

New Testament Studies

Acts (RVS Notes)

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Introduction—Acts: You Shall Be My Witnesses

Acts belongs with the Gospel of Luke as part of Luke's account of Christian beginnings. In Acts, Luke takes the reader on a whirlwind tour of the first three decades of church history. It traces the preaching of the gospel and the Church's rapid expansion in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), in all Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12) and beyond (Acts 13-28). The book begins by describing the early ministry of the apostles before tracing Paul's missionary journeys up to the time of his imprisonment in Rome. Acts supplies the Bible student with the necessary historical, cultural, and geographical grid for understanding the epistles that follow. It also reveals to us the pattern of church life in between Christ's advents: its power, its objectives, its methods, its essential organization and discipline, and its driving vision.

Acts derives its name from the Greek word *praxeis*, commonly used in Greek literature to summarize the accomplishments of outstanding people. The irony of the Christian dynamic confronts the reader immediately. How did these followers of Jesus, who were obscure provincial Galileans and Judeans, become people who turned the world upside down (17:6)? What changed these timid men from those who denied their Lord and abandoned him in his hour of need into bold, stalwart apologists for the new faith? How did preachers who were confessedly "unlearned and ignorant men" (4:13) make such an impact on the world that they ushered in a new culture that reshaped the face of Western civilization? Luke records the acts of the Spirit of Christ working in and through these people. These apostles were "jars of clay" (2 Cor. 4:7) abandoned to God's person, purpose, and program, in and through whom God's work was done and his glory revealed (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Author, Date, and Occasion of Writing

Traditional approach—Although attributed to Luke, the Gospel of Luke and Acts are anonymous. From a casual reading of the two books, one can conclude the following:

- They were meant to be a two-part work on Christian origins. The subject matter is a continuous narrative about the incarnate life and ministry of Jesus Christ and what he continued to do through his Spirit-empowered church after his Resurrection. Theophilus (Lk. 1:3-4; Acts 1: 2,), perhaps a Greek or Roman official and the patron of the works, is addressed in both books.
- The author was well-educated as evidenced by the quality of his Greek text and his writing style.
- He was not an original apostle but did participate in the events he narrates.
- He knows the Old Testament in the Greek Septuagint version (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible dating from the third century BC).
- He has an exceptional knowledge of the political and social conditions of the Roman world in the middle of the first century.

- He thinks very highly of the apostle Paul.

The “we” passages of Acts (16:8-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:15) shed further light on the book’s authorship. Some think that in these passages the author depends on an itinerary or diary that the author kept in the first person plural at the time of the events and that he incorporates verbatim into his literary product. Others think that the author just lapsed into the first person plural at these points. Either way these passages point to Luke who was with Paul during these events. These passages support his authorship of Acts and that of the gospel that bears his name.

Tradition supports Luke’s authorship. The Muratorian Canon (circa 190), Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Eusebius all assert Luke’s authorship. Indeed, Luke’s authorship of these two books was unchallenged until the end of the 18th century.

Luke himself was a Gentile, a medical doctor (Col. 4:14), and a faithful friend and traveling companion of Paul (2 Tim. 4:11; Phile. 24). He amply demonstrates that he was a thorough researcher and capable writer. The oldest and most respected tradition associates Luke with the Syrian Antioch church. From the pages of the New Testament, we can surmise that Luke was an intelligent, faithful, kind, and loyal servant of Christ.

Critical challenge—Critics challenge the traditional view by questioning the value of the testimony of the Church fathers and debunking the value of the “we” passages of Acts for its authorship. They press the question of why Luke would leave these passages in that form when he reworked all his other sources rather seamlessly.

However, the chief reason for the challenge is the critics’ idea that the book of Acts gives us a distorted idea of the apostle Paul. They allege that the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the epistles are eons apart. They charge that the historical and theological distortion of the real Paul is so serious that it is impossible to think that a companion of Paul could have produced the picture.

Among the historical distortions alleged are the number of trips the apostle made to Jerusalem and the claim of Paul in Acts that he was educated in Jerusalem (22:3). The theological distortions include the author’s representation of Paul’s use of natural revelation in Acts 17 that is at variance with his description of Romans 1. Another is that Paul’s view of the law described in the epistles is far more negative than that portrayed in Acts. Finally, critics allege that many of Paul’s Christological and eschatological themes are missing in the account of Acts.

This critical stance is a one-sided analysis that refuses to see the author’s purpose in Acts as different than the variety of purposes Paul had in addressing problems in the churches. They also insist on a critical caricature of the authentic Paul that their interpretation of Acts does not support. Therefore, the authenticity of Acts is what is challenged, not their caricatures of Paul or their interpretation of Acts.

Date—Most scholars date Acts from one of three time periods: early to mid-60s, 80-95, 115-130. We will briefly consider these dating schemes in inverse order.

115-130—The second century date represents the opinion of the Tübingen school, whose best known member was F.C. Baur. They allege that Acts represents an attempt to reconcile opposing early Christian factions of Jewish Christianity, represented by Peter, and Gentile Christianity, represented by Paul. This reconciliation effort was feasible only after an adequate period had passed, allowing the various factions to mellow sufficiently for it to occur. That could not have been before the early part of the second century. However, the early church fathers appear ignorant of this allegedly heated polemic, and this ideological synthesis has no substantial historical underpinning. It is the rhetorical consensus of like-minded German scholars at one particular university whose historical feet are firmly planted in mid-air.

80-95—Many scholars date Acts to the period between 80-95. The argument is that it cannot be dated earlier because it shows signs of having been written after the gospel of Luke. Luke's gospel must have been written after 70 because it shows signs of the author's awareness of the destruction of Jerusalem (in Jesus' eschatological discourses of Luke 17 and 22). In addition, the gospel must have been written before 95 because of the optimistic attitude toward the Roman government which would not have survived Domitian's persecutions.

60s—Many think that Luke wrote Acts during Paul's Roman imprisonment in the early 60s. Acts gives no hint of the full-fledged persecution of Christians under Nero (64), Paul's death (probably mid-60s), or the destruction of Jerusalem (70). The simplest and best explanation for these omissions is that Luke wrote before these events took place, stopping abruptly with the contemporary scene in Acts 28. Other factors also point to this date: (1) Luke's apparent lack of familiarity with Paul's letters; (2) Luke's portrayal of Judaism as a legal religion (not after the revolt in 70); and (3) the vivid shipwreck narrative in 27:1-28:16, which suggests a very recent experience.

Sources—Luke used various sources to create his book. As a traveling companion of Paul, he was one of the principal eyewitnesses of, and had access to other eyewitnesses of, the events recorded in Acts 13-28. As indicated in his preface to his gospel account (Lk. 1:3-4), Luke did extensive research concerning those events to which he was not privy. As a close associate of Paul, he undoubtedly had access to key witnesses in Judea and Jerusalem for the information contained in Acts 1-12. He may also have used written documents for his sources as well (15:23-29; 23:26-30).

Purpose—Luke's purpose was to explain in an orderly fashion the sovereignly directed progress of the gospel message from Jerusalem to Rome and from the Jews to the Gentiles. Luke slants the book towards the Gentiles, emphasizing the purpose and purity of Jesus' followers, portraying the Christian faith as open to all, though rooted in Judaism, based on the Jewish Scriptures, and proclaiming a Jewish Messiah.

He also addresses the Roman authorities. Luke takes pains to show that Christianity poses no threat to the Roman government. The law-abiding nature of Christianity is supported by favorable judgments by various local and provincial officials. An apology was necessary because Jesus had been crucified, a Roman method of execution, and disturbances arose wherever the new faith spread. Luke anticipates the apologetic writings of other Christians in the second and third centuries.

