode shows the priorities of the early believers. They showed concern for both the spiritual and physical needs of the people. The leaders' priority was the spiritual (prayer, teaching, preaching) but they were also concerned for the physical needs of the people and adapted their administrative organization and practices to meet effectively meet the needs without neglecting their primary responsibility. Many churches today try to duplicate the form and functions established by these early believers because they think it is the “correct” way to “do” church. Many see this as prescriptive of a “pastor led” or “elder led” model of church governance. But if correctly observed, the elders (Apostles) did not see it was their responsibility to control every aspect of church life, but to encourage the people to select people from themselves who were allowing the Holy Spirit to control their lives and let those people (under the Holy Spirit's guidance) to meet recognized needs. This would leave the leaders to focus their time and efforts on the spiritual guidance of the people and evangelization of those who would listen to their teaching about Jesus.

Then Luke concludes this episode in the life of the early church by saying that the word of God spread and the number of disciples increased rapidly. He also says that a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. It would be interesting to know whether these priests continued their priestly duties in any form or if they had to find some other work to provide for their daily living expenses.

Verses 8 – 15. Now Luke begins to tell us the story of what happened in the life of Stephen who was the first of the men he listed that was selected by the disciples to become their servants to take care of the food distribution to the widows. He tells us that Stephen was full of God's grace and power and, just like the Apostles, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. So we see that the Holy Spirit empowers anyone who allows him to have control of their life to do great and wonderful things in the name of Jesus to glorify God.

Soon, opposition arose to Stephen's witness and the wonders and miraculous signs he was doing. These people who opposed Stephen were Jews that attended a synagogue called “the Freedmen.” We don't really know anything about this them except that they were from Cyrene, Alexandria (north Africa), and the provinces of Cilicia and Asia (Asia Minor – modern day Turkey). Because they are called “freedmen” many scholars presume they were Jews captured by Rome at some time and then given their freedom for some reason. But that is not definitively known. These freedmen of the synagogue argued with Stephen and it would have definitely been about Jesus' resurrection, his being the Messiah, and his death paying the price for people's sin so they could have a right relationship with God. The Holy Spirit guided Stephen in what to say and how to say it so the arguments of the freedmen could not stand up against Stephen's. So, the freedmen persuaded some men to give false witness that Stephen had spoken blasphemy against Moses and God and thus stirred up some of the people, elders, and teachers of the Law (Pharisees). So Stephen was seized and brought before the Sanhedrin where their false witness was presented to prove that Stephen never stopped speaking against the holy place (temple) and against the Law. They claimed they had heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place (temple) and change the customs Moses handed down from God. Jesus did prophesy that the temple would be destroyed but not that he would tear it down. (Matt 24:1-2; Mk 13:1-2; Lk 21:5-6) When the Jews demanded a sign of him, Jesus said, “Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.” (Jn 2:19) Those Jews didn't understand Jesus to say he would tear down the temple but only that he would rebuild it in

three days and they confronted him about the fact it took 46 years for it to become what it was at that time (begun in 19 BC and not completely finished until 63 AD). John points out that the people misunderstood that Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body and his resurrection. (Jn 2:21)

Luke records that everyone in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen and saw that his face was like the face of an angel. It may be that Stephen's face shone like Moses' face after he was in the presence of the Lord. That would be an indication of his close walk with Jesus and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 7

Verse 1. So the high priest (Caiaphas but possibly Annas) asked if the charges were true. This gave Stephen the opportunity to witness before this hostile audience. Verses 2 through 53 record his speech to them. His speech is not exactly a defense against the false charges brought against him. Rather, he defends the believers' new way of worship.

Verses 2 – 8. The false witnesses accused Stephen of speaking words of blasphemy against Moses and God. So Stephen begins his defense by going back to the original patriarch, Abraham. Since Stephen is a Greek name, it is thought that he was a Greek Jew rather than a native of Jerusalem or the surrounding area, but he was respectful of the religious leaders (Sanhedrin) by addressing them as brothers and fathers – brothers because they were fellow Jews and fathers because they would have been older than him and leaders. He uses the title “God of Glory” to refer to God to indicate that he revealed his glory to Abraham when he appeared to him while he was still living as a pagan in Mesopotamia (Ur of the Chaldeans) before he moved to live in Haran. (See Gen 12:1 and 15:7) God's call to Abraham was to leave the land and his family to come to what the Jews recognized as the Promised Land in which they were living. The Jews living in the land were very nationalistic and proud of living in the Promised Land and looked down on those who were not raised there. But they revered Abraham because he was the first patriarch, the ancestor, from which the entire Jewish nation was descended. Stephen is showing that Abraham was willing to leave what he knew and his family just to follow what God told him to do.

Stephen reminds them that although Abraham obeyed God and was promised that his descendants would possess the land, Abraham didn't possess the land as his own. (All he had was the cave in Machpelah that he bought as a place to bury his wife, Sarah. See Gen 23:3-20.) And God promised this to Abraham when he had no children (and was 75 years old when he left Haran). (See Gen 12:2-9) Stephen also reminds the leaders that God had told Abraham that his descendants would be strangers in a country that was not their own and enslaved and that this would last for four hundred years. This doesn't mean Abraham's descendants would be slaves for 400 years but that they would be strangers in the land for 400 years and also enslaved. Abraham entered Egypt the same year he entered Canaan and 430 years later Moses led the exodus from Egypt and that is what is recorded in Exodus 12:40-41. Abraham's son, Isaac – the beginning of the descendants, was born 405 years before the exodus began. Isaac and all his descendants were mistreated while they wandered in Canaan and until Joseph became second in command of Egypt and moved Jacob there. Then sometime after Joseph's death a Pharaoh came to power that hadn't known what Joseph did for the land and made slaves of Abraham's descendants until Moses finally led them out. So, Stephen has shown that God promised Abraham descendants and a land for them even though they didn't possess it for 430 years after Abraham first entered.

Stephen reminds them that God had promised to punish the nation that had enslaved them and that Abraham's descendants would come out and worship him in this place (Promised Land). (See Gen 15:13-14) When the people left Egypt, the Egyptians were punished by giving them gold, silver, bronze, precious stones, and all sorts of cloth, and the Egyptian army that pursued them into the Red Sea was drowned there. So Stephen has shown that God had blessed the people.

Then Stephen reminds them that the covenant of circumcision that set the Jews apart from other people was given to Abraham as a sign and seal of the land, descendants, and blessing God had promised Abraham.

Verses 9 – 16. Now Stephen recounts what God had done with Joseph and his family. The meaning of the Hebrew name, Joseph, is “may God add or give increase.” That was the name given to Jacob’s eleventh of twelve sons, the first one born to the wife he first loved and thought he had married until the morning after the wedding night – Rachel’s father, Laban, had substituted her older sister, Leah, so she would be married – but Rachel was still Jacob’s favorite, so consequently her first-born son was his favorite and he showed it. (Gen 29:16 – 30:24) Stephen reminds the Sanhedrin, that the patriarchs (the other brothers of Joseph who were the first of each of the twelve tribes of Israel) were jealous of Joseph, so they sold him into slavery. But God rescued him from all his troubles. Joseph had wisdom from God and God enabled him to become ruler over Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Then Stephen tells the story of how God worked everything so that Jacob and his family moved to Egypt to provide for them and all the Egyptians during a seven year famine after seven years of abundance. Through this story, Stephen had reminded them that his people had been threatened but God took care of them. Thus those following God can expect him to take care of them in the face of threats. There are a lot of similarities between what happened to Joseph and how God directed his life to bless his people and what happened to Jesus and how God directed his life to save everyone who believes in him and his death. But Stephen never directly refers to any of these similarities and we are not told that the Sanhedrin recognized them. Stephen ends that story by reminding them that the bodies of Jacob and Joseph were brought back to the land promised to Abraham and were buried in the tomb (cave) that Abraham had bought in Shechem. According to Gen 23:1-20, Abraham bought land that included a cave from Ephron in Hebron, and Gen 33:18-19 that Jacob bought land in Shechem. Jacob was buried in the cave of Machpelah (Gen 50:12-13). Joseph was embalmed when he died in Egypt and placed in a coffin (sarcophagus) according to Gen 50:26 and those bone were taken with the Hebrew people when they exited Egypt and carried them with them until sometime after they entered the Promised Land and buried them in the land that Jacob had bought in Shechem (Josh 24:32). It would appear from passages in Scripture (Gen 9:25; 25:23; Mal 1:2-3; Rom 9:11-13) that in the ancient world people often regarded an ancestor in some sense participating in the actions of their descendants. So this may be why Stephen says Abraham purchased the land in Shechem. Shechem is in the land where the Samaritans lived so this was a pointed reference that their respected patriarch was buried in an area that the orthodox Jews despised and avoided (remember that Jesus traveled through Samaria and met an adulterous woman at a well near Sychar that Jacob had dug and spent two days teaching the people of the town and many believed he was the promised Messiah – John 4:1-43).

Verses 17 – 43. Now Stephen moves in his review of Israel’s history to the Exodus and what God did through Moses. Although he briefly moved ahead of the story to tell about the burial in Shechem, he now returns to the time just before the Exodus when the time was near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham to bring his descendants out of slavery and into the Promised Land. He mentions that a Pharaoh after Joseph died dealt treacherously with Jacob’s descendants who had grown numerous and made them slaves. He tells how Hebrew baby boys were to be thrown out after birth so they would die but that Moses protected in his own home and then by Pharaoh’s daughter so that he was educated in all the Egyptian wisdom and that he was powerful in speech and action. He recounts that Moses at age 40 years killed an Egyptian while defending a Hebrew who was being mistreated by the Egyptian. He recounts that Moses thought his Hebrew people would realize that God was using him to rescue them. But the people rejected his leadership asking who made you ruler and judge over us. So, to escape Pharaoh’s wrath Moses fled to Midian where he settled as a foreigner, married and had two sons.

Next Stephen reminds them that after 40 years an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush (which really wasn’t burning) in the desert near Mount Sinai and that he was amazed at the sight. When he went closer to look, the Lord’s voice identified itself as the God of his fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses trembled with fear and did not dare look. God told Moses to take off his sandals because the place where he was standing is holy ground. God tells Moses he has heard the cries of his people and has come to set them free and that he was sending Moses back to Egypt. Stephen is reminding the Sanhedrin that God knows the condition of his people and at the right time sends a savior to free his people. He reminds them that this was the same Moses they had rejected 40 years earlier and now he has been sent by God to be their ruler and deliverer.

Stephen reminds them that Moses not only led the people out of Egypt but that he did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness. And he reminds them that Moses told the people that God will send you a prophet like me from your own people, so the current Jewish leaders shouldn't think of what Moses gave them as the end of God's word to people. Since the entire Sanhedrin knew Jesus had performed many wonders and miraculous signs among the people, this is his way of proclaiming to them that Jesus is that prophet so he was sent by God to speak for God and save people. Stephen obviously isn't blaspheming Moses but proclaiming that Jesus is his successor and thus should be followed and his teaching obeyed. Stephen goes on to remind them that God gave Moses living words to pass on to the people and this happened outside of the Promised Land. But the people refused to obey him and wanted to return to Egypt where they were enslaved. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the living words from God, the people wanted Aaron to make gods for them who would go before them saying they didn't know what had happened to Moses who had led them out of Egypt. So they made an idol in the form of a calf and brought offering to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. Stephen is reminding them that in the past they rejected the great law giver, Moses, and tried to return to worshipping idols instead of the one true God as they now claimed to do. So God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. He says this agrees with the writing of the prophets and quotes Amos 5:25 – 27 which ends by saying God will send the people into exile beyond Damascus. Amos wrote that in 787 BC, so approximately 700 years after the people exited the slavery of Egypt, but wanted to reject Moses' leadership (and therefore God who sent him to be the leader). The implication is that if the people reject Jesus as they rejected Moses they are in danger of God's judgment.

So Stephen has shown the Sanhedrin that rather than speaking against Moses he believed Moses and his prediction that God would send another prophet to speak for him like Moses. And rather than speaking against the Law he was holding it in highest regard.

Verses 44 – 50. Now Stephen turns to the charge that he spoke against the temple. Stephen begins by reminding them that it was the Tabernacle of Testimony that God had directed Moses to have built and gave him the blueprints for its construction, which included an Ark where they were to store the Testimony (the tablets of the Law that God gave them through Moses). The building of the Tabernacle, like the giving of the Law, occurred outside of the Promised Land. The Tabernacle was God's place of dwelling among his people and they carried it with them from that time until the time of King David. David had enjoyed God's favor and asked for the privilege of building a house (temple) for God's dwelling place among them, so, it was David's idea to build a temple and not God's. But Solomon (David's son) was given the privilege and not David. Then Stephen notes that God does not live in a house built by men and quotes the prophet Isaiah's writing of what God had said to him about heaven being his throne and not an earthly house. (Isa 66:1-2) In fact, Solomon recognized this during his prayer dedicating the temple to God. (1 Kings 8:27)

Verses 51 – 53. So Stephen has shown that the Jewish veneration of the Land, the Law, and the Temple and their rejection of the prophet God had sent to be like Moses and lead the people to freedom was the same thing the people had done at Mount Sinai in worshipping idols and wanting to return to their life of slavery. Now Stephen pointedly accuses them of being stiff-necked (self-willed), having uncircumcised hearts (not responding to God), and resisting the Holy Spirit – more serious charges than those of which he had been falsely accused. He says their fathers (ancestors) persecuted all the prophets and even killed those predicting the coming of the Righteous One (the Messiah prophesied by God in Genesis 3 and Moses as being sent after him). (See 1 Kings 19:10, 14; 2 Chron 36:15-16; Neh 9:26; Jer 2:30; 26:20-24) Then he says they (the Sanhedrin) have betrayed and murdered him (Jesus, the Messiah) and calls them ones who have received the Law put into effect by angels but have not obeyed it.

The message of Stephen's speech was that Israel's leaders had failed to recognize that God had told them many years before that they should expect a future change but they were wrongly focusing on the past and refusing to accept the change that God was presently bringing to his people.

Verses 54-60. Upon hearing this final condemnation of their own actions, the Sanhedrin were furious with Stephen. But Stephen, by the power of the Holy Spirit, looks up to heaven and sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Stephen has been confessing Jesus before this hostile audience and this would seem to be showing that Jesus was proclaiming Stephen's righteousness before God, the Father. Stephen tells them that he is seeing the Son of Man (a Messianic title) standing before God and they are so furious that they immediately rush him, drag him out of the city (which could be a mile or two) and began stoning him. The Sanhedrin abandoned the moderating advice that Gamaliel had given when they had all the Apostles standing before them and began persecuting the followers of Jesus.

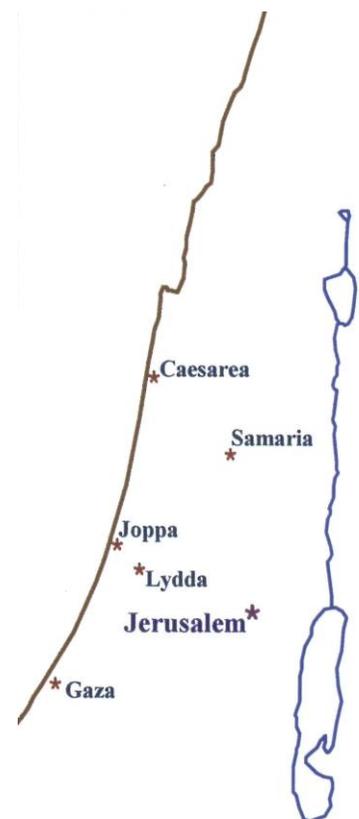
Now Luke reports that the witnesses laid their clothes (robes) at the feet of a young man named Saul. The witnesses would seem to be the witnesses who had falsely accused Stephen and they would have been the ones to throw the first stones just as Jesus had told the ones accusing the women caught in adultery that the ones without sin should cast the first stones

While they are stoning Stephen he falls on his knees and cries out for the Lord not to hold this sin against them. Then he died and his death would have been about 34 AD.

Chapter 8

Verse 1-3. Luke tells us that Saul was there giving approval to Stephen's death. Since Saul (later called Paul) was beheaded about 68 AD, that would mean his was about 34 years old at this time. That Saul was present doesn't mean he was a member of the Sanhedrin. He had lived in Jerusalem with relatives from his early teen years and studied under Gamaliel, so it was only expected that Gamaliel would have him present when the Sanhedrin was meeting to investigate accusations of blasphemy against someone. Saul's approval of Stephen's stoning shows his commitment to eradicating the followers of Jesus and begins Luke's account of how the Holy Spirit used that persecution to spread the gospel about Jesus further into the Roman world. Luke tells us that from that day a great persecution (greater than what the Sanhedrin had previously done) broke out in all of Jerusalem – so it was localized. Consequently, believers scattered throughout Judea and even Samaria (a place and people the Jews despised and from which they stayed away. But Saul began to pursue the believers, going from house to house to find and drag men and women off to prison. The Greek word that is translated "destroy" or "ravaging" is *lumaninomai* and it is not used anywhere else in the new Testament. The Jewish scholars that translated the Old Testament into Greek (Septuagint) used the same word in Psalm 80:13 as descriptive of wild boars destroying a vineyard. In English, we use the word "ravaging" to describe a man raping a woman. That is exactly what Saul was doing to the early believers as he pursued them and dragged them off to prison. Luke records that God's men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. According to Rabbinic teaching of the time, it was inappropriate to openly mourn for someone who had been stoned to death. So it appears that not everyone in Jerusalem agreed with the actions of the Sanhedrin.

Verses 4 – 8. One of the believers leaving Jerusalem was Philip who had been chosen as one of seven men recognized by the believers in Jerusalem as full of the Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:1-7). Philip was part of the believers who went to Samaria and he began proclaiming that the Messiah (Christ) had come. The Samaritans, although they were descendants of Jews who had intermarried with pagans (after the Assyrians conquered the ten northern tribes and sent people from other areas of their empire to settle there), they still were looking for the Messiah that God had promised to send to make everything right between man and himself. So Philip immediately began to tell them the good news and the Holy Spirit



empowered him to do miraculous signs. We are not told explicitly to what city Philip went. Ancient manuscripts differ on whether it was “a” city or “the” city. “A” city could be anywhere in the area of Samaria, while “the” city would most likely mean the capital city which was called “Samaria” just like the area. When viewed on a map, the area and the city of Samaria are north of Jerusalem but by elevation they are lower so the text says he went “down” to Samaria. The people paid close attention to what Philip told them. Luke tells us that at least some of the miraculous signs were that evil (unclean) spirits came out of many people with shrieks and that many paralytics and cripples were healed (like when Peter healed the man at the gate of the temple). Consequently, there was great joy in the city where Philip was sharing the good news. Luke is showing that the Holy Spirit used persecution occurring in Jerusalem to spread the news about Jesus just as Jesus had told his disciples in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Verses 9 – 25. In the city where Philip was witnessing live a man named Simon who was a sorcerer. He was being empowered by evil spirits to do things that amazed the people (magic). The “magic” he did was not sleight of hand like most magicians today are doing, but things that would be considered miraculous but by the power of Satan. Satan’s power is a counterfeit of the power of the Holy Spirit, but never-the-less looks miraculous. Simon also boasted that he was someone great so people high and low (rich and poor, influential and nobodies) gave him their attention (were following him) and proclaimed that he was the divine power known as the Great Power. But when the people heard Philip (who was not promoting himself but Jesus) and believed the good news about the kingdom of God – that Jesus is the Messiah, they were baptized. Simon also believed and was baptized and followed Philip everywhere because he was astonished by the miracles he saw. Simon must have recognized the power because Satan had empowered him to do miraculous type things.

When the Apostles heard in Jerusalem about the Samaritans becoming believers, they sent Peter and John to investigate what was happening. Their investigation was important concerning the feelings that existed between Jews and Samaritans so that Jewish and Samaritan believers could see that God had united them in Jesus as the Messiah. When the Samaritans believed, they would have received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit just as the disciples had on the evening that Jesus was resurrected and he breathed on them and gave them the Holy Spirit. But there had been no manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Samaritan believers, so Peter and John prayed, asking God to make the power of the Holy Spirit manifest in these believers’ lives just as he had on the Day of Pentecost when those believers spoke in tongues. When they laid their hands on the Samaritan believers, the Holy Spirit was made manifest in their lives. Since both the Samaritans and the Jews spoke the same language, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in their lives may have been something different than speaking in tongues because Luke makes no mention of that or even that there was the sound of a mighty wind or tongues of flames as had occurred at Pentecost. Since Philip was a Hellenistic Jew and there was already some dissention between the Hellenistic and Palestinian Jews, if the indwelling of the Holy Spirit had been manifested in when the Samaritans had heard and believed in Jesus, that could have deepened the division. But by the manifestation coming when Peter and John laid on their hands, it confirmed that all believers are the same in Christ and that Palestinian believers were not in some way better than other believers. This manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the Samaritan believers’ lives should not be thought of as a normative for the way the Holy Spirit will be manifested in every believer’s life – laying on of hands and speaking in tongues. In John 20:21, Jesus breathed on the disciples and they received the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit manifested his power in the disciples who had already received him in John 20:21 by enabling them to speak in tongues (other languages they didn’t speak). It is not said that those who believed that day had any manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s presence in their lives. In the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, later in this chapter, we’ll see no manifestation of any kind in the eunuch’s life. We will see different manifestations in the conversion of Saul in chapter 9 and Cornelius in chapter 10. When Saul (Paul) writes to the Corinthian believers about spiritual gifts he says that the Spirit gives to each believer the gifts that he (Spirit) determines they should have. (1 Cor 12:1-11) In the midst of explaining spiritual gifts to them, he tells them love (a fruit of the Spirit – Gal 5:22 – in a believer’s life) is greater than the gifts and says that prophecy (predicting the future) will cease and tongues will be stilled. (1 Cor 13:8) Then he tells them to desire prophecy over tongues because prophecy speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort. So the

prophecy he is advocating is the “speaking forth the word of God” and not predicting the future. (1 Cor 14:1-4) Since he encourages the gift of speaking forth the word of God over tongues and even says tongues will cease, that means speaking in tongues cannot be a normal sign of a person receiving or even being empowered by the Holy Spirit. This view is also confirmed by the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch and Saul as we shall see.

Although Luke doesn't tell us what the manifestation of the Holy Spirit was in the Samaritan believers' lives, there obviously had to be some observable sign. Simon, who had been a sorcerer, saw the observable sign as Peter and John laid their hands on them. This must have been before they finished laying hands individually on the believers. He recognized power and wanted it so he asked to have the ability that everyone (not just believers) he laid his hands on would also receive the Holy Spirit. As a brand new believer, he obviously didn't fully understand what Philip would have told him about the Holy Spirit being the gift of God and thus only God can give the Holy Spirit to people and not the laying on of hands that Peter and John had done. Peter rebukes Simon for the idea that he could buy the gift of God and warns him to repent of that wicked thought or he will have no part in the ministry. Peter's rebuke also shows that the heart of Simon's request was for his own benefit and not the glory of God and thus was wickedness. Peter tells Simon that if he repents (changes his attitude and was of acting) concerning this wicked way, perhaps God will forgive him such thoughts. Peter might have wondered if Simon would fall dead at his feet as Ananias and Sapphira had done for lying to the Holy Spirit, but that is not what happened. Ananias and Sapphira were deliberately lying to the Holy Spirit while Simon's error may have been more from misunderstanding. Simon recognizes the error of his thoughts and actions. He immediately repents and asks Peter to pray that none of what he said may happen to him.

When this incident was finished, Peter and John taught the new believers more about Jesus and then departed for Jerusalem. On the way, they shared about Jesus in many Samaritan villages. Luke doesn't tell us, but we can presume that people along the way became believers. What this does show is that Peter and John were now willing to accept the Samaritans as part of the fellowship of believers. That is quite a turn around for John from when he wanted to call down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village. (Luke 9:52-54) Since Samaritans were half Gentile, it also appears to be preparation for Peter to eventually accept Gentiles who had no Jewish blood as part of the fellowship of believers.

Verses 26 – 40. This next incident shows that not only were the Palestinian believers going out to witness to people about the good news of what Jesus had done for people, but also that the Holy Spirit was leading people to seek the Messiah and placing them and the believers together so that the witnessing could be done. The story is about an Ethiopian eunuch who was an official in charge of the treasury for Candace the queen of the Ethiopians. Candace is the title of the Queen mother of Ethiopia, who directed the administration of the government because the king, who was regarded as the “Child of the Sun” didn't involve himself in the day-to-day operations of the government. Candace's name would have been Amanitare and she was the Queen mother from 25 – 41 AD. At this time the area controlled by Ethiopia also included the current territory of Sudan and the capital city was Meroe, located on the East side of the Nile River about 50 miles North of modern-day Khartoum. Ethiopia is a long distance from Jerusalem (several hundreds of miles) but the Lord had drawn this man there to worship. It is not known whether this man was descended from Jews who had been dispersed to other lands (what is known as the diaspora) or was a convert to Judaism or just an individual who had heard about Judaism and



wanted to go there to learn more. As this story begins to be recounted to us, the Ethiopian eunuch is headed home from Jerusalem, which means he is headed in a southerly direction. From the telling of the story, it appears that Philip may have told it to Luke when Paul and Luke stayed at Philip's house in Caesarea twenty years later (Acts 21:8).

We are told that an angel of the Lord told Philip to go south on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip wasn't told why he should go only that he should. It is interesting that when the angel told him to do this, he was very effectively sharing about Jesus in Samaria and many were becoming believers – what we might call an effective revival. And in the midst of this, he is told to leave and go south of Jerusalem toward Gaza without any reason given. So Philip leaves and on his way he meet the Ethiopian along the road sitting in his chariot reading from the book of Isaiah the prophet. Philip was obviously led by the Holy Spirit to approach the chariot because to approach a royal chariot which may have had an official guard of soldiers would have been foolish. When Philip got alongside of the chariot he could hear the eunuch reading from Isaiah's writing. So, he asks if the man understands what he is reading, and the eunuch says "how can I unless someone explains it to me." Notice how God has prepared the meeting by arranging for the two men to be there at the same time. Also notice that Philip obeys what he is told without having to know the reason for him to do it. The Ethiopian can probably tell from hearing Philip speak that he is a Jew so he invites him to sit with him in the chariot so they can discuss the passage he has been reading. We are told what he was reading and can see that it is from Isaiah 53:7-8 which is the suffering servant passage that Isaiah wrote about the Messiah being slain like a sheep and in humiliation deprived of justice. Philip begins with that passage and tells the man about what happened to Jesus and the meaning of it so that he can understand that it means Jesus died for the sin of everyone who would believe and accept his death to restore them to a right relationship with God.

As they come to a place along the road where there was some water, the eunuch asks why he shouldn't be baptized. That is an indication that he has believed what he has heard about Jesus and is ready to follow him in baptism as Jesus had commanded his disciples to do. So he and Philip go down into the water and Philip baptizes him. Although this could have been pouring water over the head of the man the normal process of baptism in Jewish ritual and early Christian practice was complete immersion in water. Then as they come up out of the water (onto dry land), we are told (probably by Philip's own account) that the Spirit of the Lord (Holy Spirit) suddenly took Philip away so that the eunuch didn't see him any longer. The Ethiopian eunuch proceeds on his journey back to Ethiopia rejoicing about what has happened within him. Notice that there is no obvious manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the Ethiopian's life at this time and the only laying on of hands was for the purpose of baptizing him. According to early Christian tradition, he became one of the earliest witnesses and missionaries in Africa (Ethiopia, Sudan, and surrounding area). Meanwhile, Philip appears at Azotus and begins traveling about that area telling people about Jesus until he reached the town of Caesarea. That is where we find him later in the book of Acts as Paul and Luke visit. Azotus is about 10 miles NE of Gaza along the coast and 50 miles south of Caesarea.



We see through this story that the good news about Jesus has quickly spread because of persecution to the farthest reaches of what was then believed to be the known world. And not only has it spread through the Jewish community, but it has reached the half-breed community of Samaritans, and even to Gentiles (the Ethiopian eunuch). Luke has described how people groups who are not Jews are being reached with the good news of what Jesus has done for all people.

Chapter 9

Verses 1 – 2. Now, Luke describes the conversion of Saul and how he became the primary individual taking the good news about Jesus to the Gentiles of Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. By saying that Saul was “still” breathing out murderous threats against disciples, he is drawing attention back to what he had said about Saul at the end of his description of Stephen’s stoning and that he began to destroy the church by dragging off men and women and putting them in prison. By saying that Saul was “breathing out murderous threats” it shows his whole life revolved around ridding the Jews of anyone following Jesus. Now, Luke explains that Saul had received letters of authority from the Sanhedrin to the synagogues in Damascus that if he found any followers of Jesus there he could take them prisoner and bring them to Jerusalem. Since the Sanhedrin would not have any authority over Gentiles, Saul could not do anything to them. But if he could eliminate all the Jewish followers, then the Jews would be pure and the Gentiles could believe whatever they wanted. Luke calls the believers “the Way” which appears an early designation of those who followed what Jesus said to the disciples as being “the way” to a right relationship with God (John 14:6). Luke describes what Paul said about his conversion in two other places in Acts (chapters 22 and 26). Paul also describes his conversion in his letter to the Galatians (chapter 1).

Verses 3 – 9. Luke tells us that as Saul neared Damascus (which was a week’s journey from Jerusalem – 135 miles north northeast) a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him and he heard someone call his name and ask why he was persecuting them. This happened at midday when the sun would have been at its brightest (22:6; 26:13). What blinded Saul wasn’t the sun but a revelation of the glory of Jesus who was speaking to him (9:17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8). Jesus didn’t ask why Saul was persecuting his followers but himself. Saul would have understood that the voice was that of God because in Rabbinic teaching, which he had studied under Gamaliel, a voice from heaven was always a rebuke or instructions from God. This must have confused Saul because he thought he was defending God and his Law. But it shows us and influences Paul’s later teaching that Jesus was in his disciples (indwelling of the Holy Spirit) and not just with them or ruling over them as their king. So what the disciples suffered, Jesus also suffered.

When Saul asks who is speaking to him, he addresses the individual as “Lord” which means he recognizes it is God even though he doesn’t recognize at this time that it is Jesus speaking. So when Jesus identifies himself, it must have shocked Saul to discover that God and Jesus, whom he considered a blasphemous Messianic pretender, were one and the same. And Jesus again says that Saul is persecuting him. After identifying himself, Jesus tells Saul to go into Damascus and wait and he will be told what he must do. Saul was not traveling by himself because the men with him heard a sound but did not see anyone nor understand that the sound was a voice.

The intense light knocked Saul down to the ground and when he got up and tried to open his eyes, he found that he was blind and could see nothing. So his companions had to lead him by the hand into Damascus. And for the next three days he did not eat or drink anything. He was not told to fast but he did as a way of devoting himself to what God had said to him. In trying to explain away Saul’s conversion, some Bible critics have alleged that what happened to him was a hallucination, a sunstroke, or an epileptic seizure. But the change in Saul from someone who was breathing out murderous threats against those following Jesus to someone who was just as active in trying to convince people to follow Jesus shows that his meeting with Jesus converted him from a non-believer into a believer.

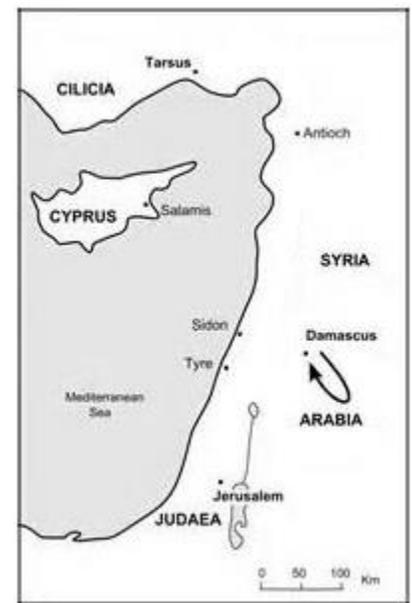
Verses 10 – 19. Ananias is identified as a believer who lived in Damascus so he probably wasn’t someone who had fled from Jerusalem because of the persecution there. We don’t know how he became a believer, but maybe he was present in Jerusalem for the Pentecost celebration and heard the Eleven Apostles speaking in tongues as the Holy Spirit had empowered them, and became a believer. Jesus appeared to him in a vision, called him by name and told him to go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul because he is praying and has received a vision that a man named Ananias will come, place his hands on him so that his sight will be restored. Ananias isn’t sure he has heard and understood the Lord

correctly because he has heard about Saul's murderous threats and harm he has done to believers in Jerusalem and knows he has been given authority from the chief priest (Sanhedrin) to arrest any believers in Damascus and take them to Jerusalem. This tells us that Saul wasn't just carrying the letter from the Sanhedrin, but that another one had been sent to the synagogues before him. Jesus tells Ananias that Saul is his chosen instrument to take his name to Gentiles, their kings, and even Jews. Taking his name means being a witness about who Jesus is and what he has done. Jesus tells Ananias that Saul will be shown how much he must suffer for him. This says that Saul, who was persecuting believers would himself be persecuted. This may have been meant to encourage Ananias that it was safe for him to meet Saul.

So Ananias obeys what Jesus has told him to do. When he goes to the house, he addresses Saul as "brother" which indicates that if Jesus has said he is a believer, then Ananias will also accept him as a believer. Then he places his hands on Saul as Jesus commanded and tells him that Jesus has sent him so that he may be healed and filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately, whatever Jesus had done to blind Saul was reversed and it seemed to Saul like scales falling from his eyes so that he could see again. This is a confirmation to Saul that Jesus has accepted him as a believer and follower. The fact that Jesus sent Ananias and not one of the Apostles to lay hands on Saul for the healing of his eyes indicates that God can and will use anyone that will obey what he says to do. That Saul's filling with the Holy Spirit is not accompanied by speaking in tongues and that Paul never mentions speaking in tongues in any of his descriptions of this conversion indicates that it was not a normative experience for all believers. When Luke says Saul was baptized, that indicates that Ananias probably took him to the local synagogue or wherever they performed ritual immersions, and baptized him as Jesus had commanded (Matt 28:19). After that, Saul broke his fast and ate and drank to regain his strength. Then Luke says Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

Verses 20 – 25. Luke says that "at once" (immediately) began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God (Messiah). This change in what Saul proclaimed is a further evidence of his conversion and willingness to be controlled by the Holy Spirit living within him. Everyone who heard Saul preach that Jesus is the Son of God were amazed and asked if he wasn't the same man who had been raising havoc among the believers in Jerusalem and had authority from the Sanhedrin to take them back to Jerusalem as prisoners. They wondered if Saul had come to take them as prisoners, but Saul grew more powerful in his proclamation and baffled the Jews in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

At this point, we need to know what Paul wrote the Galatians about his conversion and time in Damascus to see what Luke has omitted from his account. In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul tells them that the gospel he preached was not from the mind of any man but was revealed to him directly from Jesus. Then in verses 13 – 14 he explains his previous life was persecuting the church and trying to destroy it and that he was extremely zealous for the Jewish traditions. In verses 15 – 17 he says God had set him apart from birth (his mother's womb), called him by grace, and was pleased to reveal his Son so that he could preach him among the Gentiles. He says he didn't consult any man or go to see the Apostles in Jerusalem, but went immediately into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. In verses 18 to 20 he explains that it was three years later that he went to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and met none of the other Apostles but did meet James, the Lord's brother. He assures them in God's presence that none of this is a lie. Then in verses 21 – 24 he says that he later went to Syria and Cilicia (Asia Minor) but was unknown to the churches (believers) in Judea except by reports that the man who formerly persecuted them was now preaching the faith and because of this they praised God. From this account we learn that Paul was taught by Jesus in the wilderness of Arabia, which we must presume clarified for him the Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament) and how all of it pointed to Jesus just as Jesus instructed the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27). This would have corrected his Pharisaic understanding and teaching and prepared him to refute their theology at every opportunity.

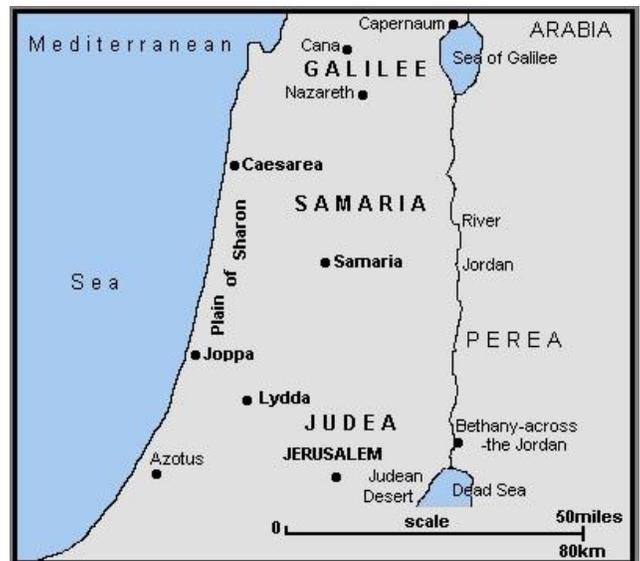


Saul's unexpected and extreme conduct astonished the Jews in Damascus who had heard he was coming to take believers to Jerusalem for trial and punishment. In fact, they were now baffled by how he powerfully proved that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ). So after many days of his preaching, those Jews who weren't believers conspired to kill him. But Saul learned of the plan and since the plotters were watching the gates, the believers put him in a basket one night and lowered him to the ground through an opening in the wall. Paul describes this in his second letter to the Corinthians and says he was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped away (2 Cor 11:33).

Verses 26 – 31. Here, Luke describes Saul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. With Jesus' death being in 33 AD and Stephen's stoning probably that same year while Saul watched. We can presume that his conversion on the road to Damascus was probably during the latter part of 33 AD or in 34 AD. We don't know how much time he spent in the wilderness in Arabia, but he said he spent three years in Damascus before going to Jerusalem, so this visit could not have happened before 36 to 37 AD at the earliest. When Saul tries to meet the disciples in Jerusalem, they were afraid and wouldn't meet him because they knew he had been persecuting believers in Jerusalem. So they wouldn't accept that he was now a believer and follower of Jesus. They probably thought he was using the story as a ruse to get to know who the believers were so he could capture and imprison them. But one believer named Barnabas (whom we met in chapter four and was told his given name was Joseph, that he was a Levite from Cyprus, and people called him Barnabas which meant son of encouragement – Acts 4:36) believed Saul's story and took him to see Peter and James. Barnabas points out three indications that Saul's conversion was genuine – he had seen the Lord (Jesus), he had talked with Jesus, and he had spoken out boldly about Jesus in Damascus. Saul stayed with Peter for 15 days (Gal 1:15) and spoke boldly about Jesus, especially with the Grecian Jews. But those Jews tried to kill him so the believers whisked him away to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus (his hometown in the area of Cilicia). We learn from Paul's account Luke recorded in Acts 22:17-21 that during this first visit to Jerusalem, he received a vision of Jesus telling him to leave Jerusalem because God wanted him to evangelize the Gentiles. This this leaving of Jerusalem wasn't because Paul feared for his life but because God had orchestrated everything so he would leave and move on to another ministry that was planned for him. Again, we see God, the Holy Spirit, directing the evangelization of the world and sending those that he wanted to go to specific locations on their journeys.

After that, Luke says, the Church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. The believers were strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit and the number of believers grew and they lived in the fear of (in awe of) the Lord. Luke doesn't tell us anything else about Saul's activities until chapter 11 when Barnabas seeks Saul in Tarsus and brings him to Antioch in Syria at about 43 AD. What Saul was doing for those six years is not known, but presumably he was preaching and gaining experience that God would use on his later ministry trips.

Verses 32 – 35. Now Luke turns back to some activities of Peter to show him being used to reach out to Gentiles and their acceptance into the body of believers. Peter is traveling about the land and when he arrives in Lydda he happens upon a man who has been paralyzed for eight years. We are not told that the man is a believer and Luke specifically refers to him as just a "man" as opposed to his calling Tabitha a disciple in the next few verses. So it is most probable that the Holy Spirit directed Peter to this man because of what he would do in the area after Peter heals him. Peter calls the man by name, tells him that Jesus Christ (Messiah) heals him, and then commands him to get up and take his mat. On at least two occasions, Jesus had done the same type of healing and told the individual to take their mat and walk (Matt 9:6; Mark 2:11; Luke 5:24, and John 5:8). People in Joppa and the area known as Sharon (which



stretched north toward Caesarea) saw him and turned to the Lord. This bit of information may be part of the reason a Gentile named Cornelius sends to Joppa to have Peter come to him (chapter 10).

Verses 36 – 43. About this time a disciple named Tabitha (Aramaic) or Dorcas (Greek) became sick and died so her friends washed her body and placed it in an upstairs room in a house (probably her own house). Since Joppa is not far away from Lydda and they had heard Peter was there, they sent two men to ask him to come at once. Peter immediately accompanies them to where she was laid and finds many widows crying because of her death and they show him robes and other clothing Tabitha had made to the poor. Peter sends them out of the room, bends down on his knees and prays. We don't know what he prayed, but after the prayer he turns to the dead woman and calling her by name commands her to get up. Immediately she opens her eyes and sits up. Peter takes her by her hand and helps her get to her feet and then calls the other disciples and widows to come into the room so he can present her to them alive. Her healing became known all over Joppa and many people believed in Jesus because of it. Peter stayed there in Joppa at the home of Simon, the tanner, for some time. Staying at the house of a tanner was uncommon for Jews because the tanner's business made him ritually unclean most of the time and his house unclean all of the time. This shows Peter is growing in his understanding of how the gospel is available for all people and no one is untouchable like Jesus showed by touching lepers.

Chapter 10

Verses 1 – 8. God told Ananias that Saul was his chosen instrument to carry his name before the Gentiles. (Acts 9:15) Now Luke is going to describe events that show the other Apostles were to share about Jesus with Gentiles as well. At the end of chapter 9, Peter was staying with Simon the tanner in Joppa. Caesarea is about 30 miles north of Joppa on the Mediterranean coast and was the provincial capital of Judea, so it was the center of Roman government and military activity in the area. Luke says a Roman centurion named Cornelius lived there whose whole family were God-fearing people. Centurions commanded 100 soldiers in the Roman army and had about the same authority of a captain in the modern army. Luke says he was part of the Italian Regiment (also called cohort) which indicates he had a connection with Italy and possibly was born and raised there. A cohort consisted of 600 soldiers, so Cornelius was one of six centurions of his regiment. The officer in command of the regiment was called a Tribune.

To this point, Luke has shown the gospel being shared with Jews, Samaritans (half-breed Jews whom the Jews hated), and an Ethiopian eunuch (who was probably a Gentile, but may have been a Jew, or a convert to Judaism). Now Luke is showing how the Lord moved Peter into sharing the gospel with Gentiles who were open to receiving the good news but were individuals the Jews regularly avoided just like the Jewish half-breed Samaritans. We might note that the first Gentile which Jesus is reported in the gospel accounts as having dealt with was a centurion (Matt 8:5-13). In response to his faith, Jesus indicated that many Gentiles would join Jews in the kingdom of heaven.

Cornelius lived according to moral instructions of God's law because he "feared God" (held God in awe), lead his house to "fear God," gave generously to those in need, and prayed to God regularly. This was the type of individual that the Jews would accept as a convert except that he was part of the Roman occupying force. Since Luke calls him a God fearer, that indicates he hadn't become a Jewish convert yet.

The angel appearing to Cornelius at three in the afternoon probably indicates he was praying at the time since the 9th hour (3 pm) was a normal Jewish hour of prayer. Cornelius stares at him in fear and wants to know why he is appearing to him. The angel tells him that his prayers and gifts to the poor have been recognized by God and that he should send men to Joppa to find a man named Peter who is staying with Simon the tanner. Cornelius isn't told why he is to send for Peter, but he immediately sends for two of his soldiers, one of whom is identified as a devout man (therefore most likely also a God fearer). He tells them everything that had happened and sends them to Joppa to find Peter.

Verses 9 – 23a. About noon the following day the men are approaching Joppa. At the same time Peter is on the roof of Simon's house praying. Noon wasn't a normal time for Jews to pray so Peter may have been seeking God's guidance for some other thing or was taking time to praise him for things happening in Joppa. Being the noon hour, he was hungry and while a meal was being prepared he fell into a trance and had a vision. Greeks, Romans, and Jews all considered dreams and visions as something that came from "the gods" or the "one true God." So Cornelius' vision and Peter's vision are important for showing God's hand in moving people to seek him and to take the message about Jesus to people. Missionaries taking the good news to remote areas tell similar stories of people that have received a vision from God about someone bringing good news about God to them.

The main problem Jews had with Gentiles (non-Jews) was that they didn't follow the strict dietary rules of Judaism and thus were unclean. So God's vision to Peter was about eating food that the Jewish dietary rules considered unclean. The vision was of a sheet let down from heaven with unclean foods in it and Peter was told to kill and eat from them. Peter doesn't want to do that because he has never eaten anything unclean or impure. Peter obviously didn't remember or fully understand what Jesus had said that "nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean." (Mark 7:15; Matt 15:10) It is interesting to note that Peter says he has never eaten anything impure or unclean while living in the house of a tanner and that occupation was considered to make the individual and everything in his house unclean. God replies that Peter shouldn't call anything impure that God has made clean. We are told this same sequence happened three times before the sheet was taken back to heaven. After the vision, Peter was wondering what it could mean and that's when the men sent by Cornelius arrive at Simon's house. From the gate entrance to the property, they call out to ask if Simon knows of a man called Peter. From the roof Peter could probably have heard them calling out to Simon, but he is thinking about the vision. The Holy Spirit speaks to Peter and tells him the men are looking for him so he should get up, go downstairs, and go with them because he has sent them. When Peter goes down and meets them, he asks why the men have come. The men tell him about Cornelius being a righteous, God-fearing man who is respected by the Jewish people and that an angel had appeared to him and told him to send for Peter so he could hear what Peter had to say. Even though it is not his house, Peter feels comfortable inviting the men to stay as his guests.

Verses 23b – 33. The next day Peter leaves with the men and some of the believers from Joppa and a day later they arrive in Caesarea. Cornelius is expecting them and has called all his family and close friends to his house to meet Peter. We can expect that the close friends were also God-fearers or at least interested in what Peter might say to them. As Peter enters the house, Cornelius falls to his knees before him in a posture of reverence. Peter tells him to get up because he, himself, is only a man. Then Peter finds that there is a large gathering of people in the house. He points out that Cornelius should be aware that it is against the Jewish law for a Jew to associate or visit a Gentile, but that God has shown him not to call any man unclean that God has called clean. And he says that is the reason he willingly came with the men sent to get him. Then Peter asks why Cornelius sent for him.