Guiding Concepts—Acts is a book of transitions: from the gospels to the epistles, from Judaism to Christianity, from law to grace, and from Jewish exclusivism to the Gentile mission. Key concepts include:

Spirit-empowered witness—The Acts of the Apostles should be called the acts of the Holy Spirit. Acts is the Spirit's story in and through divinely energized believers. Rather than give us a theological dissertation on the Spirit, Luke tells us the exciting story of who he is and what he did through the early church. We are drawn into an unfolding drama involving real people whom the Holy Spirit empowered.

The Holy Spirit energized the early church to make a dynamic impact on the Roman world. The Holy Spirit is mentioned more than fifty times in this book. The disciples wait on the Spirit in Jerusalem before beginning to preach (2:4). The Holy Spirit fell on each new group of believers in dramatic fashion, including the Jews (4:31), the Samaritans (8:17), the Gentiles (10:44), and the disciples of John the Baptist (19:6). The book is not just a history of a given period in the life of the church, but a handbook for Spirit-directed Christian service and action. It illustrates the procedure and effectiveness of the church built on the principles the Spirit administers.

Historical and cultural interest —Acts is an invaluable historical source. Without Acts, we would know nothing of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the martyrdom of Stephen, the life of the early Jerusalem church, or the way the gospel first came to the Samaritans and the Gentiles. We would have little information about Paul's missionary journeys and the founding of various churches around the Roman world.

Can we trust these historical representations? William Ramsey and others have demonstrated the accuracy of Luke's knowledge about details of Roman provincial government, first century geographic boundaries, social and religious customs, navigational techniques, and the like. Luke's record of the serious famine in the middle 40s (11:27-30), the death of Herod Agrippa II (12:19-23), the edict of Claudius expelling Jews from Rome (18:2), the activity of an Egyptian terrorist in the middle 50s (21:38), and the replacement of the Judean procurator Felix with Festus (24:27) are all confirmed by secular historical sources.

The most serious challenge to Luke's reliability comes from the alleged historical contradictions between Acts and Paul's epistles. Most of these contradictions stem from incomplete or unclear historical evidence from Paul. Given the nature of Paul's letters, it is not reasonable to expect the

apostle to go into the details recorded in Acts. Paul's letters often address urgent issues within churches, with historical or geographical details being less of a priority.

The alleged discrepancy most frequently cited is the number of trips Paul made to Jerusalem after his conversion. Paul's own epistles mention three: (1) three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18); 14 years after his conversion or his first trip (Gal. 2:1); and a projected visit at the time of the writing of the letter to the Romans (Rom. 15:24). However, Acts records five trips: (1) a post-conversion visit (9:26); (2) the famine-relief visit (11:27-30); (3) the visit at the time of the Jerusalem Council (15:1ff); a visit between the second and third missionary journeys (18:22); and a visit at the end of the third missionary journey (21:17). The contradiction evaporates when we realize that we have no reason to expect Paul to discuss all his journeys to Jerusalem given his purposes in writing the various letters that he penned.

The cry of the Enlightenment was that the necessary truths of reason could never be established by the "accidents" of history. History was dismissed as the "ugly ditch" and regarded at best as irrelevant and at worst as falsified for purposes of indoctrination. Luke's attitude towards history is decidedly different. He takes meticulous care to detail the events of the early church with an eye to leaving believers with an accurate account of what God did in those early days.

Christianity is a religion of space and time. God became man, took on flesh, walked on the earth, laughed, cried, ate, spoke, suffered, and died smack dab in the middle of that "ugly ditch," the very one we find ourselves in today. Accordingly, Luke takes pains to get it right. The historical account of Acts not only gives us a foundation for understanding the details of God's redemptive work in those early Christians but also provides background for understanding the epistles that follow.

Prayer linked to important historical junctures—Reading this book, one senses the irresistible movement of the Spirit of God in answer to the prayers of his people. His followers are united in prayer prior to Pentecost (1:14). Prayer was their daily routine (2:42; 3:1), their first response to opposition (4:23-31), and a ministerial priority (6:4). Prayer preceded significant ministry advances, such as the conversion of Paul (9:11), the first notable Gentile conversion (10:3, 9), Peter's rescue from a Jewish prison (12:12), and the selection of the first missionary team (13:2). The list could go on and on. Praying was as natural as breathing to these people and accounts for the tremendous way they were used in the early expansion of the church.

Gentile inclusion—Luke records the general rejection of the gospel by the Jews across the Empire and the apostles' turning to the Gentiles for a ready audience to the message of truth. The Church grew rapidly independent of Jewish synagogue and ritual which hastened the final severance between Judaism and Christianity. God's salvation message burst the bonds of ethnic exclusivity (10:34-35) and obliterated any idea of human merit in its reception (15:8-9).

Sermons and speeches—Acts is loaded with sermons and speeches, no less than twenty-two in just twenty-eight chapters. Most of these are by Peter (1:16-22; 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 10:34-

43; 11:4-17; 15:7-11) and Paul (13:16-41; 14:15-17; 17:22-31; 20:18-35; 22:1-21; 23:1-6; 24:10-21; 25:8-11; 26:1-23; 27:21-26; 28:17-20, 25-28). Others include Gamaliel (5:25-29), Stephen (7:2-53), James (15:13-21), and Demetrius (19:25-27).

Many scholars assert that Luke is untrustworthy in his record of speeches in Acts. They note that the speeches are all in the same general style, a style that is in accord with the narrative portions of Acts. The speeches are Lucan, not Petrine or Pauline. They assert that Luke put into the mouths of his speakers the sentiments he felt were appropriate for the occasion. Lastly, they charge that there are differences in the theology of the speeches.

In response, the uniformity of style of the speeches is only to say that Luke did not give us verbatim reports of the speeches but paraphrased them in his own words. Paraphrases and summaries of speeches can still accurately convey their contents. What minutes of any organization's meeting is other than a summary? That the speeches are not verbatim does not mean that Luke just made up whatever seemed to fit the occasion. As for alleged differences in theology, speeches have real-life context. Peter's speeches in Acts 2 and 3 contain formulations of Christology (2:36) and eschatology (3:19-20) that fit the early days of the church. That context was different than Paul's in Acts 13 and 17 and Paul's formulations reflect his different context. Luke not only provides an accurate summary of the main points expressed but also captures the distinctive phraseology of Peter, Paul, and other speakers.

Luke's summaries supply a portrait of the preaching of the early church, centered on the life and person of Jesus Christ. Unlike modern preaching, which is usually either the logical development of a single topic or the elaboration of a single text, early apostolic preaching was a narration of the life and work of Christ, a defense of his Resurrection, followed by a call to repentance and faith. One can see the importance of historical continuity in the very structure of the sermons in Acts.

Lessons in church planting—Michael Green in *30 years That Changed the World* examines seven examples of church plants in Acts. The early believers took seriously the outward orientation of the church and thought of founding churches as part of their commission. Their churches were not clubs for the pious. In addition, the early Christians did not wait on consolidation and the training of leaders before moving out. They expected God, who brought the little congregations into being, to sustain them by providing adequate leadership. Green notes the following about church plants:

Jerusalem (2:1ff) -- Three factors were significant in the growth of the Jerusalem church:

- Infectious joy. There was undeniable radiance and joy among these people. That is manifest throughout the early chapters of Acts.
- Alternative lifestyle. You see this described in Acts 2 and 4. This alternative lifestyle gave them a credibility that was magnetic.