Cornelius says that four days previously a man in shining clothes suddenly appeared to him while he was praying at 3 pm and told him to send for Peter staying with Simon the tanner in Joppa. Therefore he immediately sent for him and it was good of Peter to come. Now he says that everyone is gathered there in the presence of God to listen to whatever God has commanded Peter to tell him.

Peter begins by telling them that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. He says this is the message God sent to his people (Jews) through Jesus, the Messiah, who is lord of all. Then he reminds them that they know all the events that have happened from Jesus' baptism and that God anointed him with power so that he went about doing good and healing people. When Peter says "we" are witnesses, he is probably indicating himself and the other Apostles rather than the believers who are with him from Joppa. Peter says they are witnesses not only of all that Jesus did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem, but also that they (Jews) killed Jesus by hanging on a tree. Then he proclaims that God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen by those whom God had already chosen to eat and

drink with him after his resurrection. Peter says that Jesus commanded them to preach and testify that he is the one God appointed to judge the living and dead. Peter says all the prophets testify about Jesus that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sin through his name.

While Peter is speaking these words to the people, the Holy Spirit comes on everyone who is hearing the message. The Jewish believers from Joppa who are with Peter are astonished that the Holy Spirit has empowered these Gentiles to speak in a different language and praise God. The language these Romans were probably speaking was Aramaic, a language used by Jews among themselves. Peter responds by asking if anyone can keep them from being baptized since they have received the Holy Spirit. So he orders them to be baptized in the name of Jesus and he stays with them for a few days. Note that these individuals who are God fearing people receive the Holy Spirit when they believe what Peter is saying about Jesus and without the laying on of hands by anyone. That these Gentiles are empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues is a sign to the Jewish believers that God does not show favoritism as Peter began by telling everyone, but accepts everyone who believes in Jesus as the Messiah and that he has called them clean because of their belief in Jesus.

It is interesting to note that the Ethiopian would have been a descendant of Ham, Saul would have been a descendant of Shem, and Cornelius would have been a descendant of Japheth. So in Acts 8 to 10 we have representatives of all the human race (the descendants of Noah) presented as having access to the good news that believing in Jesus as the Messiah will restore them to a right relationship with God as he had promised to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15.

Chapter 11

Verses 1 – 3. Luke now describes the reaction of Jewish believers to the news of what Peter had been doing in Joppa and Caesarea. All the believers, and probably other Jews, throughout Judea heard the news that Peter had gone into the house of Gentiles and ate with them. Circumcision was the covenant sign of being a Jew, so everyone who was not circumcised was a Gentile and considered unclean because they didn't follow the Jewish cleanliness and dietary rules. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, the word of what he had done had reached the Jewish believers before he arrived. The news had also been received that Gentiles had received the word of God, but they were not rejoicing over that. They were struggling with the same problem Peter had with obedience to the cleanliness and dietary rules. They may also have thought that associating with Gentiles might bring even more persecution from non-believing Jews. Although Peter may have been considered a leader of the Apostles and other believers, he obviously wasn't considered above criticism for doing what they considered wrong. Peter had learned from God not to call unclean what he has called clean and the rest of the believers needed to learn the same lesson. All the believers needed to remember that Jesus was also accused of eating with the wrong kind of people. (Matt 11:19)

Verses 4 – 17. So Peter recounts for his accusers what had happened. He starts with the vision he received in Joppa of the sheet coming down from heaven holding creatures that were not approved by the Jewish dietary rules. And he tells that he heard a voice telling him to get up, kill, and eat. And he tells them that he responded "Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth." To which the voice replied that he should not call anything impure that God has made clean. He even tells them that this happened three times before men from Caesarea arrived at the house where he was staying. He says the Holy Spirit told him not to hesitate in going with them. He tells his accusers that six brothers (believers) from Joppa went with him and the men to the house in Caesarea and heard the man of the house tell that an angel had told him to send for Peter because he will bring him a message through which he and his whole household would be saved. Peter says that as he began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on the people gathered in his household just as it had on the Apostles at the beginning (Pentecost). Note that Peter showed the Holy Spirit empowering these Gentiles as a result of their believing in Jesus and not a later event as at Pentecost. Then Peter says he remembered that Jesus had said, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:5) And Peter ends his account by saying "So, if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God!"

Verse 18. When the Apostles and other believers hear Peter’s story (which means they had probably only heard that he ate with Gentiles and told them about Jesus), and that the Holy Spirit had been manifested in their lives, they had no further objections. And they praised God for even granting Gentiles repentance unto life. The phrase “repentance unto life” summarizes what had happened to Cornelius and his family. “Repentance” is a summary term for the fact that they had turned their thinking around from just believing that there is a God who controls the universe to believing that Jesus is the promised Messiah, God in the flesh, and that his death on the cross makes it possible for every person who believes and accepts it to be restored to a right relationship with God. Although the believers can now see and agree that it is acceptable for them to associate with Gentiles to reach them with the good news about Jesus, and even accept Gentiles into the ranks of believers, we will see in a few chapters that they didn’t yet understand that Jesus had instituted a new covenant for his followers that removed the requirement for them to follow all of the rules of the old covenant. They would still be required to follow the Ten Commandments by following the greatest and second greatest commandments (Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-31) and his new commandment to love one another (John 13:34-35).

Verses 19 – 29. Now that Luke has shown that the early believers have recognized that Gentiles can become believers, he is launching into the main thrust of the rest of his book – the expansion of the Church into all of the world. He doesn’t try to show its expansion into every part of the world by telling us how each of the Apostles went to different areas and made disciples in those areas – areas like Assyria, Persia, Egypt, etc. Instead he focuses on the events surrounding the Apostle Paul. He begins with the events happening in the city of Antioch from which major missionary trips were launched to take the news about Jesus to the Gentiles in Asia Minor and Rome. The believers in Antioch not only reached out to Gentiles with spiritual aid, they also reached out to their Jewish brothers with material aid.

Luke begins by relating back to the persecution that really broke out against believers following Stephen’s stoning to death. He says some of the believers who fled Jerusalem traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch and told the message about Jesus only to Jews. Then some of them from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to tell the message to Greeks. Phoenicia is part of Syria on the southern side of the area and lies along the coast just north of Nazareth. The city of Antioch is also part of Syria but at the northern side of the area and about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Cyprus is not part of Syria but an island in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Cyrene is a city in lying on the south western coast of the Mediterranean Sea and is a long distance from Jerusalem. Remember that there was a Jew named Simon from the city of Cyrene who was present along the route the Romans made Jesus travel on his cross on the way to Golgotha. (Matt 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26) The Romans made Simon help Jesus by carrying the cross for him. It is distinctly possible that Simon took the good news about Jesus and his resurrection back to the Jews of Cyrene and that it is some of these Jewish believers and not those fleeing the persecution in Jerusalem that have traveled from Cyrene to Cyprus and joined with Jewish believers from Cyprus in taking the good news to Greeks in Antioch. One would suppose that those Jewish believers had been sharing the good news with Greeks in Cyprus before deciding to go to Antioch to tell the Greeks in that city about Jesus. God honored their efforts and a great number of people believed and turned their lives to the Lord.



At that time, Antioch may have been the third largest city in the Roman world with a population of 500,000 to 800,000. It was the capital city of the Roman province in Syria and due to its location was an important trade center. It was also so notorious as a place of corruption and pleasure seeking that the Roman satirist, Juvenal, said that its corruption was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away. It was in this type of environment

that believers began making a significant impact on the Gentile world.

News of a great revival in Antioch reached the believers in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to investigate whether people were truly believing in and trusting Jesus as Lord. When Barnabas arrived, Luke says he saw the evidence of the grace to God to these Gentiles, so he rejoiced and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all of their hearts. We are not told what evidence he saw but the Spirit showed him what was necessary to understand that they were true believers. Not only did Barnabas see what was happening, but he joined in and brought a great number of people to believe in Jesus as Lord. We don't know for sure, but an early prologue to Luke's Gospel (*Anti-Marcionite Prologue*) refers to Luke as coming from Syrian Antioch. Also the early church historian, Eusebius, says that Luke was born at Antioch. So it is highly possible that Luke was one of the Gentile converts at this time.

Barnabas, and maybe other believers in Antioch, realized that they needed someone to help disciple and teach these new converts. Barnabas remembered Saul whom he met in Jerusalem and had seen him argue successfully with Greek believers about the Lordship of Jesus. He remembered that Saul had been sent back to his home city so he went to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him back to teach. After Saul returned with him, they spent the next year teaching the new believers. Their teaching was so successful that the disciples in Antioch were the first ones to be called Christian, a term meaning "little Christ" because they lived so much like Jesus.

During this year, some prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch and empowered by the Holy Spirit, predicted that a severe famine would spread across the entire Roman world. Luke tells us that this happened during the reign of Claudius (41-54 AD). Josephus (*Antiquities* 20 chapter 1.3-2.5), Tacitus (annals 11:4), Suetonius (*Life of Claudius*, chapter 18, and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a history of England quotes the 4th Century historian Orosius and pinpoints the famine in 46 and 47 AD. The believers in Antioch demonstrated their love for their brothers by giving according to their ability and sending their collection with Saul and Barnabas to the elders in Jerusalem. This could be part of the visit that Paul refers to in Galatians 2:1-10 when he says 14 years later I again went up to Jerusalem. The elders in Jerusalem had ministered to the believers in Antioch by sending leadership and teaching through Barnabas, and now the believers in Antioch minister to their brother through financial aid.

Chapter 12

Verses 1 – 19. Luke begins this part of his account of the early growth of the Church empowered by the Holy Spirit by saying "It was about this time." Since he just recounted the prediction of famine and the believers in Antioch sending monetary support to them by Saul and Barnabas, we would think that the events he is going to describe happened at the same time (46 AD) or later. But that would be incorrect because he continues to say that King Herod arrested some of the believers to persecute them and had James, the brother of John, killed by a sword. That implies a beheading, not stabbing with a sword. The Herod that Luke mentions is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great. Herod Agrippa was born in 10 BC and died in 44 AD. He was appointed king over Palestine in 37 AD by Emperor Gaius. When Claudius succeeded Gaius, he added Judea and Samaria to Agrippa's territory so that he ruled the increased area from 41 to 44 AD. So the beheading of James and the subsequent imprisonment of Peter that Luke will describe had to take place at least 2 and maybe 3 years before the famine. When Herod Agrippa saw that the beheading of James pleased the Jews (that would be the High Priest and the Sanhedrin) he decided to seize Peter. This is the only death of an Apostle recorded in the New Testament. It is interesting to note that Luke does not record that the other Apostles didn't replace James like they did for Judas. It could be that the others they considered previously had already died during the persecution and that there was no one remaining that fit the qualifications, or it could be that since they expect Jesus to return any day it was unnecessary since Jesus would reestablish the Twelve in the resurrection.

Luke reports this happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the seven days following Passover) which occurs each spring and would be a time when Jerusalem was filled with Jews from all over the Roman world to attend the celebration. So this may have been intended as a political move to gain popularity with the masses of

Jews.

Peter was handed over to be guarded by four squads consisting of four soldiers each. In the view of the Sanhedrin, when they had Peter in prison before, he had escaped (Acts 5:19-24) so they wanted him closely guarded around the clock so it wouldn't happen again. That why Peter was chained between two guards and two standing guard at the door where he was imprisoned. Herod intended to keep him there until after the seven day feast and then put him on trial publicly. During the time he was being held, the Church was earnestly praying to God for him. It doesn't say specifically they were asking for his release, but we would presume that was at least one of their requests. Perhaps they also asked for strength to endure and to remain faithful to Jesus and have the words to say before the Sanhedrin as he had in the past.

The night before the trial was to be held, as Peter was sleeping between the two guards, an angel appeared and a light shone in the cell. Peter was so sound asleep that the angel had to strike him on the side to awaken him. When the angel told him to quickly get up, the chains fell from Peter's wrists. Then the angel tells him to put on his clothes, sandals and cloak and follow him. Peter did what he was told and followed the angel through the door to his cell and the gate of the prison and finally to the iron gate to the city which opened by itself for them. After they passed through the city gate and had walked the length of one street, the angel suddenly left Peter. Before this, Peter thought he was having a dream, but when the angel suddenly disappeared and he found himself on a street in the city, he knew it was real and that God had sent the angel to rescue him from Herod. So God answered the requests of the Church on behalf of Peter in the way that he thought was best. Note that while there was a light shining because of the angel's presence, chains dropping, and doors and gates opening, the guards and no one else noticed anything out of the normal happening. God can easily keep people from seeing or hearing what he doesn't want them to see or hear.

After finding himself out of the prison and in the city, Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark. That young boy was Barnabas' cousin (Col 4:10) who joined Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey (Acts 13:5). We aren't told whether Peter knew that there would be many people at Mary's house praying for him or that this was just the closest believer's home. Remember that Barnabas had sold a piece of property and gave the proceeds to the Apostles, but here we find that Mary still owns her house, so giving all property and money to the Apostles to use was not a requirement of the early Church. After Peter knocked on the door, a servant named Rhoda came to answer it. She must have asked who it was without opening the door because when she heard Peter's voice and recognized it she immediately ran back to tell everybody Peter was at the door without letting Peter in the house. The people thought she must be out of her mind or that she had heard his angel. As is indicated in Daniel 10:21, God gives individual angels the responsibility of being his messenger to a particular nation and Matthew 18:10 may indicate the same for an individual and that is why some people think this is the reason the people thought Rhoda had heard Peter's angel. Meanwhile, Peter keeps knocking on the door and when they finally open it and see him they are astonished and must have been joyously noisy because he had to motion for them to be quiet so he could describe how the Lord had brought him out of prison. Then he tells them to take the news of his escape to James, who was the half-brother of Jesus and the leader of the believers in Jerusalem. After he told them to tell James, Luke says Peter left for another place and doesn't say where that was. It is quite possible that Peter left Jerusalem and went back to his home and wife in Galilee where he had a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee. Since Peter had to tell the people gathered at Mary's home to tell James and the other brothers about his escape, it means all the believers were not gathered at her house. By this time, the number of believers in Jerusalem would have been large so they would not have been able to meet in one home in prayer.

In the morning, the guards found that Peter was no longer with them and that caused a great commotion among them as they wondered what happened to Peter. The news that Peter was not in prison reached Herod and he had his guards do a thorough search for him. When they didn't find him, Herod questioned the guards and then ordered their execution, probably under the excuse of dereliction of duty, but most likely out of his own anger. Early Church fathers wrote that Peter ministered throughout the Jewish Diaspora. We know that he stayed at Antioch for a while (Gal 2:11-21) and may have visited Corinth and Rome (1 Cor 1:12; 9:5; 1 Pet 5:13). We

know that he was in Jerusalem a few years later for a council of the Apostles and elders of the church to which Paul presented himself and explained his mission to the Gentiles, but he may have only been there as a visitor at that time and not living there.

Obviously, the search for an escaped prisoner would not have gone unnoticed among the people of Jerusalem and would have undermined Herod as a political figure so that may have played into his decision to return to his normal residence in Caesarea. What we see from this event is that even the Roman authority couldn't interfere with God's plans for growing the Church.

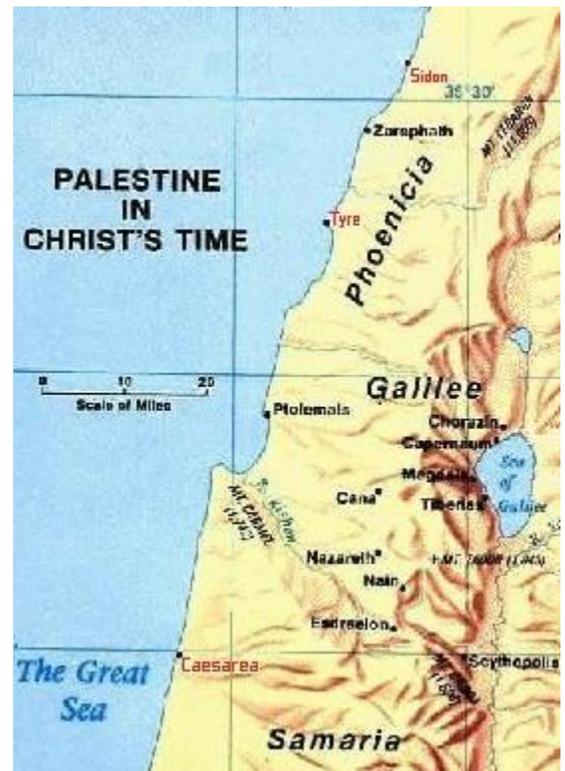
Verses 20 – 25. Herod considered Peter to be an enemy of the Jews who considered themselves to be God's people. But Peter wasn't an enemy of the Jews but simply following God's plan to restore the Jews and Gentiles to a right relationship with himself. In reality, Herod was an enemy of God and now Luke shows how great Herod's disobedience had become.

Herod was having a dispute with the people of Tyre and Sidon, two towns in his governance area that were situated on the coast. They joined together, secured the support of Herod's personal servant and sought an audience with him to seek peace. Josephus records this event in greater detail than Luke. In his account, Herod appeared in an outdoor theater at Caesarea and stood before the officials from Tyre and Sidon on a festival day (which was not specified). Herod was dressed in a silver robe. When the sun shone brilliantly on the robe, some of the crowd called out words of praise and acclaimed him to be a god. Immediately, he had an attack of severe stomach pains such that his attendants had to carry him out of the theater. Five days later he died. (*Antiquities* 19:8:2; 18:6:7; *The Wars* 2:11:6) Doctor Luke says his intestinal attack and death were caused by God because he accepted praise as a god instead of giving praise to the true God, his Creator. Being a doctor and having investigated all the matters about which he is writing, he most likely talked with the doctors that treated Herod and learned that his intestinal attack was due to worms in his intestines.

Luke comments that the word of God continued to spread. Then he jumps forward to how he ended chapter 11 with – the mission of Saul and Barnabas to bring a money gift from the believers in Antioch to the brothers suffering famine in Jerusalem (46 AD). Luke says that when Saul and Barnabas finished their mission they returned from Jerusalem to Antioch and took John Mark with them.

Chapter 13

Verses 1 – 3. Luke says that among the believers in Antioch were prophets and teachers. Some scholars want to break the list into two groups. The first being the prophets and naming them as Barnabas, Simeon (called Niger) and Lucius (from Cyrene). Then the second group, the teachers, would be Manaen and Saul. From those groupings, they identify that prophets would have a more spontaneous ministry while teachers would be less spontaneous and more involved in sharing the teaching of the Apostles. There may not be a good reason to break them into two groups like that. Saul met and saw Jesus on the road to Damascus when he was converted from a persecutor of the believers to be a believer and God's instrument to reach out to the Gentiles. Then he spent a time in the wilderness (maybe as long as 3 years) being taught by God. Because of this he was accepted as being an Apostle just like Peter and the other eleven. So it seems a stretch to relegate him to the role of "just a teacher" as if that isn't what Peter and the other Apostles were doing and they would be considered prophets.



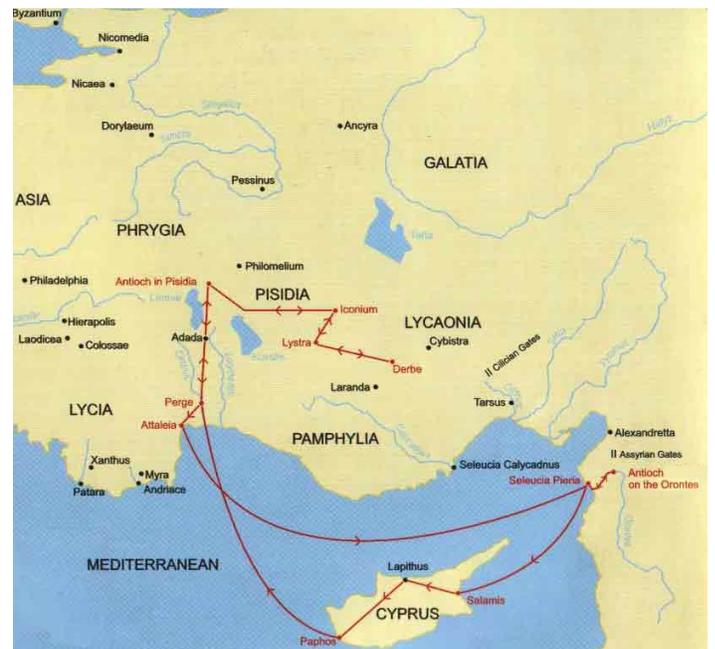
Lucius being identified as from Cyrene means he could have been one of the individuals who first came to Antioch to take the good news about Jesus to the Greeks (Gentiles). Simeon is a Jewish name but Niger is a Roman name that indicates that he was probably “black” skinned since the Latin word means black. Some individuals want to equate this Simeon with the Simon from Cyrene who carried Jesus’ cross when he fell under its weight (Luke 23:26). There is no evidence to prove or disprove this idea. Some individuals want to equate Lucius (Roman name) with Luke (Greek name) and think he is the author of the book. While this is not impossible it is improbable that Luke would list his name here among the leaders of the believers here when he might just have been a new convert from the work of the believers from Cyprus and Cyrene noted in chapter 11. Also, when he becomes a member of the group traveling with Paul in the later chapters of Acts, he doesn’t even list his name but simply changes from using third person pronouns to first person, plural. When Luke says Manaen had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch that means he came from a family that had position and connections. Herod the tetrarch is the Herod that beheaded John the Baptist and tried Jesus (Mark 6:14-19; Luke 13:31-33; 23:7-12). What this list of leaders in Antioch shows is that the believers were a varied group and God had gifted them with several who could exhort and teach all the new believers.

Although the New International Version translation says “while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting,” the Greek text uses the word *leitourgounton* which is usually translated “ministering” or “serving.” “They” doesn’t refer to just the leaders listed but the believers gathered. That is probably why the NIV translates the Greek word as worshiping instead of the usual ministering. Fasting would indicate that they were spending time with God and seeking his direction, perhaps for a decision that needed to be made. While the believers were involved in this time with the Lord, the Holy Spirit spoke to them and said for them to set Barnabas and Saul apart for the work he was calling them to do. After the believers fasted and prayed, probably for God’s blessing on Barnabas and Saul, they placed their hands on them and sent them on their way.

Up to this point, the outreach to people was primarily to Jews who would be more likely to be looking for a Messiah than the Gentiles. The outreach to Gentiles to this point appeared sporadic, but with this mission or Barnabas and Saul it becomes more deliberate and planned.

Verses 4 – 12.

As Saul and Barnabas set out on the missionary journey for which they have been set apart by the believers in Antioch, they go to Seleucia which was the port city nearest to Antioch. From there they sailed to Salamis on the Island of Cyprus. Salamis is the largest city on the eastern side of the island. When they reached there, they take the opportunity to stop in the local Jewish synagogues and proclaim the word of God to them (that Jesus is the Messiah). Since Salamis is large it had more than one synagogue, so they took time (and therefore several days / weeks to visit all of them, possibly one Sabbath at a time. Luke notes that John was with them as their helper. We know from Paul’s letter to the Colossians (4:10) that John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. He had traveled with Saul and Barnabas from his home in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12, 25). Also, we learned in Acts



4:36 that Cyprus is Barnabas’ home and since he was a Levite from there he would have been well known in the area. Barnabas, John Mark, and Saul travel through the whole island (undoubtedly sharing about Jesus) until they reached the western side of the island (roughly 90 miles west of Salamis) to a town called Paphos, which is the capital of the island and where the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus lived.

It was common for philosophers and the like to travel from city to city giving public orations, earning a living and perhaps being offered a teaching position at a school in one of the cities. So, when the Roman proconsul heard of two men traveling through Cyprus teaching, he wanted to hear them and summoned them so he could hear about this God of whom they were teaching. When they went to see the proconsul, Barnabas and Saul met one of his attendants named Bar-Jesus (which means Son of Savior). He was a Jewish individual who was involved in sorceries (magic) and a false prophet (what he predicted didn't always happen). He was also known by the name Elymas (which means wise and describes a sorcerer / magician / fortune-teller). In Deuteronomy 18:10-11, God proclaimed that no one should have anything to do with a person who practiced sorceries. Elymas opposed Barnabas and Saul and tried to keep the proconsul from listening to them and putting his faith in Jesus.

Here, for the first time, Luke identifies that Saul had a Roman name also – Paul. He says that Paul, being filled with the Holy Spirit, confronted Elymas, looking straight at him and saying: “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?” Instead of being full of wisdom, Paul announces that Elymas is full of deceit and trickery. Instead of being a “son of a savior,” Paul says he is the “son of the devil.” Instead of promoting righteousness, Paul proclaims that Elymas is the enemy of everything that is right and perverts the ways of the Lord. Now Paul is going to announce divine judgment on Elymas. He says the hand of the Lord is against him and that he will be blind for a time and unable to see the light of the sun. Immediately, mist and darkness came over his eyes and he began groping around and sought someone to lead him by the hand. As a result of this miracle, the proconsul believed that teaching Paul and Barnabas gave about Jesus.

This is the second time in Acts that an Apostle has been empowered by the Holy Spirit to have victory over demonic spirits. The first time was when Peter confronted Simon the sorcerer while he was witnessing to the people of Samaria (Acts 8:9-24). It is at this point that Paul becomes the real leader of the missionary journey and begins his ministry to the Gentiles.

Verses 13 – 15.

From Paphros, Paul and his companions (Barnabas and John Mark) sail to Perga in Pamphylia. At time point, John Mark leaves and returns to his home in Jerusalem. Luke does not tell us why he returned home but we know from Paul's later disagreement with Barnabas about taking John Mark on their second missionary journey that he did not like whatever the reason was (Acts 15:38 – 39). From Perga, Paul and Barnabas travel directly north to Antioch in Pisidia. Some scholars wonder why Paul traveled past other cities and went directly to Pisidian Antioch. A possible explanation could be that other family members of the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus, lived on a great estate nearby and had power and influence in that area. So, after he had believed in Jesus, Paulus may have asked Paul to visit his family and share about Jesus with them. What better way would Paul have to make an immediate impact in the region than to have an influential family believe and share with all the people with whom they have contact.



Pisidian Antioch is about 100 miles north of Perga and 3,600 feet above the sea level elevation of Perga. It was an area where bandits could easily attack a small party making the journey from sea level to the lake-filled plateau. Pisidian Antioch was the most important city of the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia and the crossroads of the trade routes between areas east and west. By planting a church in this city the good news about Jesus could be easily spread a long distance.

On the first Sabbath after arriving, Paul and Barnabas went to a synagogue and sat down as was the custom for all Jews attending a Sabbath service. The normal synagogue service started with the recitation of the Shema (“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Deut 6:4) and the Shemoneh Esreh (a series of benediction, blessings, and prayers). They there would be reading of two OT passages for the day, a reading from the Law, and a reading from the Prophets. Then the synagogue ruler would designate someone he thought was capable to give an address to the people. If there was a traveling rabbi in the meeting that day, he would generally be asked to address the members. That is what happened with Jesus when he attended a synagogue. He was asked to read the portion from the prophets for the day and give an address to the people (Luke 4:14 – 21). Paul and Barnabas must have been recognized from their manner and way of speaking as being learned Jews, so after the reading from Prophets they were asked if they had any message of encouragement for the people. This gave Paul the opportunity to prove from the Hebrew history and Scriptures that Jesus was the promised Messiah and encourage the people to believe in him and follow his teachings.

Verses 16 – 41.

Paul begins his encouraging remarks by addressing the “men of Israel” and “you Gentiles who worship God.” Then he proceeds into his message for the Jews and the Gentiles who have believed in and want to follow the God proclaimed in the Scriptures (Old Testament). The message is one of three that Luke records Paul gave to encourage people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah that God promised to send to make things right between him and everyone who believes. We’ll see the other two messages when we follow Paul to Lystra (Acts 14:15-17) and Athens (Act 17:22-31). The message has three parts. The first is preparation for the coming of Messiah (vv 17-25), the second is the rejection, crucifixion and resurrection of Messiah (vv 26-37), and the third is the appeal to believe and follow (vv 38-41). Here we can see how Paul spoke to people who knew the Scriptures (Old Testament) rather than how he spoke to people who didn’t.

He begins by recounting the history of Israel and how God prepared for the coming of the Messiah. God is the one who chose the Hebrew people (descendants from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) to be a special nation. He made the people prosper even during their stay in Egypt and brought them out of that slavery. He led them patiently for forty years in the desert even though they refused to enter the Promised Land when he brought them to the edge of it. Then, when they entered, he overthrew seven nations in the Canaan land to give it to his people to be their inheritance. He says this was about 450 years. It took about 10 years for the conquest and settlement of the land (1451 – 1441 BC) and they wandered in the wilderness for forty years because of their disobedience (1491 – 1451 BC), so the stay in Egypt began about 400 years before that (about 1891). Abram (Abraham) left the land God promised to give him (Gen 12:7) when he went down to Egypt for the first time in 1921 BC (Gen 12:10). The time between Abram’s first going to Egypt in 1921 BC until his descendants left in 1491 BC is 430 years and this is exactly what Moses recorded in Exodus 12:40-41. Paul recounts that God gave them judges until the time of Samuel, the prophet (the last judge). When the people asked for a king, God gave them Saul who ruled for 40 years followed by David. He recalls that God said of David that he is “a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.”

The people would have known that God had promised the Messiah would come through David’s line (Isa 11:1-16) and David would have a descendant on the throne forever. So Paul then declares that from David’s descendants God has brought the Messiah, Jesus, just as he promised. Then Paul recalls that before Jesus came (before the start of his ministry) John (the Baptist) preached repentance and baptism to all the people. His hearers would have been well aware of John’s ministry. It appears that some of John’s followers considered him to be the Messiah and took that message with them as they travelled to distant lands where Jews were dispersed. This may have presented a problem for people proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah and thus Paul strongly emphasized that John said he was not the Messiah but the Messiah will come after him.

Now before proving Jesus is the Messiah, Paul addresses the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles and says that it is to us (both Jews and Gentiles) that the message of salvation (restored relationship with God) has been sent.

Now Paul shows that the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus as Messiah was a fulfillment of prophecy which is read every Sabbath. Then he talks about Jesus' death on a cross and burial, but that God raised him from the dead and he was seen for many days by those who had travelled with him and they are witnesses to the people of the truth of his resurrection. Having proved Jesus' resurrection by more than two witnesses, he then proclaims that what God promised to their ancestors he has fulfilled by raising up Jesus and this is the good news for all of them. And he quotes Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3, and Psalm 16:10 as proof that Jesus' resurrection means he will never see decay but remain the Messiah forever. Then he reminds them that David, the great king, died, was buried and his body decayed, but the Messiah whom God has raised will never see decay.

Now, Paul shifts to applying this good news to the lives of his hearers and encouraging them to believe and follow. He says he wants them to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to them. Through Jesus, everyone who believes is justified from everything that could not be justified by the Law of Moses. Then he warns them to be careful that what the prophets said does not happen to them by scoffing and therefore perishing (Hab 1:5).

Verses 42 – 52. Paul's message created interest in his hearers because they asked him to speak further about it on the next Sabbath. Several of them even followed Paul and Barnabas as they left. Paul talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath, most of the city gathered to hear Paul speak about Jesus. This provoked the Jews to jealousy so they talked abusively about what Paul was saying. Paul answered their criticism by explaining that they had to tell them the word of God first, but since they rejected it and don't consider themselves worthy of eternal life, they will now turn to the Gentiles. And he quotes Isaiah's prophecy (49:6) which says God has "made you (singular indicating the Messiah – Jesus) a light for the Gentiles, that you (singular) may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." The Gentiles were glad to hear this and many believed. From that, the word about Jesus spread throughout the whole region. But the Jews stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas by somehow inciting the God-fearing women of men of high standing to have Paul and Barnabas expelled from the region. So Paul and Barnabas do what Jesus told his disciples to do when he sent them out to witness in the community and they encountered a town that didn't want to listen – they kicked the dust off their feet (Matt 10:14; Luke 9:5; 10:11) and moved on to Iconium. But they were joyous as they left (God had made believers of some even though they suffered humiliation and persecution for sharing about Jesus).

Chapter 14

Verses 1 – 7. The distance from Antioch to Iconium was about 60 miles and on the other side of a mountain range. When Paul and Barnabas arrived, they went first to the synagogue and spoke about Jesus so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up other Gentiles and poisoned their thinking against Paul and Barnabas. But Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there speaking boldly for God who confirmed their message by the Holy spirit enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. When they found out about a plot to stone them, they fled to the nearby city of Lystra (20 miles) and continued to preach about Jesus.



Verses 8 – 20. Being about 20 miles south of Iconium, Lystra was a normal day's journey. Lystra was a fortified city so it had a wall surrounding it and a gate for entrance. Luke doesn't tell us anything about Paul meeting with Jews in a synagogue so we should suppose that there weren't enough Jewish men there (10) to form one. We will see in Acts 16 that Timothy was a native of Lystra and that his mother and grandmother were Jewish but his father was a Greek. (see also 2 Tim 1:5) That indicates there were Jews living there but not enough to form a synagogue. So Paul just spoke out to the Gentiles who were there. Luke doesn't tell us how long Paul was in Lystra before he came upon this crippled man, but we would presume that it may have been as he entered the city the first time and started speaking to people at the gate which was a typical forum for public discussions. Luke, in investigating all things as he said in his gospel account (1:3), discovered that the man had been crippled from birth but doesn't mention that Paul knew this. What Paul recognized, most likely from the Holy Spirit, was that while he was speaking about Jesus, the man was showing that he had faith that because of Jesus' death God had made it possible for him to be restored to a right relationship with God and be healed. So Paul looked directly at him and commanded him to "Stand up on your feet." Immediately, the man jumped up and began to walk. This is similar to Jesus healing the crippled man at the Sheep Gate pool called Bethesda (John 5:1-10) and Peter's healing of the crippled man at the gate where the people were entering into the temple grounds (Acts 3:1-8). Here we see the reason the Holy Spirit gave special healing power to the Apostles. Paul and Barnabas were in a city where the good news about Jesus was not known so what would prove their message was from God? The answer is the power of the Holy Spirit demonstrated by the miraculous healing of the crippled man.

When the people witness the miraculous healing of the crippled man, they recognize the power is beyond human ability and jump to the conclusion that their gods, Zeus and Hermes, had come down to them in human form. Why did Luke mention that the crowd spoke in the Lyconian language? It was common throughout the Roman empire for people to speak three languages – Latin, the official administrative language, Greek, the common language of commerce, and then their local (native) language. Perhaps they thought speaking their native tongue would be understood by their gods and would honor them. But it may also be that they since this wasn't a Roman (administrative) matter or a commerce matter, that they just naturally spoke in their common (native) tongue.

Archaeologists have found evidence of a legend in Lystra that Zeus and Hermes had visited a man and his wife there long before Paul and Barnabas arrived. The people, assuming that these two gods have returned, identify Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes. Zeus was considered a chief god and Hermes was his spokesman. According to Greek legend, Hermes invented language and was an eloquent speaker, so since Paul was the one speaking the message, he must be Hermes. Our word for the science of interpretation is hermeneutics and is derived from the idea of Hermes inventing language. Persecution may derail the witness of many believers, but praise will do the same. The problem with a miracle is that it often draws too much attention to the person through whom God preforms the miracle and diverts it from God being given glory. That is what happened here as the people attempt to worship Paul and Barnabas as Hermes and Zeus. There was a temple to Zeus outside the city walls and the priest there brought bulls decorated with wreaths to be sacrificed in worship.

We see here that the Holy Spirit didn't enable Paul and Barnabas to have the ability at this time to interpret languages they didn't know because they were unaware of what the people were saying and intending to do until the priest brings the bulls to be sacrificed. Paul and Barnabas respond by tearing their clothes (a sign of deep grief or mourning – in this case horror because of blasphemy) and rush into the crowd shouting that the people shouldn't do this because they were men just like the people. They explain that they are just bringing good news that people should turn from these things to the living God who created the heavens and earth and everything in them. They continue to give God praise that he has shown his kindness by giving people rain, crops in their season, plenty of food and joy in their hearts. But even with all of this, Paul and Barnabas have difficulty keeping the people from sacrificing to them as gods. What Paul said to these people shows that he recognized it was necessary to start with what the people understood – that God exists – before declaring who the one true God is as they would with Jewish people.

Then some Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrive to incite them against Paul and Barnabas. This was not a spur of the moment happening. Antioch was 60 miles (3 days journey) from Lystra and Iconium was 20 miles (1 day journey) so these Jews who had opposed Paul and Barnabas in those cities were following with the intent of causing trouble for them wherever they went. We don't know how long it took them to stir up the people against Paul and Barnabas, but they convinced the people that Paul and Barnabas were deceivers and deserved to die. The crowd responds to the Jews by stoning Paul and then dragging him outside the city because they thought he was dead. Luke says the disciples gathered around Paul and he got up. Luke doesn't say whether these disciples were from those who had believed when Paul was in Antioch or Iconium and had travelled with him to Lystra or whether these were people who had believed in Lystra. Luke also doesn't say that the disciples prayed for Paul to be healed and that he was healed in response to their prayers. The indication would be that God protected Paul and kept him from dying even though that is what would normally happen when a person is stoned. After Paul got up, he went back into the city and didn't leave until the next day and go to Derbe, about 60 miles further to the southeast of Lystra. I wonder if the people who stoned Paul didn't see him because God hide him from their sight. Surely, if they had recognized him, they would have been roused up again to stone him a second time until and wait around his body to be certain he was dead. So again, we see God protecting his servant.

Verses 21 – 28. Luke doesn't tell us how long Paul and Barnabas were in Derbe or anything about what they did while they were there. All he says about their time in Derbe is that they told people the good news (about Jesus) and that many people became disciples. A man named Gaius who was from Derbe was traveling with Paul when he was heading to Troas on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). Perhaps this Gaius became a believer and disciple during this visit of Paul but there is nothing said for certain. Luke doesn't mention that there were any Jews that followed Paul to Derbe or that anyone else caused him and trouble while he was there.

After their time in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas retraced their journey by returning to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. On their way, they strengthen and encouraged those who had become disciples to remain true to the faith and that believers will experience many afflictions (sufferings) before they enter the Kingdom of God, the actual rule of God on the earth and not just the kingdom of his rule in their lives at the present. Over the years since Paul said this and Luke wrote it down, believers have suffered and are suffering many afflictions and persecution, even unto death of their physical bodies. In each of the communities, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders to lead the new believers.

From Antioch, they went to Perga and preached the good news there before going to Attalia where they found a boat on which to travel back to the port near Antioch in Syria. Having completed the mission for which they had been commissioned by the believers in Antioch, they called the believers together and gave a report of all that had happened and all that God had done through them and how he had opened the doors of faith for the Gentiles. The fact that God granted salvation to Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews is a primary focus of the book of Acts and of special interest to Luke's readers.

We don't know how long this missionary journey took, but since they traveled a minimum of 500 miles by sea and 700 miles by land, it is a good estimate that it took a minimum of one year and more likely two years. So, their return to Antioch was probably around 48 AD.

Luke ends his account of Paul's first missionary journey by saying they (Paul and Barnabas) stayed with the disciples there (in Syrian Antioch) for a long (but unspecified) time – probably two years.

Chapter 15

Verses 1 – 5. Now Luke describes how the increasing number of Gentiles becoming believers affected the early Church. The dating of the events described is explained by Paul in his letter to the Galatians (2:1). He tells the Galatians that three years after his conversion he visited Jerusalem and then fourteen years later went for the meeting that Luke will describe. That means the meeting in Jerusalem occurred seventeen years after Paul's

conversion which earlier determined was about 33 AD. That means the date of this meeting was in the Spring of 50 AD. (Galatians 1 and 2) Some Jews went from Judea to Antioch in Syria where Paul and others were reaching to Gentiles with the news of what Jesus' death offered to everyone who would believe and follow Jesus' teachings. These Jewish believers thought all believers were just a group within Judaism which understood the Messiah had come and therefore Gentile believers needed to accept Judaism, become circumcised, and follow the Mosaic Law to be really saved. What they were doing was adding the Old Testament regulations to what Jesus did to fulfill those regulations as if what he did wasn't enough. Those Jews coming to Antioch and teaching that to the believers there put Paul and Barnabas in sharp dispute with them and they even debated their view with them. Finally, the believers in Antioch sent Paul, Barnabas, and some other believers (which included Titus according to Gal 2:1) to Jerusalem to confer with the Apostles and other elders (which included James the half-brother of Jesus) about the differences in their beliefs. On their way through Phoenicia and Samaria, Paul and his fellow believers witness to believers in those areas about Gentiles in other areas becoming believers and the people rejoiced over what God was doing. When they arrive in Jerusalem, they are welcomed by all the believers, including the Apostles and elders and they report to them everything God has been doing through them in reaching Gentiles and Jews with the good news about Jesus. Some of the believers who were from the Pharisee party of Judaism were among those who met Paul and his companions. They argued that Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses to be saved, the same thing that was being said to the believers in Antioch.

Verses 6 – 11. Luke doesn't tell us until verses 12 and 22 that there was a large group of believers present during the discussion which he begins to describe. We know from Galatians 2:7 that the Apostle John was part of the discussion. We don't know if that means he hadn't moved to Ephesus yet or for some reason was back in Jerusalem. After the group had discussed the issue in great detail, Peter stood up to address the group. Since Peter was recognized as the leader of the Apostles, it is appropriate that he speak to the group to give the judgment of the group about the matter. He begins by reminding them that several years before this God had chosen him to present the news about Jesus to Gentiles (namely Cornelius and other Gentiles in the area of Caesarea – Acts 10 and 11). At that time Peter had explained his actions to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and convinced them that God had chosen to accept Gentiles as well as Jews to be saved if they believed in Jesus and had faith in his death to give them a right relationship with God. The proof of the salvation of the Gentiles was the Holy Spirit empowering the Gentiles just as he had the Jewish believers. After reminding them of all of this, Peter asks why they are trying to test God by imposing on these Gentile believers the Mosaic Law which they, themselves had found they were unable to keep perfectly enough to receive salvation from it. And he ends by saying that we believe that it is by the grace of Jesus that we are saved just as they are.

Verses 12 – 21. Then the whole assembly of believers were quiet as Barnabas and Paul described the miraculous signs and wonders God had done in the lives of Gentiles through their witness and preaching to them. When Barnabas and Paul have finished describing God's work among the Gentiles, James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jews in Jerusalem, speaks to the group. We know this isn't the Apostle James who was John's brother because Luke reported in chapter 12 that Herod had James killed by the sword (probably a beheading not simply stabbing him). James says that Simon (Peter) has described how first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself and that this is in agreement with what the prophets have written. Then he quotes Amos writing that God has said that he will rebuild David's tent (the Jewish nation and house of God - temple) and rebuild and restore it so that the remnant of men may seek the Lord and all Gentiles who bear his name. This rebuilding and restoration is indicated to be done earthly and not as a part of the Church or spiritually, but as an earthly national nation. The remnant of men would be the Gentiles who are alive at the time this happens and it will give them the opportunity to seek to know the Lord (Jesus). Amos says it is the Lord who has done these things who announced it. By this James is saying that it was God's idea that Gentiles could be saved apart from becoming Jews. Therefore, James says they should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God and becoming believers. Instead of making it difficult by imposing circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law, they should only write to them that they should abstain from food polluted by idols (meaning offered in worship of pagan deities. That they should restrain from sexual immorality (adultery and unnatural sexual activities). And that they should abstain from eating meat of

strangled animals and their blood. These things that the Gentiles should abstain from doing were things that involved ethical and moral issues and practices that would be offensive to Jews. These were things about which Moses had written should not be done and were read each Sabbath in synagogues throughout the known world.

Verses 22 – 29. To confirm the decision of the council, they wrote a letter to the believers in Antioch and sent it along with two members to accompany Paul and Barnabas as witnesses of the truth of the letter. One of the men was named Judas which indicates he was of the Jewish part of the Church. The other man was named Silas which is a Greek name and indicates he was a Hellenistic Jew. We find Silas mentioned by Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians (2:19). He also accompanies Paul on his second missionary journey to the Gentiles. The letter is addressed from the Apostles, elders and the brothers (the Church in Jerusalem) to the Gentiles believers not only in Antioch but also in Syria and Cilicia. So this would be a letter Paul would carry with him to read to Gentile and Jewish believers wherever he traveled. The letter says that the men who had been teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised and obey the Mosaic Law had not come with authority from the Church in Jerusalem, but that Judas and Silas come to confirm the authority of this letter to everyone. They write that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to them also not to burden the Gentile believers with anything other than abstaining from the four things they mention – food sacrificed to idols, from [eating] blood, from [eating] meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality (perversions – *porneias*) – because this would be well for them avoid.

Verses 30 – 35. Then Paul, Barnabas, Titus, Silas, Judas and all the other believers who came with Paul are sent back to Antioch where they present the letter to the Church there. Those believers were encouraged by the letter and the words of Silas and Judas who were considered prophets and whose words did much to strengthen and encourage the Church there. After Silas and Judas had spent some time in Antioch with the believers there, they were sent off with the blessing of peace to return to the believers in Jerusalem. But Paul and Barnabas stayed and preached and taught the word of God. The trip that Paul and Barnabas had med for this council meeting was about 560 miles, so it was not just a simple thing that they had undertaken.

Verses 36 – 41. Luke indicates the some among of time passed before this next event occurs but he doesn't say how much. It is thought that it occurs a short time later, so perhaps the Summer of 50 AD. Paul decides that he wants to go back through the towns where they had shared the news about Jesus on their first missionary journey and see how those believers are doing. Barnabas wants to take his cousin John Mark who had started out with them on the first journey but returned to Jerusalem after they left Cyprus and arrived in Perga in Pamphylia. Paul doesn't think it is wise to take him because he had not continued with them on the first trip. So he and Barnabas have what Luke calls a "sharp dispute." The Greek word Luke uses for this "sharp dispute" is *paroksusmos* (παροξυσμος) from which is derived the word paroxysm which is defined as any sudden, violent, or spasmodic action. Although the dispute resulted in Paul and Barnabas going on separate missionary trips, there is no indication that they disliked each other from that time forward or that Paul disliked John Mark. In fact, Paul writes very favorably about John Mark to the Colossians (4:10), to Philemon (24) and to Timothy (2 Tim 4:11) and even asks Timothy to bring John Mark to him in prison in Rome because he is helpful to him in his ministry. What is indicates is that the Holy Spirit used this dispute to have two missionary journeys to begin instead of just one. Barnabas takes John Mark and sails to Cyprus while Paul takes Silas and goes through Syria and Cilicia.