- Thoughtful reinterpretation of the good news. This was brought by the Hellenists, particularly Stephen (6:1ff). Whereas the Jewish Christians saw God as primarily the God of the Law, the temple, and Israel, the Hellenists realized that the customs delivered by Moses could not measure up to Christian freedom in the age of the Spirit. They translated the gospel into terms that secular people of that day understood.

Samaria (8:1ff)—Two principles emerge:

- Costly reconciliation. There was a mighty chasm between Jerusalem and Samaria for centuries. The Spirit fell with power and that led to the apostles coming to confirm the work and begin the healing. The church would not be an apartheid church. The Samaritan work will be part of the whole.
- Spiritual gifts are important. We must neither be afraid of them nor go hunting for them.

Caesarea (10-11)—Some takeaways:

- Prayer and vision (10:2). The link between prayerful dependence on God and effectiveness in God's work is undeniable. In the West, we find prayer one of the most difficult disciplines. Busyness and activity come much easier to us.
- Expect the unexpected. Here, a sophisticated Roman officer sends a detachment of men off to find a Jewish angler to instruct him about God! The Spirit is much bigger than our systems and will often act in ways that trample on our prejudices and call forth our awe.
- Household evangelism. Talk about a venue with a receptive audience!
- Confronting prejudice. Simon Peter was no Gentile lover. God had to break his disciple of his prejudice to enable his usefulness. Guess what? The same is true today.

Antioch (11:19ff)—Some takeaways:

- It was lay initiative that brought this church into being (11:20).
- Transcultural fellowship was a noteworthy aspect of the Antioch church. That reality had much to do with their missionary vision and ambition. In a world where real fellowship without judgmental attitudes and ethnic bigotry was rare, this was a most attractive feature.
- Shared leadership. Most church structures are pyramidal – the senior minister at the top, assistant ministers with their spheres of responsibility, elders or council members, various service areas (finance, Christian education, church music etc.), and then the congregation. At Antioch, you do not find a pyramid, but a ring. There was a circle of five individuals sharing the leadership of the church. That circle approach may have characterized the entire operation.
- Balance – They held together in dynamic tension their social concerns, their worship, and their missionary outreach. They are active in relief (11:28ff), in worship (13:2), and in missionary work (13:3).

Thessalonica (17)—Some takeaways:

- Value of a short campaign. The initial effort seems to have happened over a brief period. These initiatives help launch resident believers in the work of evangelism.
- Handling opposition. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4 indicate that opposition was intense. It is rare when evangelism does not engender opposition and Acts shows us how to handle it and keep going.
- Learning from your mistakes (17:6).
- Supportive work of care and prayer lavished on new converts (see 1 Thess. 1:2-3; 2:1-4, 17-20).
- A combination of preaching, power of the Holy Spirit, conviction and sincerity of leaders, and the impact of example.

Corinth (18)—Lessons from the founding of the church at Corinth:

- Church planting often begins with one individual. Paul's restlessness after his experience at Athens speaks volumes about the founding at Corinth.
- Paul sought out Christian fellowship, namely with Aquila and Priscilla. Paul was a commanding intellect. Aquila may have been a freed slave capable in a business venue. Priscilla may have come from a prominent Roman family of that name and married the successfully freed slave. They shared a household, an occupation, and a common vision.
- They reached a variety of people. The gospel reached all levels of society in that city. One of the saddest aspects of the gospel in the West is the homogeneous nature of most churches. People like being with their own kind. However, that is not the picture of the gospel given in Acts.
- The value of an encouraging atmosphere, not only by friends but also by the Lord (18:9).

Ephesus (19)—Ephesus was the preeminent city of Asia Minor. Its penetration would be of great significance for the gospel. Glimpses of how that was done:

- Use of the home – The home of Aquila and Priscilla was an invaluable asset. Doubtless others followed this fine example.
- They did not write off “fellow travelers.” John's disciples are fully welcomed into the kingdom.
- Power evangelism – Demonstrations of the power of the gospel accompanied its proclamation.
- Purposeful educational efforts build the church and help spread the gospel. Secular venues are frequently more effective for communicating the gospel than church buildings. The school of Tyrannus illustrates this point. It provided a bully pulpit as well as a place to equip leaders and engage inquirers. Shared learning was an exercise in training – it developed a rudimentary faculty. In addition, the students spread the gospel into the hinterlands of the province of Asia.

Summary Outline: Acts: You Shall Be My Witnesses

- I. Holy Spirit Poured Out: Power for Witness (1:1-2:47)**
 - A. Waiting on the Holy Spirit: Preparation for witness (1:1-26)
 - B. Pentecost: Enablement of the Holy Spirit (2:1-47)
- II. Witness in Jerusalem: Expansion Despite Jewish Opposition (3:1-8:3)**
 - A. Healing the lame man at the temple gate: Initial Jewish opposition (3:1-4:35)
 - B. Ananias and Sapphira: Internal problem of purity (4:36-5:16)
 - C. Increased Jewish opposition: Arrest, miraculous release, and interrogation of the apostles (5:17-42)
 - D. Deacons chosen to attend to food distribution: Witness and internal purity (6:1-7)
 - E. Stephen's martyrdom: Vigorous persecution by the Jews (6:8-8:3)
- III. Witness in Judea, Samaria, and Beyond: Expanded Witness as a Result of Persecution (8:4-12:25)**
 - A. Philip's ministry in Samaria and beyond (8:4-40)
 - B. Conversion and commission of Paul (9:1-31)
 - C. Beginnings of the Gentile mission (9:32-12:25)
 1. Peter's ministry among the Gentiles (9:32-43)
 2. Cornelius' conversion: Gentile inclusion established (10:1-11:18)
 3. Antioch church: Establishment and ministry (11:19-26)
 4. Relief for the Jerusalem church (11:27-12:25)
- IV. Worldwide Witness: To the Ends of the Earth (13:1-21:16)**
 - A. First missionary journey: Witness in Asia Minor arouses Jewish opposition (13:1-14:28)
 - B. Jerusalem Council: Implications of Gentile inclusion worked out (15:1-35)
 - C. Second missionary journey: Witness in Europe (15:36-18:22)
 - D. Third missionary journey: Exhorting and strengthening the churches (18:23-21:16)
- V. Witness in Chains: Paul's Imprisonment and Trials (21:17-28:31)**
 - A. Paul's arrest and initial defense before the Jewish crowd (21:17-22:29)
 - B. Proceedings before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:11)
 - C. Proceedings before Felix (23:12-24:27)
 - D. Proceedings before Festus and Herod Agrippa II (25:1-26:32)
 - E. Paul's journey to and arrival at Rome (27:1-28:31)