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Chapter 16

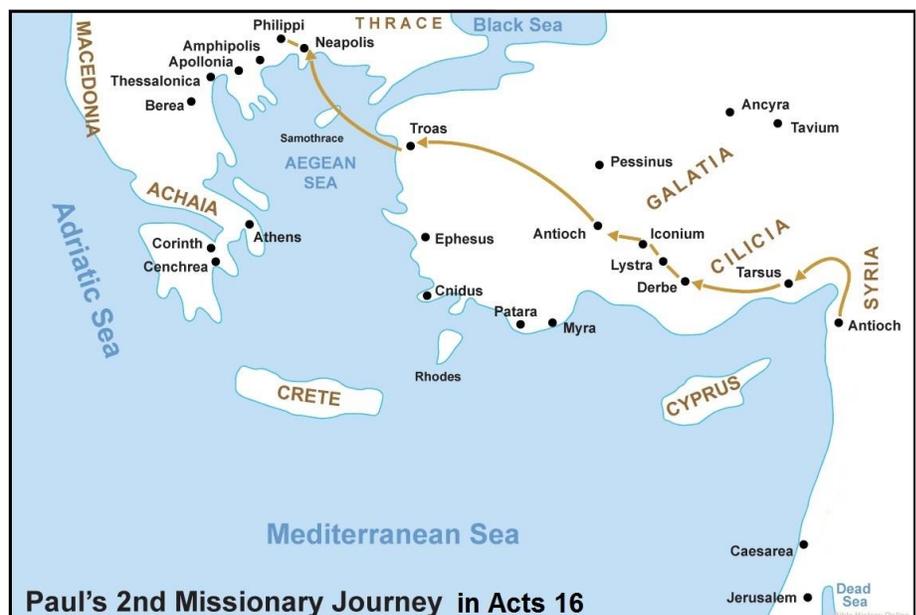
Verses 1 – 5. Paul travels from Antioch through Cilicia, where his hometown of Tarsus is located, and on to Derbe and Lystra. Just as Luke didn't say anything about Paul's time in Derbe on his first journey, he doesn't say anything about it this time. We discover later (Acts 20:4) that a man named Gaius from Derbe is traveling with Paul on his way to Troas on his third missionary journey. Perhaps he became a believer during Paul's first visit to the city or on this visit, but that information is not recorded for us. Paul goes on from Derbe to Lystra where Luke informs us that a disciple named Timothy lived. He tells us that Timothy's mother was a Jewess and that his father was a Greek. Timothy may have become a believer during Paul's first visit to Lystra. The believers in Lystra speak highly of Timothy so Paul decides to take him on his trip. Before doing this Paul has Timothy circumcised because he is a Jew and that would put Timothy in a favorable position with the Jews as being obedient to the practices of Judaism. As Paul, Silas and Timothy traveled from town to town they delivered the letter with the decision of the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem and encouraged them to follow what it said about abstaining from certain things. As a result, the believers in the churches were strengthened in their faith and the number of believers grew daily.

Verses 6 – 10. Luke says that Paul and his companions traveled throughout the regions of Phrygia and Galatia preaching about Jesus but that they were kept from preaching in the province of Asia. The province of Asia to which he refers is the combined provinces of Caria, Lydia, Phrygia, and Mysia seen in the map at right. So they tried to enter Bithynia but the Spirit wouldn't allow it. So they passed straight through Mysia (passed by) to the town of Troas on the coast. There, Paul received a vision of a man in



Macedonia begging him to come and help them. So they prepared to go to Macedonia because they recognized that the Spirit was calling them to go there instead of the provinces of Bithynia and Asia. Note Luke says "we got ready" (first person plural) indicating that he was now traveling with the group. Luke identifies the leadership of this journey as being the Trinity as he refers to "Holy Spirit" (v 6), the "Spirit of Jesus" (v 7), and then "God" (v 10) as leading them.

Verses 11 – 15. From Troas, Luke says they sailed straight to the island of Samothrace and after a night's stay sailed on to the port city of Neapolis. From the port city they traveled 10 miles to Philippi which was the leading city of the province of Macedonia. They stayed there for several days. The city of Philippi was named after Philip II (382 – 336 BC) who was the king of the area of Macedon. He was the father of Alexander the Great. Philippi was a area which had mines from which gold was taken. It was also the location of a Roman garrison. The city was on the



eastern end of the major Roman highway linking the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. The highway was called “Via Egnatia” which means Egnation Road. Philippi was a strategic commercial location and had a school of medicine.

On their first Sabbath in the city, they went outside the city gates expecting to find a place of prayer. What this indicates is that there weren’t enough Jewish men in the city to form a synagogue, so people met outside the city near a river so there would be water for purification rites. That’s where Paul went to find the Jews so he could present the good news about Jesus being the Messiah to them. What Paul and his companions found was a group of women, so they began to speak to them. One of the women was from the province of Lydia on the western side of Asia Minor. She had a business selling purple cloth dyed in the city of Thyatira. Roman laws restricted the wearing of purple clothes to people of status because purple was the most precious of colors. So, as a business woman, her clients would have been the wealthy and influential people.

Luke tells us that Lydia was a worshiper of God, but that doesn’t mean she was a believer, because we find that the Holy Spirit opened her heart to respond to what Paul said to the women. Then she and her household were baptized and she invited and persuaded Paul and his companions (Silas, Timothy, Luke and possibly more) to stay at her house.

Verses 16 – 40. During the days that they stayed in Philippi (the length of that stay is undetermined), on one occasion of going to the place of prayer, Paul and his companions were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. This girl is an example of Satan’s imitating God’s power by having one of his spirits have the girl predict something which he then causes to happen, thereby showing she could predict the future. Through her predictions, her owners made money. As the girl followed Paul and the rest of the group, she kept shouting that these men were servants of the Most High God and they are telling you the way to be saved. This didn’t happen just once but for several days. Since the people would have known that the girl had a spirit that enabled her to predict the future, this may have caused trouble for Paul because people began associating what he was saying with this demon’s announcement. Finally, Paul had been troubled enough by this situation, that he turns to the girl and commands the spirit to come out and leave her, and at once it did. The only conclusion we can make as to why Paul allowed her to shout the truth for several days before casting the demon out of her is that the Holy Spirit didn’t lead him to do it any sooner. It may have caused Paul some trouble but would have also given him the opportunity to speak to people about Jesus because of her words. But finally Paul casts out the demon and the girl is healed. Being a slave, this girl was on the opposite end of the social scale from Lydia

When the girl’s owners discover that she no longer has the demon and thus can’t make them money by predicting the future, they are upset. So they seize Paul and Silas and drag them before the magistrates (two Roman individuals given authority by the Emperor to govern a town) and charge them with throwing the city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for Romans to accept or practice. The Roman Emperor Claudius had recently expelled all the Jews from Rome so these individuals were using his disfavor with the Jews as a means to gain favor with the Roman authorities. The crowd joined the attack of these men so that the magistrates didn’t even attempt to investigate the matter to determine whether or not they would be punished. Paul and Silas were stripped, flogged, and thrown into prison. The commander of the prison was ordered to guard them well so he put them in an inner cell and fastened their feet in stocks. This was the treatment that would have been given to dangerous criminals.

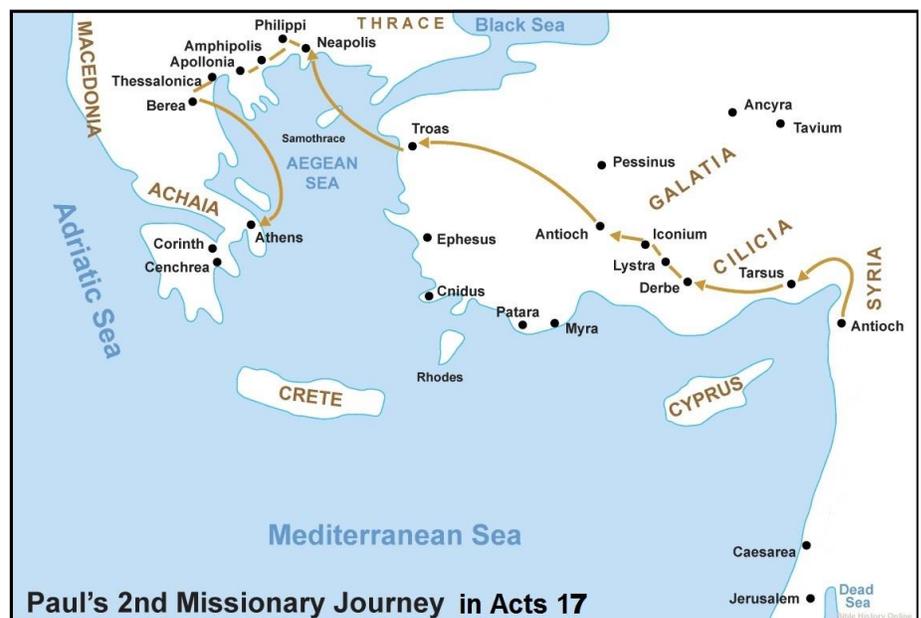
About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening. Here, again, we see the bottom rung of society being touched by Paul’s ministry. Suddenly, there is an earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison and all at once the prison door opened and everybody’s chains fell off. The earthquake wakens the jailer who runs to the doors of the prison and finds them open. Fearing the prisoners have escaped and knowing that his punishment would be whatever theirs was and then probably death, the jailer takes his sword and prepares to kill himself. At least that death would might make it easier on his family. But Paul interrupts him, saying don’t harm yourself because we are all here. The jailer

calls for lights so he can see this for himself and then falls trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. Apparently, the fact that Paul and Silas were still there and it seemed to him that they had kept the other prisoners from escaping, the jailer wants to know what he must do to be saved. He has probably either heard them directly or heard about what they have been preaching and this brings him to accept that they are serving God. Therefore he wants to do whatever is necessary to have the kind of relationship with God so that God would protect him too. Of course Paul and Silas point him to Jesus and then tell his whole house about what Jesus has done for them. Upon hearing this, the jailer and his whole family believe and are baptized. Then the jailer brings Paul and Silas into his house and feeds them a meal and everyone is filled with joy because they have believed. The jailer and his family would have been in the middle class of society in Philippi, so Paul had now touched the lives of all classes of people in the city.

The next morning, instead of sending for the prisoners to be brought before them, the magistrates sent word that Paul and Silas should be released. Either someone changed their story overnight, or the magistrates had intended from the beginning to teach them a lesson not to disturb the peace in their city and therefore they order them to be released. But Paul knows that Roman citizens are guaranteed the right to a public trial and freedom from degrading punishment such as beating. So he announces that since they are Roman citizens and did not receive the treatment they deserved, that the magistrates would need to come personally and escort them out of prison. We are not told whether or not Paul and Silas had tried to proclaim their citizenship before they were treated in such a degrading fashion. When the guards who came with the release order hear that Roman citizens have been treated unfairly, they return to report this to the magistrates. But now the magistrates apparently do not challenge Paul’s claim. When travelling, Roman citizens would carry with them a certified document giving evidence of their Roman citizenship (much like our modern passport). Anyone who falsely claimed Roman citizenship would be immediately killed, so perhaps Paul produced his document and had it taken to the magistrates, because the magistrates came to appease them and escorted them from the prison and then asked them to leave the city. Paul and Silas do not immediately leave but go to Lydia’s house and encourage the new believers before leaving town. Luke apparently stays behind in Philippi because he shifts the narrative back to third person again at this point. So the time frame is now about early Fall of 50 AD.

Chapter 17

Verses 1 – 9. Luke reports that they (3rd person) passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia and stopped at Thessalonica where there was a Jewish synagogue. We see in the passage that “they” included Paul and Silas who were the earthly leaders of the journey, but also Timothy and maybe even Gaius from Derbe and some others. Luke says that as was the custom of Paul, they went into the synagogue and three Sabbath days and reasoned with them showing and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. Then Paul plainly says that Jesus is the Messiah. As a result some of the Jews believed along with a large number of God-fearing Greeks and a few prominent women. That made some of the Jews jealous so they gathered some unsavory (bad) characters from the marketplace to form a mob and create a riot in the city. The mob rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas to drag them out, but when they weren’t there, they dragged Jason and some other believers out and took them before the city officials (politarchs – city rulers – a title used only in



Macedonia to describe city officials). The mob proclaimed that Paul and Silas had caused trouble all over the world and now they have come to Thessalonica to do the same and Jason has welcomed them into this house. They accuse Paul and Silas of defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king called Jesus. No facts or witnesses are presented to back up the accusations, but when the crowd (probably in the marketplace) and the officials were thrown into turmoil (incensed). So Jason and the other believers captured with him were forced to post bond in order to be set free. Since they didn't have Paul before them the bond was to insure that Paul left town and was no longer causing a disturbance. Luke doesn't say how long they stayed in Thessalonica, but from Paul's two letters to them from Athens, it would seem to have been some time since he writes of working to support himself rather than be a burden on them (1 The 1:9; 2 The 3:7-10). Two of the converts here are named in Acts 20:4 (Aristarchus and Secundus).

Verses 10 – 15. When night came, the believers sent Paul and his companions away to Berea. Again, on arrival they went to the local synagogue. The people of Berea received Paul's message with great eagerness and carefully examined the scriptures to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews, and Greeks (some were prominent women) believed. When the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul was preaching in Berea they traveled there and stirred up crowds against him. So the believers in Berea sent Paul to Athens and some of them went with him. But Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. The men who accompanied Paul to Athens returned with instructions from Paul that Silas and Timothy should join him as soon as possible. It appears from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians that Silas went back to Thessalonica or Philippi for a time before joining Paul in Athens. One of the converts in Berea is named in Acts 20:4 (Sopater, son of Pyrrhus).

Verses 16 – 34. Paul was greatly distressed to find Athens was full of idols. Athens was an old city even in Paul's time, having reached its prime about 500 years previously (so about 450 BC). The events of the book of Nehemiah occurred about the same time (445 – 420 BC). Athens was the cultural and intellectual center of the Greek world and was still prominent in these Roman times. There were statues to all different gods and were places of worship that were considered holy. Seeing all these idols not only disturbed him because of his Jewish upbringing but also because of the Holy Spirit within him. Paul continued his practice of reasoning with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the synagogue but also with Greeks in the marketplace each day. This brought him into dispute with a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who called him a "babbler" and said he was trying to advocate people believe in a "foreign god." They said this because they heard him preaching about Jesus and the resurrection. Epicureans were followers of Epicurus (341 – 270 BC) who believed that pleasure (sense of tranquility, freedom from pain and upsetting passions and fear, especially the fear of death) was the greatest good and should be man's pursuit. They taught that the gods didn't have any interest in human affairs, so religion was bad and that the gods would not punish in an afterlife because death was the end of existence. So they would be considered agnostic secularists – god is unknowable and pleasure is all there is. Stoics were followers of Zeno (340 – 265 BC). Their name is derived from the porch (portico – Greek "stoa") where Zeno taught. They placed great importance in living in harmony with nature, self-sufficiency, and rationalism. They believed that god was in everything and everything was god. So Paul's preaching about trusting Jesus' death to give a person a right relationship with God, the Creator of the universe and that Jesus was resurrected from the dead as proof of what he taught – these were in direct opposition to what the Stoics and Epicureans believed and taught.

So these philosophers brought Paul to the Aeropagus (literal meaning – a court or council of Ares, the Greek god of war) so he could explain this new teaching and what it meant. There is a hill in Athens called Mars Hill on which the Council of Aeropagus (30 individuals) met to give rulings about religion, morals, and education in Athens. This would be the opportunity for the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers to pick apart Paul's teachings and have it ruled that they were false (heretical) and could not be taught in Athens. In 399 BC, Socrates would have been tried by this council for his teachings in Athens and found guilty of corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens and of impiety (not believing in the gods of the city). He was sentenced to death by drinking a mixture containing the poison, hemlock. So Paul would have been in danger of the same sentence for false teachings. At this point Luke inserts a note to tell his readers that the Athenians were always listening to and talking about the latest ideas. That indicates this was an attempt to silence Paul.

Now Luke presents Paul's address before the Council of Aeropagus. This example of his preaching to a hostile group of intellectuals shows how Paul always used his situation to give a clear presentation of trusting Jesus' death and resurrection to give a person a new relationship with God. He begins with where his audience is in their thinking and then proceeds to point them to Jesus as the answer for what they seek. Note in his address that he is careful not to offend them or drive them away from hearing the truth about Jesus. He calls them "very religious" not to flatter them but to point out that they were very firm in their reverence for their gods. Then he points out that he saw an altar that was dedicated to the worship of an "unknown" god. An altar for worship of an unknown deity was not uncommon (one has been found in Pergamum). This appears to have been more common and designed to ensure that no god was overlooked who might possibly bring harm to a city. So Paul says he will tell them about that "unknown" god. He begins by saying God created the world and everything in it and thus is ruler over all of it. He does not live in temples built by hands and is not served by human hands because he has no need of anything because he gives life and breath to everything else. This indicates that this God is above all other gods because he doesn't need a temple or people to bring him food to eat. This meant all their other gods were meaningless. He continues by saying God made every nation from one man and determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. This means no race of people is superior to all the others and that the rise and fall of the power of nations and how far they will extend is under God's control. Thus man does not determine his own destiny as many believed. It also indicates that God is close to all humans if they only seek to find him. Paul even says some of their own poets have said that we are his offspring, so we should not think that he is like gold, silver, or stone which is shaped into an image by the hand of man. The poets he means are probably Epimenides who lived in Crete about 600 BC and was also quoted by Titus in his letter; Aratus who lived in Cilicia about 315-240 BC; and Cleanthes who lived about 331-233 BC. Quoting their own poets would get them to agree with the truth he was speaking. That God did not need an earthly home or earthly food meant he was spiritual rather than physical and that he did not reside in statues made of gold, silver, or stone (any earthly materials). So, Paul has now shown all their statues to be of no value in knowing or worshipping God. Then he continues by saying that in the past God has overlooked such ignorance (as worshipping statues) and commands all people everywhere to repent (turn away from acting in such ways) because he has set a day of judgment when all men will be judged by the man whom he has appointed. This does not mean people in the past were not guilty of sin (disobeying by not letting God be the ruler of their lives based on the revelation that was available to them) but that now he has come to pay for their disobedience they are guilty of not accepting what he has done for them (a greater revelation of himself). Paul ends by explaining that God has given proof of this by raising from death the one appointed to judge the world. This was what Paul was telling people in the marketplace and which the Stoics and Epicureans disputed with him. When the people (Council) heard Paul's message, some of them sneered (meaning they refused to give any validity to what Paul had said), but other said they wanted to hear more from Paul. At this point Paul left the meeting. Luke ends by reporting that a few became believers and followers of what Paul taught and names two, a man called Dionysius and a woman called Damaris. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul mentions the household of Stephanas as being the firstfruits of his ministry in Achaia (the area where Athens is located), so he may be another who became a believer at this time. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul mentions sending Timothy to them from Athens. (1 Thes 3:1 – 6)

Some people take Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:5 as an indication that he thought he took the wrong approach in Athens by starting from and using their worldly wisdom to point to Jesus. That seems highly unlikely because as we have just seen, Paul did point to Jesus. The problem is that highly educated, intelligent unsaved individuals generally are more critical and non-committal than others when presented with the truth about Jesus. What Paul did here was exactly what he did everywhere, which was to use every means to point people to the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who has made it possible for everyone to have a right relationship with God, and that his crucifixion and resurrection proves it. So everyone should repent of living in any other way than following what Jesus has taught. Luke says nothing about Paul planting a church in Athens but that doesn't mean he didn't or that the gospel didn't make an impact on the city. In fact, in the next century Publius, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras and other bishops and martyrs are mentioned as coming from the Church at Athens. And Basil and Gregory (early Church leaders) were noted as coming from the Christian schools of Athens.

out to the cities of Galilee to preach that the kingdom of heaven is near. Whenever a town wouldn't listen, he told them to shake the dust off of their sandals because it would be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. So Paul went to the house next to the synagogue which was owned by Titus Justus and continued to preach. Crispus, the synagogue ruler and his entire household became believers as well as many other Corinthians and they were all baptized.

One night the Lord gave Paul a vision and told him to keep on speaking and not be silent, that he was with him and no one was going to attack and harm him because he (the Lord) had many people in this city. This indicates that Paul may have had some fear and second thoughts about continue ministering in Corinth. That God had many people in Corinth could mean there were believers there before Paul arrived (like Aquila and Priscilla) or it could be the Lord seeing those who would respond to Paul's preaching before it happened. Paul's response to this vision was to stay in Corinth for 18 months preaching the word of God (Fall 50 AD to Spring 52 AD).

Verses 12 – 17. Luke records that while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. An inscription found at Delphi in central Greece establishes the beginning of Gallio's time as proconsul in Achaia as 1 July 51 AD. He left the area for medical reason in 52 AD and there is some debate as to whether or not he ever returned. So this attack would have been in early 52 AD. The "court" where the Jews brought Paul and accused him of persuading people to worship God in ways contrary to the law was a raised judgment seat (Greek *bema*) in the agora (market place) where the proconsul would hear disputes and render official judgments. This is the first time that Paul or any other Apostle (as far as we know) stood trial before the governor (proconsul) of a Roman province. As Paul is about to answer his accusers, Gallio speaks to the Jews making the complaint and refuses to hear their complaint. His reasoning is that their complaint is about religious matters and not some violation of Roman law so he would not be a judge of such matters. So he told them to settle the matter themselves and had them ejected from the court (but they would still be in the market place within the sight and hearing of Gallio). Because of this rejection of their attack, the Jews turn on Sosthenes (the ruler of the synagogue after Crispus became a believer) and beat him. But even though this was causing a disturbance, Gallio showed no concern for what was happening. Just as our court system uses judgments from other judges in deciding their cases, the decision of one proconsul would be used by others in making their decisions. This may account for how believers were tolerated throughout the Roman Empire until Nero eventually accused them of setting fire to Rome in 64 AD and began a terrible persecution of believers. This tolerance may also explain why seven years later Paul appealed to have his case heard by Caesar when he thought the Jews in Palestine were influencing the Roman officials there against him.

Verses 18 – 22. Paul stayed in Corinth for some time but would have departed by the Spring of 52 AD with the brothers (possibly Silas and Timothy but Luke doesn't say who) along with Aquila and Priscilla and set sail from Cenchrea for Syria. Before he leaves he has his hair cut off because of a vow he had taken. Luke doesn't say what the vow is but from the normal way a Nazirite vow of Numbers 6 was performed (the cutting of the hair at the end of the vow and presenting it in the temple to be burned on the altar) this was possibly that type of vow. It could also be that he had his hair cut before taking the vow at Cenchrea and then would have his head shaved and the hair at that time burned on the altar. Either way, this would explain why after he arrives in Caesarea that he goes to Jerusalem.

On the way they stop at Ephesus, in the area previously referred to as Asia where Holy Spirit kept Paul from going at the beginning of his journey. This is Paul's first visit to Ephesus and as was his custom he went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. They asked him to spend more time with them but he declines and says if it is God's will he will come back. He leaves Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus and sails on to Caesarea. Then he goes to Jerusalem, greets the believers, and returns to Antioch. The rest of his journey to Jerusalem and Antioch would mean he arrives in Antioch by Fall of 52 AD.

Verses 23 – 28. With the simple phrase "after spending some time in Antioch," Luke proceeds right into describing Paul's third missionary journey. He doesn't tell us how much time has passed or anything else about

Paul's stay in Antioch. His departure is probably in the Spring of 53 AD. Luke doesn't tell us anything about anybody traveling with Paul he just says Paul set out and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia strengthening all the disciples. It doesn't appear that Paul is going on this journey to start new churches as he did on his first two journeys. Luke indicates that Paul's purpose was to check in with the churches previously started and encouraging and strengthening those believers. So Paul, following the beginning of his second journey, would have traveled to Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Phrygia.



Then Luke interrupts his description of the journey to tell us what has been happening in Ephesus since Paul left there on his way to Jerusalem at the end of his second journey. Luke introduces us to Apollos, who is a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures (OT), and has come to Ephesus from his native town of Alexandria which is the capital of Egypt. Luke says he had been instructed in “the way of the Lord.” That was a common way of describing the faith of the believers. Then Luke goes on to say that Apollos spoke with great fervor and taught accurately about Jesus but that he only knew about the baptism that John had done to express repentance for sin and nothing more. When Apollos began speaking boldly in the synagogue in Ephesus, Aquilla and Priscilla heard him and decided to invite him to their home so they could explain “the way” of God more accurately. They had been taught in Corinth for a year by Paul and recognized that Apollos did not have all the information he needed to completely teach people how to follow “the way,” so they went out of their way to help him learn. Sometime during his time with Aquilla and Priscilla, Apollos wanted to travel to Achaia to teach there. Remember that the philosophers on the Areopagus heard Paul and most would not believe what he taught. And in Corinth the Jews brought Paul before the Roman proconsul and accused him of teaching people to worship God in ways contrary to the Law. But the Gallio, the proconsul, refused to hear their complaints because they were simply religious differences and not criminal. And Corinth was a highly pagan culture. This is the area to which Apollos wanted to go to teach people about “the way.” So the brothers in Ephesus encouraged him and wrote to the believers in that area to welcome him. Luke reports that after he arrived, he was a great help to the believers in that area because he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from their Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah. This was the same thing that Paul taught, but often it takes hearing it from different people to make an impact on the lives of some people.

Chapter 19

Verses 1 – 7. After Apollos had left Ephesus and went to Corinth, Paul left the area of Galatia and Phrygia and headed along the road through the Roman province of Asia toward Ephesus. Ephesus, like Athens, had reached its prime as a city and was in decline by the time of Paul. It had originally been a bustling seaport but because of silt building up in its harbor, it now lay three miles inland from the coast. When he arrives, he finds some disciples and asks them if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed. Since Luke didn't call these individuals believers but disciples, it seems that they were followers of John the Baptist and like Apollos only knew about the baptism to indicate repentance that John taught. That's why they tell Paul that they received John's baptism and didn't know about the Holy Spirit. That means they didn't know the Holy spirit had been sent as John had predicted. (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:32-33) So Paul explains the meaning of the baptism that John was doing and reminds them that John told his disciples to believe in the one coming after him who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. When the men hear this they believe and Paul's baptizes them. As he lays his hands on them for their baptism, the Holy Spirit empowers them to speak in other languages and even to prophesy. This would have furthered the spread of the good news about Jesus to the diverse culture with many languages spoken in Ephesus. Luke tells us that there were twelve men in this group.

Verses 8 – 10. Paul follows his normal pattern and goes to the synagogue and speaks boldly to the Jews about the kingdom of God for three months. That means he attempts to persuade them that Jesus is the Messiah. But as in many other areas, many of the Jews became obstinate, refused to believe, and publicly maligned “the way”

and anyone who claimed to believe that Jesus is “the way.” (John 14:6) So Paul quit trying to persuade them and with the twelve disciples who believed, he began having daily discussions in the lecture hall owned by Tyrannus. He continued to do this for two years (53 to 55 AD) so that Jews and Greeks throughout the province of Asia had the opportunity to hear about Jesus.

During Paul’s three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31), he had a lot of contact with the believers in Corinth. He wrote them a letter that he called his “former letter” in 1 Corinthians 5:9. Then he wrote what we still have and call 1 Corinthians, probably in the spring of 55 AD. Paul sends Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17) to encourage them and asks that they receive him and what he will teach them as teaching from Paul. Apparently, Apollos traveled from Corinth to Ephesus because Paul wrote to the Corinthians (56 AD) that he had urged him to go to them but that he was unwilling at that time but would go later. (1 Cor 16:12) Following Timothy’s visit to Corinth, Paul seems to have made a “painful visit” to Corinth and then returned to Ephesus. (2 Cor 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2) If Paul wrote letters to any other churches during these two years, we don’t know about it because the letters have not been preserved for us to read.

Verses 11 – 20. Luke tells us that God did many extraordinary miracles through Paul during those two years, even the healing of illnesses and the driving out evil spirits just by the individuals having a cloth that Paul had touched being laid on them. This is not the only time that God healed because someone believed and touch a garment. It happened when the woman with prolonged bleeding believed and touched the hem of Jesus’ cloak. Paul never suggests using cloths that he has touched for the healing of people, but God honored the faith of those people by granting them miracles. It is possible that he did this to show his power since there were many pagans practicing sorcery and supposed exorcisms. That would appear to be the reason since Luke tells us about the seven sons of Sceva who thought they would perform exorcisms in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches. The believed, like many pagan religions believed, that there is power in the words of an incantation so if they just spoke words like Paul, then they would be able to drive out evil spirits. Sceva was a Jewish chief priest living in the area. These sons heard from the evil spirit that he knew Jesus and Paul. He recognized the authority of Jesus as his creator, and he recognized Paul’s authority because the Holy Spirit lived in him. But he didn’t know these men; he didn’t recognize that they had authority like Jesus and Paul. So the evil spirit empowered the man to jump on the seven sons, giving them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. When this event was hear by the Jews and Greeks in Ephesus, they feared the Lord and held the name of Jesus in high regard. Another result was that many of the people who believed in Jesus and had practiced sorcery, confessed the evil of their deeds, brought their scrolls (teaching of how to do incantations) and burned them publicly. The value of those scrolls was estimated at 50,000 drachmas. A drachma was the wage of a worker for one day. Using a minimum wage of \$10 per hour and a working day of 8 hours, that would make the value today at about \$4 million. Because of the miracles, the driving out of evil spirits, and the burning of sorcery manuals of such value by believers, the word of the Lord spread widely and had much power in leading people to believe in Jesus.

Verses 21 – 22. Luke tells us that after all of this happened, so around the end of his two years in Ephesus, Paul decides go to Jerusalem after traveling through Macedonia and Achaia. His intend would be to encourage the believers in the cities where he planted churches during his second journey. But then Luke adds after Paul returns to Jerusalem he wants to go to Rome. Paul sends two of the people with him (Timothy and Erastus) to Macedonia while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer, perhaps several months.

Verses 23 – 41. Sometime during the last months that Paul stayed in Ephesus the following incident takes place. To understand the significance of this incident we need to know that even though was not the great seaport that it once had been, it is still a significant city on the major Roman road from West to East. It was a major religious center when it was in its prime and still is, drawing worshippers to the great Temple of Artemis (Greek name – Diana, the roman name). The temple was four times larger than the size of the Parthenon at Athens and was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The first temple was built around 800 BC on a marshy strip of land near the river at Ephesus and housed a statue to the goddess Artemis who was a symbol of fertility and pictured draped with eggs or multiple breasts from her shoulders to her waist. It also

housed a sacred stone which was probably a meteorite which they claimed had fallen from the god Jupiter. Over the years it had been destroyed and rebuilt several times, each time bigger and more elaborate than before. The last rebuilding of the temple began in 356 BC and took at least 60 years to complete. When Alexander the Great came through Ephesus in 333 BC it was still under reconstruction and he offered to fund the finishing of it. The recorded size of the temple was 425 feet long, 225 feet wide, and had 127 columns that were 60 feet in height supporting a massive roof above it. The temple was on the side of Mount Pion, about a mile northeast of the city. As well as a place of worship, it served as a bank and a place of cultic immorality (prostitution). Even as late as the 2nd Century AD, the worship of Artemis was claimed to be the most widely followed in the ancient world. The temple remained standing until 263 AD when the Goths destroyed it.

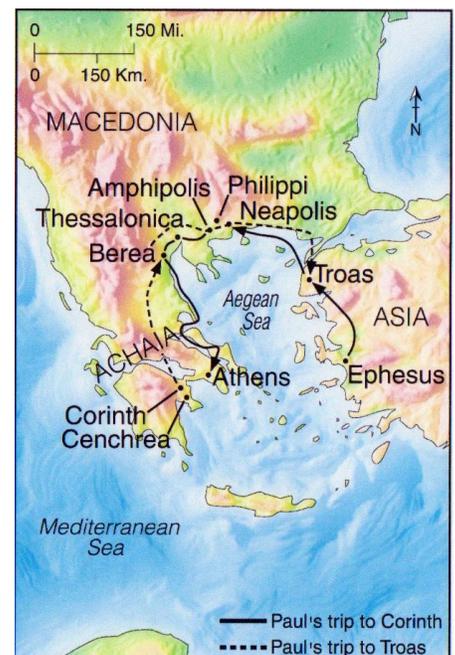
Since the temple was a wonder of the ancient world with many pilgrims coming to worship there, a thriving souvenir business had arose to sell miniature silver replicas of the statue of Artemis that people would take home so they could worship the idol in their home. Because “the way” taught that Jesus’ death made it possible for anyone who believed in him to have a right relationship with God, it drew a lot of people away from believing in the goddess Artemis and thus it was affecting the source of income for the silver craftsmen who made the statues of Artemis that the pilgrims would buy. So a silversmith named Demetrius called together the silver workers along with workers from related trades and convinced them that Paul was a threat to their business and to the Temple of Artemis, robbing her of her divine majesty. Demetrius worked the people into a riotous frenzy with shouts of “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.”

Soon the whole city was in an uproar and seized Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul’s traveling companions, and rushed them into the city amphitheater wanting to harm them. Paul heard what was happening and wanted to go to the theater and appear before the crowd, but the believers wouldn’t let him go. Even some of the officials of the province who were Paul’s friends sent him a message urging him not to go. The crowd in the theater were so confused about what was happening that most didn’t even know why they were there. They were just following all the activity whipped up by Demetrius and his fellow workers. The Jews pushed a man named Alexander to the front of the crowd and shouted instructions for him to address the mob. The people became silent to listen to him until they realized that he was a Jew and then they began shouting again about Artemis being great and continued for at least two hours.

Finally the city clerk was able to quiet the crowd and told them that since it was a known fact that Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and her image which fell from heaven, that they should be quiet and not do anything rash. He said that the men brought there (Gaius and Aristarchus) had neither robbed the temple nor blasphemed the goddess so if Demetrius and his fellow workers have a grievance they should take it to the proconsuls who are available in the court (in the market place) and press charges. He tells them that they are in danger of being charged with rioting without reason and thus he is able to get them to be quiet and leave.

Chapter 20

Verses 1 – 6. After the uproar had ended, Paul gathered the believers together and after encouraging them, set out for Macedonia. He traveled through the area of Macedonia encouraging the believers and finally arrived in Greece (Corinth). He stayed there for three months before deciding to set sail for Syria. This gave him opportunity to correct some of the errors of the believers in Corinth that he wrote about in his letters that we have preserved for us to read. But the Jews made a plot against him just as he was going to set sail, so he decided to go back through Macedonia. He was being accompanied by Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Derbe; Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia, and Timothy. Paul sent these men on



ahead of him to Troas to await his arrival. And Luke says that “we” (including himself) set sail from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread (seven days after Passover) and in five days joined the others at Troas where they stayed for several days. Since Luke changes from 3rd person to 1st person with this comment, it means he rejoined Paul at Philippi where he apparently stayed behind during Paul’s second journey in early fall of 50 AD.

Verses 7 – 12. While they were at Troas, on the first day of the week (Sunday) they gathered to break bread together. Paul spoke to the believers in Troas because he intended to leave the next day, but he kept talking until midnight. They were meeting in an upstairs room with many lamps providing light. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, and as Paul talked on and on, he became sleepy, finally went completely asleep, and fell to the ground from the third story. When the people got to him and picked him up they found that he was dead. Paul came down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him and said to the people not to be alarmed; he is alive. Then Paul went back upstairs, broke bread, ate, and kept talking until daylight. Then he left and the people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

Verses 13 – 16. Luke says that he and Paul’s other traveling companions went ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos where they were going to meet Paul after he walked there. The trip by ship would have taken longer than what Paul would by walking the 20 miles between the two cities, so this gave Paul a little extra time to spend in Troas. But Luke doesn’t record what he did with this time. When Luke and company arrived in Assos by ship, they took Paul aboard and continued sailing to Mitylene. The next day they arrived off the coast where the city of Kios was and then the next day crossed over to the city of Samos. The following day they arrived in Miletus. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending a lot of time in Asia because he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost (fifty days after Passover in 57 AD).



Verses 17 – 37. So at Miletus, Paul sent for the elders (leaders) of the believers in Ephesus to come and meet him. When they arrived he reminded them of his stay in the province of Asia – that he served the Lord with great humility and with tears even though he was severely tested by the plots of the Jews; that they know he did not hesitate to preach anything that would be helpful to them, publicly and from house to house; and that he declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in Jesus. He concludes that now he is compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem and doesn’t know what will happen to him there, only that in every city in which he has been traveling, the Holy Spirit has told him that prison and hardships are facing him. He encourages them by saying that he considers his own life worth nothing if only he can finish his race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given him – that of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

He says that he knows that none of them will ever see him again. So he declares that he is innocent of the blood of all men for he has not hesitated to proclaim to them the whole will of God. So he tells them to keep watch over the flock which the Holy Spirit have made them oversees. He tells them to shepherd the church of God which he (Jesus) bought with his own blood. He warns them that after he leaves savage wolves will come in among them and will not spare the flock (believers). He warns them that even from among their own number men will arise to draw away disciples so that they should be on their guard. He says they should remember that during his three years with them he never stopped warning them every night and day with tears. Then he blesses them, committing them to God and the word of his grace which can build them up and give them an inheritance among all of those who are sanctified. He says he never coveted anyone’s silver, gold, or clothing but worked with his hands to supply his needs and the needs of his companions so that in everything he did he showed the kind of hard work that they must have to help the weak, remembering the words of Jesus: It is more blessed to give than to receive. Then he knelt down with them and prayed and they all wept, embraced, and

kissed because they were grieved that they would never see him again. Finally they accompanied him to the ship so he could continue on his trip to Jerusalem.

Chapter 21

Verses 1 – 6. After Paul and his companions return to the ship, they sail straight to Cos, an island 40 miles south and a little west of Miletus. They stayed the night there and the next day sailed 90 miles farther south and east to the island of Rhodes, whose name means “Roses.” The people of Rhodes erected a gigantic statue to honor the god, Helios, on the island after their defeat of the ruler of Cyprus in 304 BC. The statue which was 98 feet tall stood on a base that was 49 feet tall and is known as the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was constructed of bronze plates fashioned from



the weapons of the defeated army affixed to stones and iron framing. It stood until the earthquake on the island in 226 BC but its fallen remains were visible for over 800 years until Arab conquerors reportedly dismantled and sold them. From Rhodes they sailed 60 miles east to Patara a port on the south coast of Lycia. From there, they were able to board a ship headed 400 miles directly to Tyre in Phoenicia where the ship unloaded its cargo. While the ship was being unloaded, Paul and his companions stayed for seven days with the disciples who lived there. Those disciples may have been some of the ones who fled the persecution following Stephen's stoning or some of those who responded to their witness in the area (Acts 11:19) or they could have been people who responded to Philip's evangelization around Caesarea which was in the southernmost part of Phoenicia. (Acts 8:40)

Some of those disciples, because of information from the Holy Spirit, urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But when the seven days was over, Paul continued on his way. As they left, the disciples and their wives and children accompanied them to the city walls where they knelt and prayed for the journey. Then Paul and companions boarded the ship and continued on their way.

Verses 7 – 16. The ship's next stop was in Ptolemais, 25 miles south of Tyre, where they stayed for a day and Paul visited with the believers living there. Then it sailed on to Caesarea, 40 miles further to the south, where Paul and his companions stayed at the house of Philip, the evangelist, who was originally one of the seven deacons whom the believers in Jerusalem selected to accomplish the work of seeing that all widows were treated fairly in the distribution of food. (Acts 6:1 – 7) Philip had four unmarried daughters whom Luke says prophesied without mentioning anything that they had prophesied. According to early church tradition, Philip and his daughters later moved to Hierapolis, a city in Phrygia near Laodicea, where the daughters recounted the early history of the church at Jerusalem to Papias, Bishop of the city and author of *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*.

After they had been there several days, a believer named Agabus came there from Judea. He was known as a prophet and in Acts 11:28 came from Jerusalem to Antioch in 46 AD and prophesied about a famine to come on the Roman world. He took Paul's belt and tied his own hands and feet with it and said "In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles." Luke says that when everyone heard this, he and Paul's other companions and the believers in Philip's house who heard the prophecy urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But Paul answered that they should not be weeping because he was ready to not only be bound but to die in Jerusalem for the name of Jesus. When Paul would not be dissuaded, the believers gave up trying and said, "The Lord's will be done." Why was Paul so adamant about going to

They made their accusation based on an assumption that Paul had done this since they had seen him in the city with Trophimus who was an Ephesian. So perhaps these Jews were some of the ones that opposed Paul and caused a riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). As a consequence, the whole city was aroused and people came running from all directions. They seized Paul and drug him from the temple area and immediately the gates were shut to keep people from entering the temple area. Those gates would have been in the wall around the court of the Israelites. The area from which they dragged Paul could have been the court of males or the court of the Israelites but into the court of Gentiles. The fortress of Antonio which housed the barracks for the Romans was adjacent to the north wall of the court of the Gentiles and at the western edge. The crowd begins to beat Paul, intending to kill him but the commander of the Roman troops hears the uproar of the people, takes some of his soldiers, and runs down from the fortress into the crowd. According to Acts 23:26, the commander is Claudius Lysias. He commanded the Tenth Legion which consisted of about 1,000 troops. When the soldiers arrive the crowd stops beating Paul. The commander orders Paul to be bound with two chains (meaning and then asks who he is and what he has done. Some of the crowd shout one thing and others another so that the commander can't determine the truth, so he orders Paul to be taken to the barracks. When they reach the steps the violence of the crowd becomes so great that Paul has to be carried by the soldiers. As they are carrying him up the stairs, the crowd keeps shouting: "Away with him!"

Verses 37 – 40. Before the soldiers take him into the barracks, Paul asks if he may say something to the commander. Apparently Paul spoke to him in Greek because the commander is amazed he speaks Greek. The commander has presumed that Paul is an Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out into the desert. So he asks if he isn't that person. Paul tells him that he is a Jew from the town of Tarsus in Cilicia and a citizen of no ordinary city. Tarsus is a Roman city so when Paul says he is a citizen and not just a resident, that means he has Roman citizenship. That is something that causes the Roman commander to pause and listen to Paul's request. Paul simply asks to speak to the people. When the commander agrees, Paul stands on the steps and motioned for the crowd to become quiet. Amazingly, they quiet down to hear what Paul might say. So Paul begins to speak to them in Aramaic (or possibly Hebrew).

Chapter 22

Verses 1 – 21. Paul addresses the crowd as "brothers and fathers" which means he is identifying with them as a Jew. And since he is speaking in Aramaic, they become very quiet to hear what he has to say. Then he tells them that although he was born in Tarsus he was raised in Jerusalem and was a student of the great Jewish teacher, Gamaliel. As a student of Gamaliel, Paul says he was thoroughly trained in the Law and as zealous for God as any of them. His zeal was so great that he persecuted followers of the Way (believers in Jesus) to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. He says the high priest and the entire council can testify that he obtained letters from them to the Jewish brethren in Damascus giving permission for him to bring followers living there as prisoners back to Jerusalem.

Then Paul begins telling them about his conversion experience on the road to Damascus. The crowd listens quietly as Paul describes the bright light that knocked him to the ground, the voice asking him "Why do you persecute me," the announcement that the speaker is Jesus of Nazareth, that his traveling companions didn't understand the voice speaking to him, that he was told to go into Damascus to await hearing what he has been assigned to do, his companions leading into the city because he was blinded, a man named Ananias who was a devout and highly respected Jew commanding him to receive his sight, that God had chosen him to see the Righteous One (Messiah) and to hear directly from him that he will be a witness to everyone about what he has seen and heard, and that he should get up, be baptized and wash his sins away calling on his (Messiah, the righteous One) name. Then he tells about returning to Jerusalem and while he was praying at the temple saw the Lord and heard him say to leave the city because they (the Jews) will not accept Paul's testimony about him. Then Paul says that they know about his imprisoning those who believe in him (the Lord) and that he was giving approval and guarding the clothes of those who killed Stephen. Finally he says the Lord told him to go and he will send him far away to the Gentiles. Paul's statement to the crowd stresses that his encounter on the road was with Jesus, the Messiah, in his risen body and that the risen Lord spoke to him.

Verses 22 – 30. When the crowd heard the last of Paul’s statement, they quit listening and began to shout to rid the earth of him because he is not fit to live. Not only were they shouting but they were taking off their cloaks and throwing them into the air. So with the resumption of the rioting, the commander orders the soldiers to take Paul inside so he can be flogged and questioned to find out why the people were shouting these things about him. As he is being stretched out to be flogged, Paul asks the centurion standing there to direct the flogging if it is legal for him to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty. The centurion immediately goes to the commander and reports that Paul is a Roman citizen and asks what he is going to do. Now the commander goes to Paul to confirm that he is really a Roman citizen. When Paul says he is, the commander says that he had to pay a big price to get his citizenship, but Paul responds that he was born a citizen (inherited rather than purchased was more important). Immediately the men who were going to flog and question Paul move away from him. And the commander is alarmed that he put a Roman citizen in chains let alone almost have his flogged. Since the commander wants to know why Paul was being accused by the Jews, the next day he has Paul released and orders the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to appear before him. When they arrive, he has Paul brought in to stand before them.

Chapter 23

Verses 1 – 11. Paul looks straight at the Sanhedrin and addresses them respectfully as “brothers.” Then he begins by proclaiming his conscience is clear that he has fulfilled his duty to God to this very day. His claim meant that he believed that nothing he has done, which he was probably going to relate to them, was contrary to the will of God as contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and specifically that what he believed as a follower of Jesus as Messiah did not compromise his Jewish heritage. Paul’s claim to being upright upset Ananias. So he told those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. That was a punishment for speaking something that could not be true. According to Josephus, Ananias really knew the wickedness of man because of his own life. Josephus says that Ananias seized tithes for his own use that should have gone to other priests, gave large bribes to Romans and Jews to get what he wanted, and resorted to violence and assassination to accomplish his ends. He was appointed the high priest by the Romans in 47 AD and was finally assassinated by the Jews during their uprising against the Romans in 66 AD. (Josephus, *The Wars* . . . , 2:12:6; 2:17:6, 9; *Antiquities of* . . . , 20:5:2; 20:6:2; 20:9:2, 4.) Jewish law considered a person to be innocent until proved guilty by at least two witnesses, but Ananias had Paul punished before even hearing any charges against him. Paul replies that God will strike him (calling him a whitewashed wall) because he has judged and punished him in violation of the Law. The idea of a whitewashed wall or tomb referred to something (or some person) who looked good on the outside but was stained, inferior, or filthy inside. (See Ezek 13:10-16; Matt 23:27) Some people try to explain that Paul’s statement was extreme, an overreaction, an attempt at irony, or that he simply lost his temper. They see that his response to the Sanhedrin’s question of how dare he insult the high priest as an apology. In reality Paul is simply speaking the truth, although rather bluntly. Paul responds that he did not realize that the individual was the high priest because it is written in the Law not to speak evil about the ruler of your people. (Ex 22:28 “Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.”) Some people think Paul might have not recognized that the man was the high priest because of poor eyesight (Gal 4:13- 15) or that Paul was looking in another direction. It is more probable that Paul did not know who the high priest was because the last time he had been with the Sanhedrin was before his conversion in 33 AD and Ananias was appointed high priest in 47 AD. When Paul visited the believers to present his case for his ministry to the Gentiles in 50 AD he had no reason to be anywhere to see or hear about the new high priest.