Detailed Outline: Acts: You Shall Be My Witnesses

- I. Holy Spirit Poured Out: Power for Witness (1:1-2:47)**
 - A. Waiting on the Holy Spirit: Preparation for witness (1:1-26)
 - 1. Command to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1:1-5)
 - 2. Commissioning instructions: Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth (1:6-8)
 - 3. Ascension of Christ into heaven and promise of return (1:9-11)
 - 4. Preparation for witness: Matthias chosen to replace Judas (1:12-26)
 - B. Pentecost: Enablement of the Holy Spirit (2:1-47)
 - 1. Tongues of fire: Filling of the Holy Spirit (2:1-4)
 - 2. Amazement and speculation of the crowd (2:5-13)
 - 3. Peter's sermon: Pouring forth of the Spirit (2:14-41)
 - 4. Early Christian community summarized (2:42-47)
- II. Witness in Jerusalem: Expansion Despite Jewish Opposition (3:1-8:3)**
 - A. Healing the lame man at the temple gate: Initial Jewish opposition (3:1-4:35)
 - 1. Lame man healed by Peter: Amazement of the crowd (3:1-10)
 - 2. Peter's sermon: Times of refreshing from the Lord (3:11-26)
 - 3. Arrest of Peter and John: Before the Sanhedrin (4:1-22)
 - 4. Believers' prayer for power for witness: Filling of the Holy Spirit (4:23-31)
 - 5. Early Christian community summarized (4:32-35)
 - B. Ananias and Sapphira: Internal problem of purity (4:36-5:16)
 - 1. Incident and God's response (4:36-5:11)
 - 2. Summary: Miraculous power and supernatural growth of the church (5:12-16)
 - C. Increased Jewish opposition: Arrest, miraculous release, and interrogation of the apostles (5:17-6:7)
 - 1. Apostles' imprisonment and miraculous release (5:17-25)
 - 2. Sanhedrin's second interrogation of the apostles (5:26-6:7)
 - D. Deacons chosen to attend to food distribution: Witness and internal purity (6:1-7)
 - E. Stephen's martyrdom: Vigorous persecution by the Jews (6:8-8:3)
 - 1. Conflict with the Synagogue of Freedmen: Conspiracy to charge Stephen with blasphemy (6:8-12)
 - 2. Stephen's arraignment and defense before the Sanhedrin (6:13-8:1a)
 - a. Charges: Speaking against the temple and the law (6:13-7:1)
 - b. Stephen's defense (7:2-53)
 - c. Stoning and death of Stephen (7:54-8:1a)
 - 3. Church persecuted and scattered throughout Judea and Samaria: Role of Paul (8:1b-3)

III. Witness in Judea, Samaria, and Beyond: Expanded Witness as a Result of Persecution (8:4-12:25)

- A. Philip's ministry in Samaria and beyond (8:4-40)
 - 1. Samaritan ministry (8:4-25)
 - a. Samaritan reception to the gospel (8:4-8)
 - b. Simon the Magician's astonishment at signs and miracles performed by Philip (8:9-13)
 - c. Apostolic confirmation of Samaritan ministry (8:14-25)
 - 2. Ethiopian eunuch hears the gospel (8:26-40)
- B. Conversion and commission of Paul (9:1-31)
 - 1. Vision on the Damascus road: Jesus' appearance results in Paul's blindness (9:1-9)
 - 2. Healing and commissioning of Paul by Ananias (9:10-19a)
 - 3. Paul's early preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem (9:19b-31)
- C. Beginnings of the Gentile mission (9:32-12:25)
 - 1. Peter's ministry among the Gentiles (9:32-43)
 - 2. Cornelius conversion: Gentile inclusion established (10:1-11:18)
 - a. Cornelius' vision: Divine instructions to send for Peter (10:1-8)
 - b. Peter's vision of eating unclean food: Do not call impure what God has made clean (10:9-16)
 - c. Arrival and reception of Cornelius' messengers (10:17-23a)
 - d. Peter's ministry to the Gentiles at Caesarea (10:23b-48)
 - e. Peter's report to the Jerusalem church (11:1-8)
 - 3. Antioch church: Establishment and mission (11:19-26)
 - 4. Relief for the Jerusalem church (11:27-12:25)
 - a. Antioch church sends famine relief through Barnabas and Paul (11:27-30)
 - b. Death of Herod Agrippa I provides relief from persecution (12:1-23)
 - (1) James martyred by Herod (12:1-2)
 - (2) Peter's imprisonment and miraculous release (12:3-11)
 - (3) Reaction to Peter's escape by praying believers and by unsuspecting guards (12:12-19a)
 - (4) Account of Herod's death (12:19b-23)
 - (5) Summary of growth; Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch (12:24-25)

IV. Worldwide Witness: To the Ends of the Earth (13:1-21:16)

- A. First missionary journey: Witness in Asia Minor arouses Jewish opposition (13:1-14:28)
 - 1. Barnabas and Paul set apart by the Spirit for missionary work (13:1-3)
 - 2. Cyprus (13:4-12)
 - 3. Antioch Pisidia (13:13-52)
 - a. Journey to Antioch Pisidia (13:13-14)

- b. Paul's sermon in the synagogue: Through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed (13:15-43)
 - c. Jewish hostility towards the gospel: Paul turns to the Gentiles (13:44-52)
 - 4. Iconium (14:1-7)
 - 5. Lystra (14:8-20a)
 - 6. Return to Antioch: Strengthening believers and reporting to the church (14:20b-28)
- B. Jerusalem Council: Implications of Gentile inclusion worked out (15:1-35)
 - 1. Controversy with the Judaizers: Are Gentile believers subject to the Law (15:1-5)
 - 2. Debate at the Council (15:6-21)
 - 3. Council's judgment summarized in letter to Gentile believers (15:22-35)
- C. Second missionary journey: Witness in Europe (15:36-18:22)
 - 1. Dispute between Paul and Barnabas concerning Mark: Division of the team (15:36-40)
 - 2. Strengthening the churches; Timothy joins the team (15:41-16:5)
 - 3. Macedonian vision: Spirit-directed call to ministry in Greece (16:6-10)
 - 4. Philippi (16:11-40)
 - a. Journey to Philippi (16:11-12)
 - b. Preaching at the place of prayer: Conversion of Lydia (16:13-15)
 - c. Exorcism of a demon-possessed slave girl (16:16-18)
 - d. Imprisonment of Paul and Silas: Conversion of the Philippian jailer (16:19-34)
 - e. Release of Paul and retraction of false charges by the authorities (16:35-40)
 - 5. Thessalonica (17:1-9)
 - a. Witness in the synagogues: Response from God-fearing Greeks and prominent women (17:1-4)
 - b. Persecution instigated by the Jews: Arrest and release of Jason (17:5-9)
 - 6. Berea (17:10-15)
 - 7. Athens (17:16-34)
 - a. Witness in the synagogues and marketplace leads to controversy with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (17:16-18)
 - b. Address on Areopagus: Witness to the intellectual pagan (17:19-31)
 - 8. Corinth (18:1-17)
 - a. Tentmaking with Priscilla and Aquila and preaching in the synagogue (18:1-4)
 - b. Blessings on the Gentile ministry after rejection by the Jews (18:5-11)
 - c. Proconsul Gallio ignores Jewish charges against Paul (18:12-17)
 - 9. Return to Antioch via Jerusalem (18:18-22)
- D. Third missionary journey: Exhorting and strengthening the churches (18:23-21:16)

1. Summary: Strengthening the Galatian and Phrygian churches (18:23)
2. Apollos' instruction by Priscilla and Aquila and his subsequent ministry in Achaia (18:24-28)
3. Ephesus (19:1-41)
 - a. Disciples of John receive the Spirit (19:1-7)
 - b. Witness and miracles at Ephesus: Sons of Sceva and exposure of counterfeits (19:8-20)
 - c. Paul's future plans: Jerusalem and Rome (19:21-22)
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 - a. Macedonia and Greece: Encouragement for the brethren and hostility from the Jews (20:1-6)
 - b. Sermon snorer at Troas: Eutychus revived (20:7-12)
 - c. Troas to Miletus (20:13-16)
 - d. Paul warns and exhorts the Ephesian elders to shepherd the church of God (20:17-38)
 - e. Miletus to Tyre: Warnings to Paul through the disciples (21:1-6)
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V. Witness in Chains: Paul's Imprisonment and Trials (21:17-28:31)

- A. Paul's arrest and initial defense before the Jewish crowd (21:17-22:29)
 1. Paul takes a vow to reassure Jewish Christians concerning his attitude towards the Law (21:17-26)
 2. Seizure of Paul upon Jewish accusation of temple defilement (21:27-36)
 - a. Seizure of Paul upon charge of bringing Gentiles into the temple (21:27-30)
 - b. Paul rescued from Jewish mob by Roman garrison (21:31-36)
 3. Paul's testimony before the Jewish crowd upon initial arrest (21:37-22:29)
 - a. Obtaining permission from Romans to address Jewish crowd (21:37-40)
 - b. Testimony before the Jews (22:1-21)
 - (1) Getting their attention: Address in Aramaic (22:1-2)
 - (2) Early life in Judaism: Persecutor of the Way (22:3-5)
 - (3) Conversion on the Damascus road (22:6-11)
 - (4) Commissioning and healing through Ananias (22:12-16)
 - (5) Vision in the temple: Mission to the Gentiles (22:17-21)
 - c. Jewish uproar: Paul avoids a flogging by invoking his Roman citizenship (22:22-29)
- B. Proceedings before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:11)
 1. Council assembled to ascertain charges against Paul (22:30)

2. Confrontation with Ananias: Lawless traditionalism (23:1-5)
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- C. Proceedings before Felix (23:12-24:27)
 1. Jewish conspiracy to kill Paul uncovered; Removal to Caesarea (23:12-35)
 2. Jewish charges presented to Felix: Paul charged as troublemaker and for temple desecration (24:1-9)
 3. Paul's reply to Jewish charges: Assertion of clear conscience and the hope of the resurrection (24:10-21)
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- D. Proceedings before Festus and Herod Agrippa II (25:1-26:32)
 1. Before Festus (25:1-22)
 - a. Hearing set for Caesarea: Jewish plot to kill Paul foiled (25:1-5)
 - b. Change of venue proposed: Paul's appeal to Caesar (25:6-12)
 - c. Festus seeks Agrippa's counsel on Paul's case (25:13-22)
 2. Before Festus and Agrippa (25:23-26:32)
 - a. Festus announces the purpose of the hearing: Specify the charges (25:23-27)
 - b. Paul's testimony before Agrippa (26:1-23)
 - (1) His early life in Judaism (26:1-11)
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 - (3) Subsequent witness and arrest (26:19-23)
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 - c. Deliverance through shipwreck: Ashore at Malta (27:27-44)
 2. Miracles performed by Paul at Malta (28:1-10)
 - a. Paul unharmed by snakebite (28:1-6)
 - b. Publius' father healed (28:7-10)
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 - a. Journey from Malta to Rome (28:11-16)
 - b. Paul's witness to the Jews before turning to the Gentiles (28:17-29)
 - c. Paul under house arrest: Unhindered witness at Rome (28:30-31)

Acts: You Shall Be My Witnesses

I. Holy Spirit Poured Out: Power for Witness (1:1-2:47)

This initial section of the book describes the engine of the church: the early Christians witnessed as energized and emboldened by the Holy Spirit. Acts 1 describes the Lord's commands to wait for the power from on high (1:1-5), instructions concerning the progression of their witness (1:6-8), the Lord's Ascension to glory (1:9-11), and the apostles' preparation for their mission by filling out their number, replacing Judas with Matthias (1:12-26). Acts 2 describes the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: the tongues of fire (2:1-4), the amazement of the crowd (2:5-13), and Peter's powerful sermon (2:14-41). The chapter concludes with a fascinating summary of the early Christian community (2:42-47) that gives an instructive window into what the redeemed community of God looked like.

A. Waiting on the Holy Spirit: Preparation for witness (1:1-26)—The first chapter of Acts is the account of what happened between the lightning of Christ's life, ministry, death, and resurrection and the thunder of Pentecost. The two cannot be separated. The life and ministry of the Lord Jesus and the in-filling and infusing power of the Holy Spirit for life and ministry are all part of piece.

1. Command to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1:1-5)—The former book to which Luke refers is his gospel account, also addressed to *Theophilus* (a Greek compound meaning friend or lover of God). In the gospel's salutation, he is referred to as "most excellent Theophilus", indicating that he may have been a person of some rank in government or society. Luke drops the formality in the introduction to Acts, which may indicate a growing friendship and intimacy between the two.

Luke-Acts was conceived as a whole. The Gospel of Luke records the ministry of Jesus on earth and the book of Acts the ministry of Jesus' disciples as empowered by the Spirit. What Jesus began is continued through his Spirit-led followers. Luke's purpose for both books is clearly stated in Luke 1:3-4, that Theophilus may know with certainty those things in which he had been instructed. "Instructed" is *katechetes*, meaning to sound down. It is the root for our English word catechumen, or the one instructed. Luke-Acts is intentional instruction in the truth delivered to a very receptive learner.

1:3—Jesus appeared to the disciples multiple times over the forty days between his Resurrection and Ascension, teaching them many things. He opened their minds to understand the Old Testament passages concerning himself (Lk. 24:44-48). Now the lessons focused on the reality of the Resurrection, the nature of his kingdom, the power of the Spirit (1:4-8), and their directions for ministry (1:8). The writers of the New Testament always assume that the Resurrection is central to the Christian faith. Paul spells out in detail why this is so in 1 Corinthians 15.

1:5—John the Baptist had announced a future baptism of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33) and Jesus had promised the coming of the Spirit in the upper room discourse (Jn. 14:16-18, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15). The disciples needed power from on high.

2. Commissioning instructions: Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth (1:6-8)—The disciples thought that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the coming of the kingdom were closely related. The full realization of the Kingdom was near. Jesus redirects them from speculation to the task at hand—to be witnesses to the king. The important thing is not to so pine for the future as to neglect the business of the kingdom. They were to preach the gospel everywhere.

1:8—This verse outlines the entire book. The gospel will spread throughout Jerusalem and Judea in chapters 1-7, Samaria and the adjacent regions in chapters 8-12, and to the entire Roman world in chapters 13-28. Note that the Spirit is given to make Christians effective witnesses, not impressive people.

Jesus' charge to his disciples, then and now, is to be witnesses. Witness is *martus* in Greek, meaning one who avows what he or she has seen, heard, or knows. Our English word "martyr" comes from this root, denoting someone who bears testimony to another person or cause with his or her death. The dynamic power of the Spirit will be given in constant flow as we engage in communicating the truth. We are to be conduits or channels, not reservoirs or holding tanks. The focus of our mission starts near home in life's most intimate relationships where people really know us. It also has a focus at work and in the community where the consistency of our life and witness can be observed. However, it has a broader meaning still—to reach our nation and world and includes wherever we are sent.

3. Ascension of Christ into Heaven and the Promise of His Return (1:9-11)—In Peter's Pentecost sermon, the exaltation of Jesus is associated with the outpouring of the Spirit. Specifically, in Acts 2:33-35, Peter connects the Ascension to the Messiah's exaltation by referencing Psalm 110:1. The continuing work of Christ on earth is in the hands of his Spirit-led disciples.