Paul knows that some of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees and some were Sadducees who did not believe in resurrection of the dead or the existence of good or evil spirits. The Pharisees did believe those things. So, since Paul can’t receive a “fair” hearing by men who didn’t follow the Law that they supposedly were protecting, he changes his tactics and divided the Sanhedrin based on their beliefs. Basic to Paul’s case was Israel’s national hope of deliverance by the Messiah which rested on the resurrection of that Messiah as predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures. So Paul addresses them again as “brothers,” and says that he is a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and that he is on trial because of his belief in the resurrection of the dead. That caused an uproar of arguing among the Sanhedrin that became so violent that the Claudius Lysias feared Paul would be

torn to pieces by them. So he orders his soldiers to take Paul away from them by force and move him to the barracks.

That night, as Paul stayed in the Fortress of Antonio, Jesus appeared to Paul and tells him to take courage because as he has testified about him in Jerusalem so he must also testify in Rome. That confirms what Paul has thought he should do and why he desired to go to Rome.

Verses 12 – 22. The next morning the Jews gather more than forty men together with a plot to kill Paul. And they bind themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed him. Then these men go to the chief priests and elders and inform them of the oath and they suggest that the Sanhedrin petition the Roman commander to have Paul brought back before them with the pretense that they want to hear more accurate information about his case. The plotters planned to kill Paul on the way. The distance from the Fortress of Antonio to the hall where the Sanhedrin met in the temple was short (maybe 100 feet) so the plotters intend to attack the Roman guards while they walked across the Court of Gentiles. They surely understood that the Roman guards would kill some of them before they could kill Paul but they were willing to die to get rid of Paul. They didn't know whether the Roman commander would agree and if he didn't then they would not be able to fulfill their oath and according to the oath would starve to death. But scholars tell us that wasn't likely because the Jews had a provision that released oath takers from the consequences of their oath if the failure to fulfill it was impossible because of external circumstances beyond their control.

Luke tells us that the son of Paul's sister heard of the plot and went into the barracks of the Fortress of Antonio to tell Paul about it. This is the first and only time that we learn about Paul having a sister. There is nothing even mentioned about her in any extra-biblical literature. We don't know if she lived in Tarsus or Jerusalem or to whom she was married. We also don't know how old her son is, but he is called a young man which could indicate he was a young teenager or even a preteen. That would indicate his sister and family lived in Jerusalem. The son obviously wants to protect his uncle. Since Paul is not a prisoner but a Roman citizen under protective custody, he would have the right to receive visitors and even make requests of the Roman guards. So Paul notifies a centurion that the boy has something the commander needs to hear and asks the centurion to take him to Claudius Lysias. The centurion complies and tells Claudius what Paul has said when he arrives with the boy. Claudius takes the boy aside and asks what he knows and the boy tells him the details of the plot against Paul. Claudius dismissing the boy doesn't mean he doesn't believe the boy's story, only that he told the boy he could leave, but he commanded him not to tell anyone what he reported to him. That indicates he believed the story. So Claudius calls two of his centurions and tells them to get men ready for a trip to the Roman governor, Felix, in Caesarea. Felix was the governor (procurator) of Judea from 52 – 59 AD and had a reputation of being a harsh ruler who had risen from a lowly background. Tacitus, a Roman historian, described Felix in this way: "... Antonius Felix, practiced every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of [a] king with all the instincts of a slave." (Tacitus, *The Histories*, 5:9.) The centurions are to get 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen and be ready to leave at nine that evening. And they are to provide a horse for Paul because they are going to take him to Felix that night. Obviously took the boys story seriously and recognized that it meant that Paul, a Roman citizen, was in danger if he kept him in protective custody in Jerusalem and that it could cause a major disturbance in the city. That would jeopardize his job so he needed to take quick, decisive action.

Verses 25 – 30. Since Claudius was sending Paul to Felix, he needed to explain his actions with a letter that summarized the events which led to his taking this action. We don't know whether Luke had access to that letter but the facts included are what Claudius would at least have written to Felix. The letter follows the known pattern of letter writing for that time period and is very politely addressed as it would have been from a subordinate, who had bought his Roman citizenship, to his boss who was a natural born Roman citizen. Claudius puts himself in the best possible light in the incident, mentioning his "rescue" of Paul but conveniently leaving out that he almost had flogged a Roman citizen. He says the Jews had arrested Paul, something that we had not been told earlier and may have been said to put him in a better light. He says he "rescued" Paul because he knew he was a Roman citizen, but the fact is he didn't learn that until after he had arrested ("rescued") him.

Of particular interest is that fact that in his judgment Paul was not guilty of a crime that deserved death or imprisonment, but that Paul had a disagreement with the Jews over their beliefs. And he informs Felix that he has told the Jews to present any case they have against Paul to Felix. It is interesting that every Roman official before whom Paul has been or will be brought find him not guilty of any wrong.

Verses 31 – 35. The 270 soldiers plus the 2 centurions depart with Paul and travel at night as far as Antipatris which is a Roman fortress about 42 miles NW of Jerusalem (as the crow flies), but 40 miles by road. At that point the 70 soldiers on horseback, one centurion, and Paul continued on the 32 miles by road to Caesarea while the other 200 soldiers and one centurion returned to the Fortress of Antonio in Jerusalem. When the soldiers arrived with Paul, the centurion handed him over to Felix along with the letter from Claudius Lysias. After Felix read the letter, he asked which province Paul was from. Felix's concern here was that if Paul was from a province which had its own ruler as well as a Roman governor then that ruler had the right to witness the proceedings. After learning he was from Cilicia, Felix announced that he would hear Paul's case after his accusers arrived. Cilicia was not a province which had its own ruler so Felix didn't need to inform anyone else and wait for them to arrive before hearing Paul's case. Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace. This was a place that Herod the Great had built and although it had cells for prisoners, since Paul was a Roman citizen and not charged with a crime it is likely that he was put in a guest room with guards posted outside.



Chapter 24

Verses 1 – 9. Although the high priest, Ananias, was notified that Paul had been sent to Felix in Caesarea the morning after Paul had departed, he did not arrive in Caesarea until five days after Paul. Ananias took with him some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. The elders were most likely members of the Sanhedrin and could have been Pharisees and Sadducees, Ananias most likely took Sadducees with him because they would have disagreed with Paul's position about someone being resurrected from the dead and life after death – the very argument that Paul had used before Claudius Lysias to disrupt the accusations against him. Tertullus is a Roman name but that doesn't mean he is Roman. It is possible he was a Jew. Ananias most likely didn't present his case against Paul himself because he might have made an error concerning Roman law and it is possible that the proceedings were held in Latin which he may not have known or at best was a fourth language for him after Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Tertullus is identified as an attorney (*rhētoros* which is only used here in the New Testament) and indicates that he was especially skillful in speaking.

Tertullus begins his presentation by heaping praise on Felix. His words were flattery because Felix had only become the procurator in 52 AD and it is now 57 AD so the "long period of peace under his rule" that Tertullus mentions could only be 5 years. The importance of his opening mention of peace under Felix was because he was going to accuse Paul of breaking the peace. Tertullus makes three charges against Paul. First, he is a troublemaker who stirs up the Jews and causes riots wherever he goes. This was the primary charge against Paul because Rome sought to keep the peace in all the area under their rule and thus someone who caused riots could not be tolerated. Second, he called Paul a ringleader of the Nazarene sect which indicated that he was not of the mainstream Jewish religion. The Romans tolerated Judaism but a sect that caused riots among the Jews was not something Rome could tolerate. Third, he claimed that Paul had tried to desecrate the temple and act that would have been designed to cause a riot among the Jews and thus something that Rome could not tolerate. He says they (the Jews) seized him, which agrees with Claudius's statement that the Jews had "arrested" Paul.

This third charge could also imply that Felix should put Paul to death because Rome had given the Jews the right to execute people who desecrated the temple. Tertullus does not mention that the Jews had tried to kill Paul because that would have put them in an unfavorable light before Felix. All the Jews with Tertullus and Ananias agreed that the charges were true and thus they were “witnesses” for the prosecution. They also undoubtedly expected Felix to quickly put Paul to death because he had crucified many other leaders of uprisings for disturbing the peace.

Verses 10 – 21. Felix now gives Paul the floor to give his defense of the charges brought by Tertullus. Paul begins simply, but politely by acknowledging that Felix had been judge over the nation for a number of years. He doesn't add a lot of flattery but only says that because of Felix's experience he will gladly make his defense. He says that Felix can easily verify the truth that he had only gone up to Jerusalem 12 days before to worship. Considering that Tertullus, the high priest and his entourage arrived five days after Paul arrived, that Paul's overnight journey with the Roman soldiers started after the high priest and Sanhedrin had accused him before Claudius Lysias, and after Claudius had taken him into custody to protect him from being killed. That means Paul's only confrontation with the Jews in Jerusalem occurred seven days before this trial before Felix and five days after he arrived in Jerusalem. Paul's point is that he had not been there long enough to cause the disturbance and that implies that it was the Jews that caused the disturbance. The first part of his statement is Paul's reply to Tertullus' first accusation that Paul is a troublemaker. The second part of his statement is Paul's beginning of his defense against Tertullus' third accusation that he is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and had come to desecrate the temple. He continues to say that his accusers did not find him arguing with anyone or stirring up people in a synagogue or anywhere else in the city and he claims that they can't prove otherwise.

Paul does admit that he worships the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which he says they are calling a sect. But he says he believes everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets. And he says that he has the same hope in God as his accusers. That counters Tertullus' accusation that he was lead a cult (sect). His point is that his beliefs harmonize with the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures (Law and Prophets). In this he is showing Felix that the real disagreement between him and his accusers is religious and not political, so there is no threat to Rome or the peace of the area as Tertullus had made it appear. He says that the hope is that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and wicked and that is the reason he always strives to keep his conscience clear before God and man. Since the high priest and the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the body or the soul having a life after death and the Pharisees did, that must mean at least a few Pharisees were in the representatives from the Sanhedrin. But Felix must have seen the glaring look from the high priest and the Sadducees which they kept under control enough that they didn't start arguing about it in front of Felix because that would have completely destroyed their case. And the Hebrew Scriptures do explicitly say that there will be a resurrection and judgment in Daniel 12:2.

Then Paul informs Felix that he has been away from Jerusalem for several years. In fact Paul has not been in Jerusalem but two times since his conversion on the road to Damascus – once three years after his conversion (Gal 1:17) and the second when he came to Jerusalem for a meeting with the Apostles and elders in 50 AD (Acts 15). So Paul has not been in Jerusalem for seven years. And Paul says his purpose in coming was to bring gifts for the poor and to present offerings (at the temple is implied). He says he was ceremonially clean when they found him in the temple courts do what he came to do. That there was no crowd with him nor was he involved in any disturbance. It was Jews from Asia who had seen Paul in town with Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus, and accused Paul of taking a Gentile into the temple courts reserved only for the Jews. These individuals were not present and Paul explains that if anyone should be present to present a case against him it should be those accusers. But of course the high priest and the Sanhedrin could not allow them to come because it would quickly become evident that they didn't see Trophimus in the temple courts with Paul but only assumed it, and that would have ended any case against Paul. Then he says that the delegation of the Sanhedrin who are present should tell what crime he committed when he stood before them (before Claudius Lysias) unless it was his statement concerning resurrection from the dead. And that must be the real reason that he is on trial before Felix.

Verses 22 – 23. Luke tells us that Felix was well acquainted with the Way and that he adjourned the proceedings saying that he would decide the case later. Felix's knowledge of the Way may have come from his wife, the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I who was king over Palestine from 37 – 44 AD. He had authorized the death of James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Acts 12:1 - 2) and the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:3 – 11), so she would have heard about the Way while she was at home. She was Felix's second of three wives. Felix' first wife was Drusilla, the daughter of Cleopatra Selene II and Juba II of Numidia and granddaughter of Anthony and Cleopatra. Felix's second wife was also named Drusilla, but she was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and Cypros. She was previously married to Gaius Julius Azizus, King of Emesa (a province in Asia). Felix convinced her to divorce Azizus to marry him. Felix and his second wife had a son named Marcus Antonius Agrippa, who died along with his daughter Antonia Clementiana, his mother, Pliny the Elder and many of the inhabitants of the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum when Mount Vesuvius erupted on 24 Aug 79 AD. After Drusilla died in the eruption, Felix married a third time, but little is known about it. Felix probably also heard about the Way from Romans (like the Centurion Cornelius – Acts 10) and other Jews of Judea who had become followers.

So Felix dismisses the proceedings and says that he will decide Paul's case when Lysias the commander comes. Then he tells the centurion to keep Paul under guard but give him some freedom and permit his friends to come and take care of his needs. Those who took care of Paul's needs probably included Luke, Aristarchus, and Philip the evangelist who also lived in Caesarea (Acts 21:8; 27:2). So Felix was stalling for Paul's benefit at this time and to avoid having to decide and make the Sanhedrin upset.

Verses 24 – 27. After several days Felix sent for Paul to come and talk with him. His wife was also with him and they asked Paul to tell them about faith in Christ Jesus. Paul talked about righteousness and self-control, which neither Felix nor his wife had, and the judgment to come. At that point, Felix became afraid and told Paul that was enough for now and sent him away, saying when it is convenient he would send for him again. It was common knowledge that Felix liked to take bribes. So Luke tells us that Felix was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe and for that reason sent frequently for Paul to come and talk with him. Two years passed and finally Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus (59 - 62 AD). Felix was relieved of his position because he had handled a conflict in Caesarea between the Jews and Gentiles too harshly and that had resulted in the suffering and death of innocent people. Because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews upon leaving, and thus leave in a more favorable light, he left Paul imprisoned (restricted to Herod's place under guard).

Some scholars have proposed the idea that Luke might have used these two years of Paul's imprisonment to do much of the research behind his account of Jesus' life (Luke 1:3 – 4) and even some of the details he tells in Acts before he began traveling with Paul.

Chapter 25

Verses 1 – 5. Knowing that turmoil that had occurred under Felix's rule and the reason for his removal, Festus goes to Jerusalem three days after his arrival in the area to meet with the chief priest and leaders (Sanhedrin). The Jews immediately present their charges against Paul to Festus and, as a favor to them, they asked that he send Paul to Jerusalem. Of course, they were still plotting to kill Paul along the way. Festus replies that Paul is being held in Caesarea and he is going there soon, so they should send some of their leaders there and press charges against him if he has done anything wrong. Festus would have surely heard about Paul and would have known that he was a Roman citizen, so there was no reason for him to grant their request.

Verses 6 – 12. Festus spent 8 to 10 days in Jerusalem and then went to Caesarea and a group of Jews went also. The day after he arrived he brought Paul before him. Then the Jews claimed many serious charges against Paul, none of which they could prove. So when Paul made his defense, all he had to do was deny that he had done anything wrong against the law of Moses, against the temple, or against Caesar. Because the Jews could not prove their claims, Festus had no reason to hold Paul in Herod's place, but since he was new as the ruler and wanted to start off with the Jews in a favorable way, he asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem and

stand trial before him there on the charges. Since he didn't just send him but asked permission, shows that he knew Paul was a Roman citizen who had not been convicted of any crime and thus had rights under Roman law that he, as the governor, had to respect. Paul knows that two years ago the Jews were plotting to kill him, so why would he agree to let the trial be moved to Jerusalem. So Paul answers that he is now standing before Caesar's court where he should be tried and that he has done nothing wrong to the Jews as Festus knows. But he goes on, that if he has done anything deserving death he does not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against him are not true, then no one has the right to hand him over to the Jews. So he appeals to Caesar to hear his case which was his right as a Roman citizen that believed he was in danger of violent coercion or capital punishment in a lower court. Roman citizens who could not make this appeal were those who were murderers, pirates, or thieves caught in the act.

Nero was emperor at this time and had been since 54 AD. But during the early years of his rule he was a relatively stable and good ruler. It was only after 62 AD that Nero became unstable, ruling erratically, and turned against Christians and claimed that they had set fire to poor sections of Rome, when it was actually he that had ordered it. So at this time (59 AD), Paul has no reason fear appealing to him. After two years being held in protective custody in Caesarea, Paul would probably see this as his only way to get to Rome as Jesus had told him would (Acts 23:11). Paul's appeal to Caesar took away the need Festus would have to try and appease the Jews. So after conferring with his council of Roman advisors, he grant Paul's request and said that he would be sent to Caesar. Before Paul had made the appeal to Caesar, Festus could have released him, but after the appeal it was set in concrete – an appeal by a Roman citizen to be heard by Caesar had to be honored.

Verses 13 – 22. A few days after Festus hears the charges against Paul and Paul appeals to Caesar, King Agrippa and Bernice arrive to pay their respects to the new Roman Procurator, Festus. Bernice is not Agrippa's wife but his sister (one year younger). This would be a typical thing for them to do and had nothing to do with Paul being held in protective custody. The king's full name was Marcus Julius Herod Agrippa II. He was the son of Herod Agrippa I, mentioned in Acts 12:1-11. He was the grandson of Aristobulus and the great grandson of Herod the Great who had tried to kill Jesus as a baby by having all the children in Bethlehem killed who were two years old and under. It was Antipas, one of Herod the Great's sons, who beheaded John the Baptist (Mark 6:14 – 29) and before whom Jesus was ordered to be taken on the evening before and early morning of the day he was hanged on a cross at Pilate's order (Luke 23:6 – 12). Herod Agrippa I was the one who had James, the son of Zebedee and brother of the Apostle John, executed (Acts 12:2) and imprisoned Peter with the intent to do the same to him (Acts 12:1-19). Herod Agrippa II was the last of the Herodian line serving as a King of Judea. He is considered by scholars to be the "best" of all the line. He was a friend of Flavius Josephus, who was a Jew who became a Roman citizen and historian of the life and events of the First Century, especially Roman dealings with the Jews. Among his powers was the overseeing of the temple in Jerusalem and the appointing of the high priest.

Since the charges against Paul centered about the temple, it is only natural that Festus would consult with King Agrippa who had a great knowledge about the temple and Jewish life (being part Jewish and in favor with the Jews in general). Festus accurately reviews what he knows of Paul's case and even expresses surprise that the charges against him were a matter of religious nature and about a dead man named Jesus. Luke has not previously told us that Paul spoke the Festus about Jesus but obviously he had. Festus admits he was at a loss about how to investigate such matters, so he says he asked Paul if he would agree to going to Jerusalem to stand trial. But that when Paul appealed to Caesar he ordered him to be held until he could arrange for him to be sent to Rome. Part of that arrangement would be to determine what to write to Caesar to tell him what had happened and why Paul was being sent for him to hear the case.

Agrippa was interested in Paul's case and what Paul had to say, so he tells Festus he would like to hear from Paul. Festus replies that he will arrange that for the next day.

Verses 23 – 27. The next day, Agrippa and Bernice enter with great pomp (show) the audience room along with high ranking officers and leading officials of the city of Caesarea. At Festus' command Paul is brought in and

presented. Festus says he has been petitioned about him in both Jerusalem and in Caesarea that he should not be allowed to live. Festus says he has not found that he did anything deserving of death, but that since Paul has appealed to be heard by the Emperor of Rome that he has ordered that he will go. But Festus says he has nothing definite to write Caesar about Paul so he has been brought before them for investigation so that he might find something to write. He says he thinks it is unreasonable to send him to Rome without specifying the charges. Not only is it unreasonable, but most likely would have caused him to be brought to Rome to explain why he had done such a thing.

Chapter 26

Verses 1 – 23. Paul is not on trial, but the proceedings are an opportunity for him to present his case to those present so they can help Festus with what to write to Caesar. The proceedings have effectively been turned over to Agrippa to run unless Festus decides to take back control. So Agrippa gives the floor to Paul to explain what has happened. While Paul's statements are not a true defense, they are a declaration of the gospel with the purpose of winning Agrippa and others present to belief that Jesus is the Messiah and the one to trust for life.

Paul begins by extending his hand as he makes his opening statement. His action is like what an orator would do when beginning his presentation. Paul's introduction to his "defense of the accusations" begins with complements to King Agrippa because he is well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. So Paul asks him to listen patiently. Jesus had told Paul at his conversion that he was he chosen instrument to speak to the Gentiles about him and before their kings and before the people of Israel. What we don't often remember is that Jesus went on to say to Paul that he would show him how much he must suffer for his name. So to Paul this is just another occasion for him to speak about Jesus – not to really defend any of his actions except as they relate to his mission to tell about Jesus.

Paul says the Jews all know the way he has lived since he was a child in his home country and in Jerusalem. This is what tells us that Paul was raised from part of his childhood in Jerusalem. Not only have the Jews known him for a long time, he says that they can testify (if they are willing) that he has lived according to the strictest sect of the Jewish religion, that of a Pharisee. He says it is because of his hope in what God has promised to the Jewish ancestors that he is on trial. He continues to explain that the hope that the twelve tribes have lived by day and night is why he is being accused, and asks why any of them should consider it incredible that God raises the dead. His audience knew fully that the hope of which Paul spoke was the coming of a Messiah who would fulfill God's promise to restore Israel to a right relationship with God. The promise was that people personally would be saved and the nation would be restored to its prominence, and that God would anoint the Messiah and resurrect him from the dead. When Paul mentions that this is what the twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled, that indicates that he didn't think the descendants of the 10 northern tribes were unknown to God and that although they were not recognized in the land, that they still had the same hope. Paul is showing that the gospel being shared by the followers of Jesus was the fulfillment of that hope of all of the Israelite people. His mention of resurrection is appropriate because the identification of the Messiah depended on his resurrection and besides that, who would not believe that an "all powerful" God could raise men from death. Since the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead according to what Moses and the Prophets had written, that is why the high priest and religious leaders (who were Sadducees and didn't believe in resurrection or life after death) were accusing him.

Then he goes on to say that he, like the religious leaders, was convinced that everything possible should be done to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and because of this, by the authority of the chief priests, he had put many of the saints (followers of Jesus) in prison and when they were put to death, had cast his vote against them (as in the case of the stoning of Stephen in Acts 6:8 – 8:1). He says he went from one synagogue to another to have them punished and try to force them to blaspheme (deny that Jesus is God). He admits that he even went to other cities to persecute them. Then he describes his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus for just such a mission. He says that Jesus asked why he is persecuting him (by persecuting his followers) and that he has appeared to him to appoint him as a servant and witness of what he has seen and what he will show him.