The Ascension highlights that the divine descended to the human so that the human could reflect the divine. Put another way, Christ became what we are to transform us into what he is. First, what did the Ascension mean to Jesus? It was his ascent to heaven for glorification. The first part of the mighty work of the divine Word was done. A small band of disciples was ready to be transformed by the reality of the Holy Spirit in them. To return as indwelling power in his redeemed ones, he had to leave them as the self-limited Jesus who took on humanity. The glorified Christ commanded all power in heaven and earth. Jesus was liberated from the confines of locality to make his followers like him through the power of the Holy Spirit. The next part of the mighty work or redemption would be to return with reigning power, ubiquity, and omniscience by the Spirit.

Second, what did the Ascension mean to his followers? Jesus had been their friend, companion, master, Lord, and crucified and risen Savior. Their conception (and ours) of what Christ is like focused on his incarnate state. The gospels are our source of how he calls and ministers to us. But this reality is multiplied by Christ's ascended glory and the infinite, ever-present, and enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The reality of Christ in them by the power of the Spirit took this redemptive and ministerial dynamic to whole new level.

1:11—Someone has counted three hundred and eighteen references to the second coming of Christ in the New Testament. Paul and the apostles mentioned the Lord's return frequently in their preaching. Today, we tend to back off from this emphasis for a variety of reasons. However, the New Testament is urging us to garner a mindset of looking expectantly for the Lord's return and the culmination of the age.

4. Preparation for witness: Matthias chosen to replace Judas (1:12-26)—The necessity to fill Judas' spot is not a common-sense decision independent of Scriptural counsel. Judas' betrayal and the need for his replacement was in keeping with the fulfillment of the inspired Word. The decision between Joseph and Matthias is determined by casting lots (see Prov. 16:33). This is the last time in the Bible that lots are used to determine God's will.

There had been competition among the disciples and there must have been the residue of criticism of each other. In addition, there were prejudices to unearth and dispose of. The "wrong" type of people were joining Jesus' followers. Would the crony klatches close ranks or would they embrace "those" people? Rich and poor, high society and untouchables, zealots and tax collectors, fishermen and former Pharisees. Quite a motley crew. The early disciples may have used this time to confess their wrongs, share their pains, encourage one another, and begin down the path of reconciliation. Prayer brought unity. They sought the loving heart of God and extended what they sought to their siblings in the Lord. The Lord wants to bless us with his Spirit. Prayer and reconciled relationships are the place for us to begin and return to repeatedly throughout our Christian adventure.

1:14—The group that assembled in the upper room included the Lord's family, including his mother and his brothers. His brothers did not believe in him during his public ministry (see Jn. 7:3-5), but they did come to faith after the Resurrection. At least one of the Lord's post-Resurrection appearances was to one of the members of his immediate family (see 1 Cor. 15:7).

In Acts, the early believers are portrayed as constantly praying—for guidance in making decisions (1:24-25), for courage to witness (4:24ff), for forgiveness for those persecuting them (7:55ff), for people's reception of the message and the Spirit (8:14-17; 10:9), for deliverance from persecution (12:1ff), for missions work (13:1-2), for the selection of leaders (14:23), for their friends (20:36; 21:5), for deliverance from natural peril (27:35), and for healing (28:8). Acts 16 records back-to-back instances of people's hearts opening to the Lord as a direct result of prayer meetings of believers (16:13, 25ff). Things happen when God's people pray!

1:18-20—Peter’s account of the purchase of the burial plot and the death of Judas Iscariot complements the record of Matthew 27:3-10. Judas did not personally buy the field, but his money paid for it. Matthew tells us that Judas hanged himself; Luke graphically completes the account of his sorry end. It seems the rope broke, and his body burst open when it hit the ground.

B. Pentecost: Enablement of the Holy Spirit (2:1-47)—Acts 2 describes the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (2:1-13), Peter’s powerful explanation and summons to respond (2:14-41) and concludes with an instructive summary of what the redeemed community looked like (2:42-47). Pentecost was a miracle, an intervention of supernatural power in keeping with a higher spiritual law which supersedes the laws of human nature. The higher spiritual law that Jesus explained was demonstrated as God’s Spirit within individuals, which produces potential that surpasses human limitations.

An agnosticism about the Holy Spirit is common in the church today. Not disbelief so much, as an aching desire for power to live by faith accompanied by an uncertainty of how to access that power. Acts 2 still invites us to spiritual adventure.

1. Tongues of fire: Filling of the Holy Spirit (2:1-4)—Pentecost is the annual Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15-22). In the book of Acts, the Spirit’s initial outpouring on the apostles (2:1-4), Gentiles (10:45-48; 11:15-17), and John’s disciples (19:4-6) was marked by speaking in tongues. In the first instance of these outpourings, tongues entailed speaking in a known human language previously unknown to the speakers. Later in the life of the church, the Spirit gave the gift of tongues in the form of utterance which was not a specific language. That gift was to be used in the assembly of faith and interpreted for the edification of believers.

The Bible provides numerous insights about the Holy Spirit. The nature of his personality is explicitly delineated in John 14:16-17, 15:26, and 16:7-15. Scripture ascribes to the Spirit intellect (1 Cor. 12:11), emotion (Rom 15:30), and will (1 Cor. 12:11). It also assigns divine attributes to him, such as omnipotence (Lk. 1:35) and regenerative power (Jn. 3:5). He is expressly described as one of the three persons of the Trinity (Mt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14). His ministries with respect to believers include that of regeneration (Jn. 3:5; Titus 3:5), baptism (1 Cor. 12:13), indwelling (Jn. 14:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal 4:6), sealing (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30), and filling (Eph. 5:18). The baptism of the Spirit is distinct from the filling of the Spirit. Spirit baptism identifies believers with Jesus Christ, incorporating them into his body, the church. In contrast, the filling of the Spirit pertains to empowerment for witness and service.

The Spirit’s coming at Pentecost was different from his manner of ministry prior to Pentecost in two ways. He dwells in people now rather than coming upon them and his presence is no longer temporary (Jn. 14:16). It was essential that Jesus die, be raised from the dead, and ascend into heaven, before the Holy Spirit could be given in this fashion. Note that believers are not going to

move the world by criticizing it or by conforming to it, but by combustion within their lives ignited by the Spirit of God.

The dynamic of Pentecost was wind, fire, and praise. These were outward signs of an inward reality. The Hebrew word for wind and spirit is *ruach*. The presence of wind outwardly was soon an inward rush of new thought, emotion, and will. The second outward sign was fire, an enactment of the prophecy of John the Baptist in Luke 3:16: “I baptize you with water; but One mightier ... will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” The fire of the Holy Spirit burns our dross away, refines, and galvanizes us. He also makes us capable of true warmth and inclusive love. This quality of inclusive, unselfish love is impossible without the Holy Spirit. The third outward sign was praise. Their speech was anointed. A key application of this passage to our lives is praise as the secret of the liberated life. Praising the Lord for what he has done frees us to receive what he will do. Praise is also an irresistible, magnetic attraction for communicating our faith to others.

2. Amazement and speculation of the crowd (2:5-13)—The people assembled were from a wide variety of backgrounds and nations. Their first reaction was to dismiss the miracle. That set the stage for Peter’s powerful explanation and summons to faith.

Pentecost was the reversal of God’s judgment at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Consider the following parallels:

- At Babel, God confused people’s languages; at Pentecost, each heard in their own language.
- At Babel, God scattered the people in judgment; at Pentecost, he united them into one body, his church.
- At Babel, people schemed to make a name for themselves; at Pentecost, people brought praise to the name of the Most High.
- At Babel, people gathered in rebellious self-assertion; at Pentecost, they were gathered in humble submission.

3. Peter’s sermon: Pouring forth of the Spirit (2:14-41)—This sermon consists of three parts: (1) Peter’s explanation for the pouring out of the Spirit on the believers in terms of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 (2:14-21); (2) a proclamation of Christ’s resurrection as the fulfillment of David’s prophecies in Psalms 16 and 110 (2:22-36); and (3) a call for repentance and a promise of blessing for those who respond (2:37-41). In equating the Pentecost experience with Joel’s prophecy, Peter challenges the people to call on the Lord for salvation (Joel 2:32). His focus is not on the celestial signs that will accompany the day of judgment (Joel 2:30-31).

This sermon is a model of early Christian preaching. Typically, sermons included (1) an announcement that the age of fulfillment had arrived, (2) a review of the life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ, (3) citations of Old Testament proof texts for Jesus' Messiahship (here Psalms 16 and 110) and/or an explanation of the events at hand in relation to Old Testament prophecy (here Joel 2:28-32), and (4) a call to repent and believe.

2:25-36—Peter supplies his audience with three evidentiary proofs of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

- Fulfilled prophecy—In Acts 2:25-28, Peter quotes David's prophecy in Psalm 16:8-11 and notes that David obviously was not speaking of himself but of the coming of Messiah. That Messiah was Jesus, whose Resurrection fulfilled these prophecies.
- The witness of believers (2:32)—Can we trust such biased witnesses? Yes, because it was very much a testimony against their own interests. The followers of Jesus exhibited skepticism regarding His resurrection. Furthermore, they had nothing to gain and much to lose by believing a lie. They engendered official opposition and persecution that led to the imprisonment and death.
- The presence of the Holy Spirit (2:33-35)—If the Holy Spirit was in the world, then the Father must have sent him at the behest of Jesus the Messiah, as prophesied by Joel and as promised by Jesus (1:4; Jn. 14:26; 15:26).

2:38—In the final segment of the sermon (2:37-41), the people, under conviction, ask Peter what they should do. Repent and be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins” is Peter's reply. Repent is *metanoeo*, meaning to change one's mind or perception due to perspective-altering truth. Peter wanted them to change their minds about Christ and to see their own desperate need for him as Lord and Savior of their lives. The call to baptism would have been eye-opening for a Jewish audience. It was used for initiation into Judaism or for a reconsecration of an individual seeking forgiveness.

Christians have disagreed on this text's interpretation. Roman Catholics assert that this text teaches baptismal regeneration, that the physical act of baptism by the appropriate personnel accomplishes regeneration. They argue that both verbs (to repent and to be baptized) are in the imperative with the single result of sin's forgiveness (for the remission of sins). But if this verse requires the physical act of baptism for regeneration, it also requires the repentance of the people baptized (not their surrogate), regardless of age. That would seem to mitigate against the common Roman Catholic baptismal practice.

Others understand the reference to baptism in this text as the outer sign of an inner transformation, and not that transformation's cause. Some translate 2:38a in the following manner: “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ on account of [for] the forgiveness of sins”. The preposition “for” (*eis*) is used here with a noun in the accusative case (*ashesin* translated “forgiveness”). When this preposition is used with this case, it may mean “on the basis of, on account of.” This construction is used in Matthew 3:11 and Mark

1:4 in speaking of John the Baptist's baptism and the forgiveness of sins. No one suggests that John's water baptism constituted the regenerative baptism of the Spirit. Indeed, John himself testified to the contrary in Mark 1:8: "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit".

Still others take the phrase "and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ" as parenthetical. Thus, the thrust of Peter's message in Acts 2:38 is to repent for the forgiveness of sins. The original language distinguishes between the verbs "repent" and "believe," the first being second person plural and the latter being third person singular. The verb "repent", being plural, corresponds to the plural pronoun "your" in the clause "for the forgiveness of your sins". The singular verb "be baptized" is set off from the rest of the sentence as a parenthetical expression. Therefore, Acts 2:38 is in accord with Acts 10:43, where Peter links the forgiveness of sins with faith. Baptism follows closely on a profession of faith and repentance, but it is the outer sign of an inner transformation, not that transformation's cause.

4. Early Christian community summarized (2:42-47)—This is hardly the picture of "services as usual" one often gets from Christian practice in modern America. The believers were devoted to the Word, sacraments, prayer, and to mutual support. They met daily, witnessed daily, and increased in numbers and power daily. They were expectant people. They anticipated and waited on God to act in a way that lifted high the cross of Christ. This spirit led to a body that was unified (2:44), magnified (2:47a), and multiplied (2:47b).

The first quality of the church was a sure knowledge of salvation through Christ's death and resurrection, and the reception of his living presence in his Holy Spirit. The second quality of this grouping was that they have an objective basis for the subjective experience of being together. Their structure and reality were thoroughly rooted in Scripture. Third, the Pentecost community had all things in common. Fourth, their common life was real and growing. They broke bread and prayed together. They took the time to be together, to listen to each other, to care for each other. Fifth, they had a gladness and simplicity of heart. Praise was an outward sign of the indwelling of the Spirit in which he filled them. Sixth, people were attracted to their joy expressed in praise and wanted to know its source.

There has been much discussion about the communal sharing practiced by the early church, where resources were redistributed to support those in need (2:45; 4:34-35). It is true that the multitude "had all things in common." However, the giving was voluntary, not compulsory, and intended for the poor. There is no record of a similar system in other churches, although relief of the poor was a general practice of the churches.

II. Witness in Jerusalem: Expansion Despite Jewish Opposition (3:1-8:3)

This section chronicles the advance of the faith in the citadel of Judaism. This advance takes place in the context of growing Jewish opposition that results in open persecution as well as issues internal to the Christian community attendant to a dynamic movement of God's Spirit. Jewish opposition does not thwart God's plan. It promotes it by thrusting the early believers beyond the confines of their comfort zones into Samaria and beyond. In addition, the internal issues provide the opportunity to discipline and organize the growing church.

A. Healing the lame man at the temple gate: Initial Jewish opposition (3:1-4:35)—

These chapters record the healing of a lame man by the apostles (3:1-10), the second of Peter's powerful sermons recorded in Acts (3:11-26), the arrest and interrogation of Peter and John by the Sanhedrin (4:1-22), and the believers' response to the Jewish authority's command to stop testifying. They prayed for boldness to preach and were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (4:23-31).

Note the emphasis in these chapters on the name of the Lord Jesus (see 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17-18, 30). The name of Jesus conveys much more than merely a sense of identity; it carries with it authority, reputation, and power. The name of Jesus has all authority behind it because he is God's own Son (Mt. 28:19). His name is above every name (Phil. 2:9-11). He deserves honor, worship, and obedience. The early Christians were concerned to bring glory to the name of Jesus, as we should be today.

1. Lame man healed by Peter: Amazement of the crowd (3:1-10)—Peter and John were going to the Temple for afternoon prayers, circa 3:00 pm. They meet a lame (*cholos*) man pleading for alms. The word shows his congenital issue was with his feet. His bones were out of place from birth, and he could not walk. What would Jesus have done? He would have healed him. Dare the apostles attempt that? Peter does—in the name of Jesus—he tells the man to arise and walk. The man leaped up (*exallomenos*), a term that comes from *hallomai*, an ancient medical word for the healing of the heel and ankle. Today, that process requires corrective surgery and a prolonged time of healing and learning to walk. The healing took place instantaneously.