Since he was a Pharisee and living in Jerusalem during the three years Jesus traveled around there, spoke and did miracles, Paul would most like have at least heard about Jesus and may have even been among some of the Pharisees who confronted Jesus about what he was teaching and doing. At this encounter, Paul was a witness of the fact that Jesus was resurrected and Paul spent three years in the wilderness learning more about Jesus and his teachings. Paul tells us more in his statement to Agrippa than Luke recorded in Acts 9. He says that everyone with him also fell to the ground. Even though they didn't see the vision, their falling to the ground makes it a real event and not just a vision in Paul's head. Paul also explains that Jesus said he will rescue him from his own people (Jews) and the Gentiles, and he will send him to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive forgiveness and a place among those who are sanctified (set apart for God) by faith in Jesus. Paul's telling of his conversion is meant to stress the significance of the event – that he went to Damascus as an apostle (one sent) of the Sanhedrin and arrived there as an apostle of Jesus. It also stressed his identification as being commissioned by God, just like the prophets of old, to speak for God.

Paul tells Agrippa that he was not disobedient to the vision from heaven, but preached to those in Damascus, then Jerusalem and Judea, and to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and prove that repentance by their deeds. This should not be seen as a strictly chronological account of his ministry because everywhere he went Paul spoke first to the Jews and the Gentiles who would listen. Speaking to the Gentiles, Paul says, is why the Jews seized him in the temple courts and tried to kill him. But he explains that he has had God's help to this very day and so he stands there to testify to everyone that he is saying nothing beyond what Moses and the Prophets said would happen – that the Christ (Messiah) would suffer and rise from the dead and would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles. Luke may not have recorded all the references Paul made to the teaching of Moses and the Prophets that would show what he was saying was true.

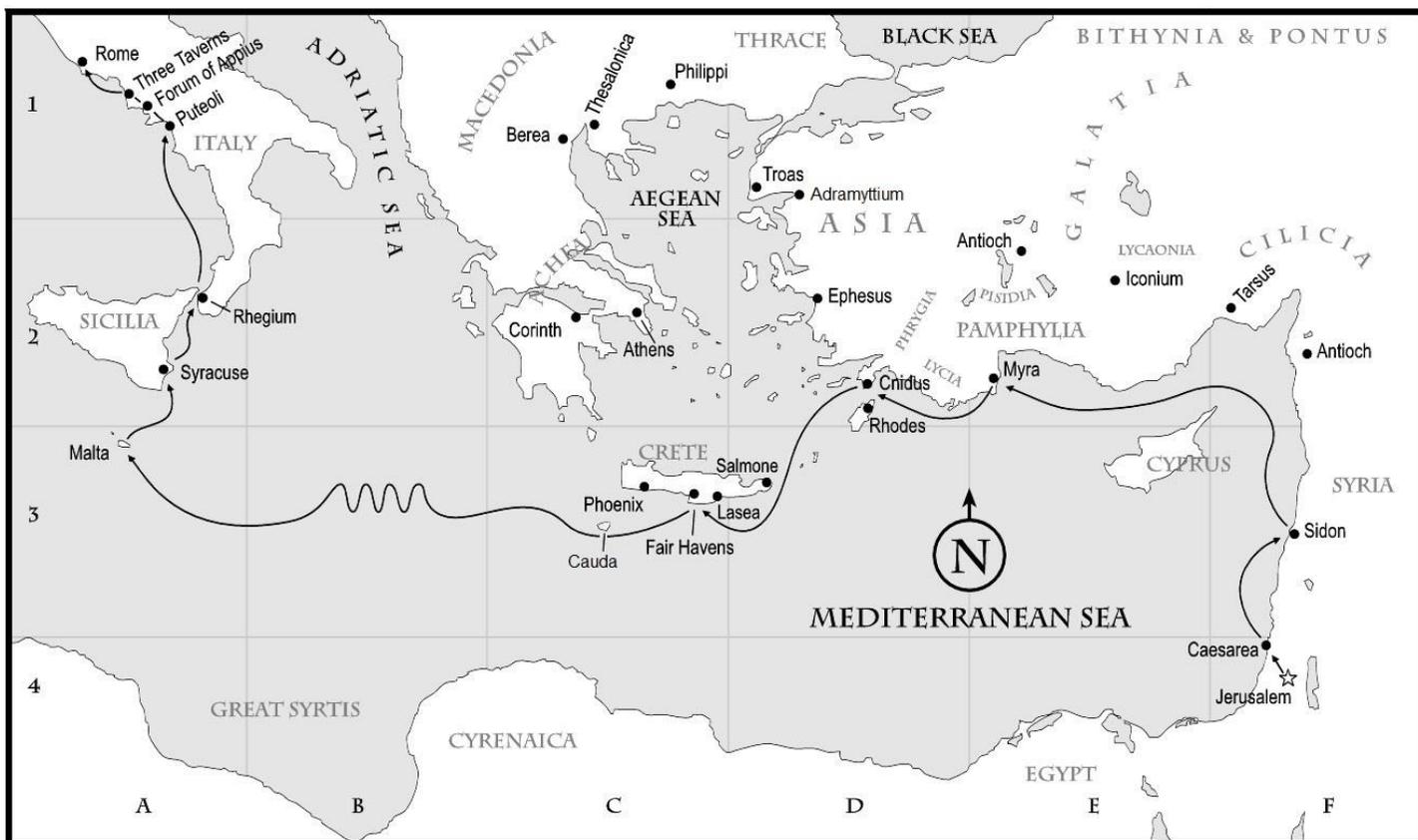
Verses 24 – 32. At this point Festus interrupts, shouting at Paul that his great learning is driving him insane. The Romans didn't believe in the resurrection of the body, only the immortality of the soul, so resurrection could have seemed to Festus as insanity. Paul responds that he is not insane and that King Agrippa is familiar with these things because it was not done in a corner but openly and would not have escaped his notice. So he feels he can speak freely to the King, and asks if Agrippa believes the prophets and then answers his own question, that of course he knows the King does believe. Paul has backed Agrippa into a corner with his question. If Agrippa agrees with Paul or even seems to agree, then he will lose face with Festus who has just said Paul was insane. If he says he doesn't believe what the prophets have written then he will lose influence with the Jews. So, in reply, Agrippa asks if Paul thinks he can persuade him in such a short time to be a Christian (follower of Jesus, a member of the Way). Agrippa is familiar with the writing of Moses and the Prophets and has heard about Jesus and his teachings, but even though Paul is a witness to the fact that Jesus was resurrected and Paul has backed him into a corner, Agrippa is unwilling to put his faith and trust in Jesus as God. Paul responds that whether a short time or long, he prays that not only Agrippa but all listening may become what he is (a follower), but not in chains like him.

Then Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, and the others rise up and leave talking among themselves and saying that Paul is not doing anything that deserves death of imprisonment. And Agrippa says to Festus that Paul could have been freed if he had not appealed to Caesar. Every governor and ruler before whom Paul has been brought to this point had agreed that Paul has done nothing deserving death. We previously looked at the possibility that part of Luke's purpose for writing this book could be to help a defense lawyer know the facts so he could prepare what he would present to Caesar on Paul's behalf at his trial in Rome.

By including all the occasions that Paul has been brought before rulers who have all determined that he has done nothing deserving of death and specifically mentioning that Agrippa says he could have been released, Luke has given the reason why Paul should be released by Caesar. The rest of the book relates what happened to Paul on the way to Rome and continues to show God's hand and leading in all of the events.

Chapter 27

Verses 1 – 12. When Festus finally decided to send Paul to Rome to appear before Caesar, he handed him and some other prisoners over to a centurion named Julius, who was part of the Imperial Regiment. The Imperial Regiment or battalion of Augustus may have been a special group of soldiers who reported directly to Caesar and provided him with communications throughout the Roman Empire. As such, they would have been the proper way to send prisoners, and especially a Roman citizen who had appealed to Caesar, along with letters explaining why these people were being sent for Caesar to hear their cases rather than the procurator taking care of them. Luke says that “we” (Paul, Aristarchus, and himself at the minimum) boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia.



The next day when they landed at Sidon, the roman centurion showed kindness to Paul and allowed him to go ashore to visit his friends so they could provide for his needs (unspecified what his needs were, but possibly food and or clothing). When they left Sidon they had to sail to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against them. The winds being against them (from the west) would mean the boat would have needed to “tack” from northwest to southwest and back and forth to sail to the west. This would make the travel more difficult and time consuming. When they had finally sailed along the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia using this tacking maneuver, they finally reached Myra and landed there. At this port, the centurion, Julius, found another ship that was from Alexandria (Egypt) and sailing to Italy and transferred his charges to that ship. We know from verses 37 and 38 that this was a grain ship and had room for 276 passengers. Scholars tell us that Egypt was a major supplier of grain to the world and that there was a large fleet of ships making the trip along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea taking grain to ports all along the way to Rome. This ship was probably 180 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 44 feet deep from the deck to the bottom of the hold. When they left Myra, they again had difficult sailing and it took them several days and much difficulty to reach the port of Cnidus. As they left Cnidus, the wind was so strong from the northwest that they had to sail to the south of the Island of Crete and even then with much difficulty they reached the port of Fair Havens. Luke says the journey had taken so long that it was now after the “fast” and sailing was dangerous. The “fast” would have been the Jewish Day of Atonement which is observed about Oct 25 of each year. This means their sailing would

have to be done now in the winter months when the winds were often stronger from the west and northwest and whipped the sea into dangerous swells and driving ships away from safe harbors. Most people considered it too dangerous to travel by sea from mid-September to mid-November and after that the harbors were closed for the winter until mid-February.

Paul warned them that continuing on at this time of year would be dangerous and could cost the loss of the ship's cargo and even the lives of the passengers. All ships of this kind were under the control of the Roman government even though they were owned by a private individual. So the Julius had the authority to command that the ship would stay in Fair Havens or continue on its journey. The ship's captain and its owner (can't determine if they are the same individual or not) persuaded the centurion that the harbor at Fair Havens was not as suitable as the one at Phoenix, just 45 miles further west along the coast was a better harbor in which to stay for the winter. So Julius decided that they would attempt to sail on to Phoenix.

Verses 13 – 26. When a gentle southern wind began to blow, the captain and centurion thought they had favorable conditions to sail to Phoenix so they set sail. Before long a wind of hurricane force from the northeast swept down from the island and forced the ship away from the main island and to the south of a small island named Cauda. As they passed Cauda, the sailors were able to secure the lifeboat on the ship (it would normally be towed behind) and they were able to run ropes under the ship to help keep the hull of the ship from breaking apart from the severe beating of the water on the sides. The sailors feared that the strong winds would drive them all the way into the sandbars in the Syrtis off the west coast of Cyrene in northern Africa. So the sailors lowered a sea anchor into the water to slow the ship from moving so fast. A sea anchor can be made from anything that is on the ship which when tied to a rope and lowered into the sea will provide a dragging force in the water. In addition, the rudder would be tied so that it stayed in one position to help keep the ship pointed into the water swells and minimize the risk of capsizing. In violent winds this is the most control that can be had over the direction of the ship's movement and safely survive the storm.

The ship was so battered from the winds and swells of water that the next day the crew began to throw cargo overboard into the sea to lighten the load. On the third day of the wind storm, with the cargo all gone, the crew threw the ship's tackle overboard. The tackle would have been the ship's rigging, ropes, pulley's and maybe even the masts. Luke reports that neither the sun nor stars were visible for many days as the storm raged which means they had no way of telling which direction the winds were driving them. So, the passengers and crew gave up hope of being saved from drowning in the sea.

The crew and passengers had not eaten for several days (possibly due to sea sickness caused by the tossing of the violent waves). At this point Paul stood before them and told them they should have heeded his advice not to sail from Fair Havens and they would not have suffered this loss. He says they should have hope because not one of them will be lost, but only the ship destroyed. He tells them this message was given to him by an angel of the God to whom he belongs and whom he serves. So they should have courage because he has faith in God that it will happen just as he has been told. But still they must run aground on some island.

Verses 27 – 44. After fourteen nights of being driven across the Adriatic Sea, the sailors sensed they were approaching land. The Adriatic Sea extends from the east of Italy all the way into the central Mediterranean Sea. The winds had evidently driven the ship in a west, northwesterly direction from the central Mediterranean Sea toward the island of Malta, south of Sicilia. The sailors may have "smelled the land" (which I am assured sailors can do in the dark) or they may have heard waves crashing on the shore. And thus they knew land was somewhere nearby. So the sailors took sounding of the depth of the water. A sounding of the depth of the water is done by tying a lead weight to a line and dropping it overboard. The length of the rope that was in the water determined the depth. The Greek text says their first sounding was 20 orguias. An orguia was 1.85 meters which is about 6.1 feet and equivalent to the Old English fathom which equaled 6 feet. So their first sounding was that the water was 120 feet deep. Their second sounding was that the water was only 90 feet deep. So they were fast heading toward land and feared that the ship would be dashed upon the rocks and broken apart during the night and people would drown because of the wreck or because they couldn't see which way to swim for

shore. So they dropped four anchors from the stern (aft or back of the ship) so that they would be caught in the sea bottom and hold the ship from moving closer to the land and rocks of the shore.

The sailors were going to escape from the ship and leave everyone else to drown when the ship broke apart so they started to lower the lifeboat that had been secured to the deck and said they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Paul, who had sailed on many ships, obviously recognized that anchors from the bow would not help keep the ship from moving toward shore and that this must mean they were abandoning everyone. So he informed the centurion and the soldiers that unless the sailors remained with the ship all of them would be lost. The sailors would have been necessary to maneuver the ship into the beach. The centurion had the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat so that it fell away from the ship. It may have still been tied to the ship but was no longer available in the darkness and with the waves for anyone to use to escape.

Just before dawn, Paul again addresses everyone and tells them to eat because they have gone 14 days without eating and he urges them to eat because they will need nourishment to survive. And he reminds them of what he said the angel told him before, that none of them would die. So he takes some bread, gives thanks to God for it, and begins to eat. Everyone on board, all 276 of them, were so encouraged that they all ate some food. After everyone had eaten, they threw whatever remained of the ship's cargo of grain into the sea in preparation for beaching the ship on the shore. When it was light enough to see the land, they spotted a bay with a sandy beach that appeared to be a likely spot to run the ship aground. So they cut loose the anchors and untied the rudder so they could control the direction of the ship and headed for the beach. But as they approached it the bow ran aground on a sandbar and stuck fast. Consequently, the stern of the ship was being pounded by the waves of the surf and began to break apart.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to keep them from swimming away and escaping because if they lost a single prisoner it would mean their death. But the centurion, Julius, wanted to spare Paul's life so he kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered everyone who could swim to jump in the water and swim for shore. Everyone else would jump in and grab a piece of the ship and paddle for shore. In this way, everyone reached the land safely just as the Lord had told Paul.

Why didn't God just calm the winds like he did on the Sea of Galilee? Obviously he has control of the winds and waves (remember the parting of the Red Sea so the Israelites could walk across on dry ground) so he must have had some purpose for allowing Paul, the centurion and soldiers, the sailors, the prisoners, and the other passengers to experience this terrifying situation. When Julius stops the soldiers' plan to kill the prisoners just to spare Paul's life, it may indicate that he has become a believer and follower of Jesus during this trip and his experience with Paul. We will also see in the next chapter that what happens while they are on Malta may also be part of the reason to allow the storm and shipwreck to occur.

Chapter 28

Verses 1 – 10. Luke records that after everyone was safely on the island they learned it was called Malta. Malta is not just one island but a chain of seven islands which had previously been used as a trading spot by the Greeks, Phoenicians, and now the Romans. The Greeks called the islands Melitē which means “honey sweet” because of the honey produced by bees on the islands. The Phoenicians called the islands Maleth which means “haven” because of the many bays and coves among the islands. The islands are 50 miles south of Sicily and have a land area of 122 square miles. The Greek text of verse 2 doesn't say “the islanders showed us unusual kindness” as the NIV translation does. The Greek refers to the people as “barbaroi” which would be translated as barbarians. That term doesn't mean the people were savages or uncultured people as is shown by their hospitable treatment of the shipwreck victims by starting a fire for them because it was raining and cold. Barbarian is a term used to show that they were not Greek people just like the Israelites used Gentile to show that people were not Jewish.

Paul immediately made himself useful by gathering wood to be put on the fire. Apparently he accidentally picked up a snake with the wood, maybe because the snake was lethargic due to the cold weather. But as Paul put the

wood on the fire, the heat caused it to move quickly and it fastened itself on his hand, meaning it bit him. The islanders immediately thought Paul must be a murderer and although he escape being drowned in the sea, whoever the god of justice in their belief was making him get the death he deserved by the snake. This was the third life-threatening event that Paul had experienced since he left Caesarea for Rome. The other two were the storm (hurricane winds) and the wrecking of the ship on the shore. Paul had shown that his faith in God trusted that nothing would happen to him unless God allowed it and that he would arrive in Rome and witness there about Jesus because God had promised that. So, Paul simply shook the snake off into the fire and went about his work. When nothing happened to him immediately and the people saw that he didn't swell up or suddenly fall down dead after even a long time, they decided that he must be a god.

We know how Paul reacted previously when people claimed he was a god in Lystra (Acts 14:8-18). He quickly corrected them and pointed them to Jesus as the source of all miracles and life. So it would be expected that he would do the same in this situation. But Luke chooses not to record for us what Paul said in response to the people thinking that he is a god. Perhaps Luke's purpose in even recording this event was not to show how Paul responded but to show that God would protect his servant so that he could fulfill what God had said he would do in Rome – witness about Jesus to the Romans.

Luke gives further evidence that the people of the island weren't uncultured savages as he tells that there was an estate nearby belonging to the chief official of the island. It would look like his name was Publius but that is more likely a title. It is unlikely that the official welcomed all 276 survivors to his estate, but only that he invited Paul because the people thought he was a god, and perhaps Paul's traveling companions. The Roman centurion (Julius) would also have been welcomed because of his status. They were entertained graciously for three days. Sometime during that time, it was mentioned that the official's father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery (an inflammation of the intestine causing diarrhea with blood). Since Luke was a doctor, it would seem likely that he would have examined the man. But when Paul enters the room to see the sick man, he prays, lays his hands on him and heals him. Obviously the Holy Spirit is still using Paul to provide healing to people as a means of authenticating his witness about Jesus. So when the news of this healing spread around the island, all the sick were brought to him and the Holy Spirit allowed him to heal them. Even though Paul had to be exhausted by the long storm at sea and the shipwreck, the Holy Spirit gave him the strength to meet with all those individuals and heal them, giving further witness to the power of the Holy Spirit to take care of God's followers. Although Luke doesn't tell about Paul's witness about Jesus during this time, it evidently happened because when the time came for them to sail on to Rome, the people honored Paul and his companions but no mention is made that they still thought of Paul as a god.

Verses 13 – 17. Since it was three months after the shipwreck before they were ready to sail on, that means they spent the winter on the island. Ships began to sail again around mid-February so the date is around the end of February or the first of March of 60 AD. Centurion Julius found a ship from Alexandria, Egypt that had wintered in the island's harbor that was headed to Italy. The harbor at Valetta was the largest of these ports so it is most likely the one where the ship had spent the winter and from which they would set sail to Italy. Luke describes the ship as having a figurehead that depicted the twin gods Castor and Pollux. This reference would have had great meaning for the people reading his account. Castor and Pollux were supposedly the twin sons of Zeus and Leda, queen of Sparta. Zeus had supposedly transformed his sons into gods. They are represented in the stars by the constellation of Gemini and anyone who saw the constellation during a storm was considered to have good luck and safety. So these twin gods were thought to provide protection for sailors. Being put in conjunction with Paul's protection by the Holy Spirit and the healing he had done on Malta, shows the true protection that comes from trusting God and following Jesus.

From the harbor at Malta, the ship sailed to Syracuse, which is a port on the island of Sicily, and it stayed there for three days. Then it sailed to the port at Rhegium which is on the southern part of Italy that looks like the toe of a boot. The next day a south wind arose and they sailed up the coast and reached the port at Puteoli the following day. In Puteoli there were some followers of Jesus (brothers) who invited them to stay with them for a week. Since Luke says they stayed there, that means Centurion Julius approved of the stay. This probably

indicates Julius, if not a believer and follower of Jesus, is at least interested in finding out more. At the end of the week, Julius takes them northwest along the coast toward the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns. As the group approached each one, they were met by believers who lived in Rome who had heard that Paul was coming so they journeyed to the two places to greet him. Luke reports that the sight of the believers from Rome encouraged Paul and lifted his spirit so that he thanked God for them. The fact that there were believers in Puteoli and Rome means Paul didn't bring the Gospel to Italy – it was already there. The message about Jesus was most probably brought to Rome by Jewish individuals who had been in Jerusalem for Pentecost in 33 AD when the Holy Spirit empowered the Twelve to speak to people from all over the Roman Empire about Jesus and they heard them in their native language. Some of those individuals that heard that Jesus is the Messiah and were baptized (Acts 2:41) must have taken the message back to Rome, shared it with other Jews (and possibly even some Gentiles) who also became believers. The book of Romans, which Paul probably wrote from Corinth around 57 AD, was written to believers living in Rome (Rom 1:7), so Paul knew there were followers of Jesus living in Rome and it made him happy to see them.

Another indication of the status of Paul and that he was not a common criminal is that when they reached Rome, he was allowed to live by himself with only a soldier to guard him, rather than being confined in the Roman jail. Whether this occurred because of the letter written by Festus or because of the influence of Centurion Julius is something that cannot be determined. At this point, Luke ends writing in the first person, plural and returns to the third person. Although we know Luke and Aristarchus were with Paul in Rome when he wrote his prison letters to Philemon and the Colossians (Philemon 24 and Colossians 4:14) Luke does not include himself in the activities which he describes from here to the end.

Verses 17 – 31. Three days after Paul arrived in Rome, he invited the leaders of the Jews to come and meet with him since he was not free to go to the synagogue like he did in every town to tell the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah that they have been praying God would send. Paul addresses them as brothers and explains the events that led him to appeal to have his case heard by Caesar. He says that it is because of the hope of Israel (the Messiah) that he is bound with a chain (to a Roman guard). The Jewish leaders reply that they have not had any letters from Judea concerning him nor has any of the Jewish brothers who have traveled to Rome brought any report about him or said anything bad about him. But they want to hear his views about the sect of the followers of Jesus because they have heard that people everywhere are talking against them. So they agreed to meet Paul on a later day and came in even greater numbers. From morning to evening, Paul explained everything about Jesus to them, declared the kingdom of God, and using the Law of Moses and the writing of the Prophets tried to convince them that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Some of the Jewish leaders were convinced but others would not believe. They disagreed among themselves and started to leave when Paul made a statement quoting Isaiah about the people hearing but not understanding because their heart has become calloused. And for this reason, God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles who will listen.

For two full years (60 to 62 AD) Paul stayed in the house he rented and welcomed everyone who came to see him. Paul boldly and without hindrance preached the kingdom of God and taught about Jesus to everyone who came to visit him. This again shows that the Romans considered him innocent of anything worthy of punishment. Although the majority of the Jewish leaders did not believe what Paul taught them, he proceeded just as he had in every other town to share about Jesus with the Gentiles who would listen. And we have to remember that there was always a Roman guard around when Paul was teaching visitors. Scholars inform us that the guards would have been changed every 6 hours so that means many of the praetorian guard would have heard about Jesus.

What happened to Paul following what Luke recorded in Acts is debated by scholars. Some believe he was condemned and put to death, but most believe he was released and that he left Rome, perhaps going to Spain and sharing about Jesus there before later being taken prisoner again and finally being beheaded under Nero's reign in 68 AD. The early church historian, Eusebius wrote, "After pleading his cause, he is said to have been sent again upon the ministry of preaching, and after a second visit to the city [Rome], that he finished his life with martyrdom." (Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, p. 74)