This miracle of healing brings praise to God. Peter takes no credit (3:12) but instead uses the opportunity to preach Christ (3:13ff). This healing has similarities to Christ's healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda in John 5. The length of time of the disability is similar (38 years (Jn. 5:5) and 40 years (4:22)). The religious authorities are upset and actively oppose the Lord and his disciples. After the miracle in John 5, the Jewish opposition to Jesus grows (Jn. 5:14-18). In like manner, the apostles are forced to appear before the Sanhedrin (4:1-22) and commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus anymore (4:18). In both instances, the crowd responds—following Jesus (Jn. 6) and gathering for Peter's stirring message (3:11-26).

However, after Christ's miracle in John 5, there is no great harvest of converts. In fact, there is no indication that the paralytic himself came to faith or even expressed gratitude to Jesus for the healing (hard as that is to believe). In Acts, the man healed starts praising God, drawing a great throng who respond in large numbers to Peter's preaching. The episode makes you think of the Lord's promise to his disciples in John 14:12: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father."

2. Peter's sermon: Times of refreshing from the Lord (3:11-26)—In Acts, history plays a significant role in the way the apostles preached and presented Jesus as Messiah. Peter links the miracle to Christ, who has suffered, died, resurrected, and is now ready to bestow Abrahamic blessings (3:25; see Gen. 12:3) on those who repent and believe. The God of the patriarchs is the one who glorified Jesus (Acts 3:13) and whose ministry was prophesied by the prophets (Acts 3:18, 24). Jesus himself is the greater prophet predicted by Moses (3:22; see Deut. 18:15). To such a message, rooted in history controlled by a sovereign God, repentance and faith is the only proper response so that the Lord may bring times of refreshing to his people.

3:12-16—Peter speaks plainly. He charges the Jews with regicide. The names for the Lord that Peter uses underlines this point: God's servant Jesus; the Holy and Righteous One; and the author of life. God's resurrection of the Son puts the Jewish authorities' guilt on vivid display. There must be conviction before there can be conversion. Peter turned the temple into a courtroom and laid out the evidence of guilt to prompt repentance by the Jews.

3:17-26—Peter urges them to repent for the Lord of glory stood ready to pour out redemptive blessing. This required a twofold response (3:19): (1) they were to repent, literally to have a change of mind about themselves, their sin, and their regard for the Savior, and (2) they were to be converted, to turn to God in order that their sins might be wiped away and the Lord might send times of refreshing to their souls.

Peter uses five divine names to speak about what faith in the name of Jesus had done: (1) the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the Lord of Israel had come in the life of Jesus of Nazareth; (2) His Servant speaks of the sin-bearing servant prophesied in Isaiah's Servant Songs (42:1-9; 49:1-13; and especially in 53:1-12); (3) the Holy One, a term used for the majesty, glory, and purity of God; (4) the Just, a term that describes the perfect congruity between God's nature and his acts; and (5) the Prince (*archegos*) of Life, also the Author of Life, Pioneer of life, and Guide of life, describing the author and instigator, who takes the lead and who is the first occasion of everything. It was through this one, so named, Peter declares, that the lame man was cured and could walk.

3. Arrest of Peter and John: Before the Sanhedrin (4:1-22)—This chapter unfolds with the arrest of Peter and John by the Temple Guard (4:1-4) and the interrogation of them by the

Sanhedrin (4:5-22). The Sanhedrin questioned the apostles' authority to perform miracles (4:5-7) and received Peter's Spirit-filled defense concerning Jesus, the rejected cornerstone (4:8-12). Peter cites Psalm 118:22 to explain the authority behind the healing and as a statement indicting the rulers. The Sanhedrin was astonished at the courage and able defense offered by the apostles and concluded the matter by threatening and then releasing them (4:13-22).

We meet the Sadducees, the principal accusers of Peter and John, for the first time in Acts. As a group, they had a number of characteristics: (1) disbelief in the bodily resurrection; (2) denial of the existence of angels or spirits; (3) loyalty to Rome and the resultant desire to protect the status quo (and their positions of privilege); (4) wealthy, Jewish ruling class; and (5) adherence only to the Pentateuch and not the rest of the Old Testament.

4:1-4—When God blesses, opposition often arises to oppose the work and silence the witness. “Religious people” are sometimes the chief opponents. Here, Peter and John end up in the slammer for their effective preaching, but 2,000 more people were destined for glory by the mercy of God and the power of the Spirit (4:4).

The priests and leaders were disturbed by Peter's preaching (4:1, *diaponeo* = worked up with indignation and annoyance). The Council of leaders were composed of Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees opposed Jesus for theological reasons, the Sadducees for political and economic ones. The Sadducees lead this conflict with the apostles. They came upon them (*epetesan autois* = burst upon them suddenly in hostile anger) because they preached the resurrection with the assurance of the immediacy and intensity of the Holy Spirit.

Luke gives us a clear picture of the difference between defensive blandness of officialdom and the boldness of the church alive with hope and power. The Sadducees orchestrated Peter's arrest. The trial had to wait until morning by Law and gave them opportunity to grease the wheels of “justice” so that they would arrive at the “right” conclusion.

4:5-12—The Jewish honchos demand an explanation. Peter, filled (*plestheis*) with the Spirit, gives a defense and sets them on their heels. He quotes Psalm 118:22, an Old Testament stone testimony, and then clearly states that they, the Jewish leaders, were the culprits that rejected God's testimony and chosen agent. This stone serves as the cornerstone of God's work and represents the sole name through which salvation can be attained. Johannes Weiss summarized the effect: “The early Christians had a tempestuous enthusiasm, an overwhelming intensity of feeling, sense of power, and an irresistible control over the will and inner spirit and even physical conditions of other [people]—these are the incredible features of historic early Christianity.”

The text gives us a sense of the rage and consternation of Annas and Caiaphas as they ascertained the confident presence of the apostles before the Sanhedrin. The context of this scene is helpful. Annas was the infamous power behind the ecclesiastical throne in Jerusalem. He had

been high priest from 6-14. Five of his sons and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, followed him in occupying this office. Prior to Roman occupation, the high priest held office for life, but by this time appointment by the Roman governor was for a year at a time. It usually went to the highest bidder who was willing to be a collusive collaborator with Rome. Annas was immensely wealthy and used that wealth to establish and continue a nepotistic dynasty. How did he get his fortune? The “bazaars of Annas” in the Court of the Gentiles of the temple, sold sacrificial animals at exorbitant prices. Only these animals were accepted for sacrifice. Tragic exploitation resulted, Annas’ fortune grew, and his ecclesiastical position consolidated. Jesus had “cleansed the temple” of these fraudulent bazaars and that may well have sealed the certainty of his death. Now these pests that were his followers were causing trouble again.

4:12—Compelling boldness is the result not just that Jesus saves, but that only Jesus saves. One of the reasons for the growing demise of institutional Christianity in the west is that we have lost the “Christ only” verve. We need Peter’s boldness to preach and teach and then to live, that there is no other way to God.

4:13—This is an instructive text. The rulers were astonished at the boldness (*parresia*) of Peter and John to speak so openly and so frankly because the apostles were unschooled, ignorant, ordinary (*idiotai*) men. They recognized that the apostles had been in the presence of Jesus and now reflected that presence in their demeanor.

4:15-22—The Sanhedrin deliberates and decides to try and let this episode die a natural death. Their thinking seems to have been that immediate drastic action could make martyrs out of these foolish fanatics and compound the problem for the Jewish leadership. If these idiots have a clue, they will get the drift, count their lucky stars, and shut up.

Opposition crystallizes boldness. Difficulties deepen determination. Conflict forces clarification of belief. The startling thought is that the opposition of the Sanhedrin was a gift from God. The prohibition against speaking and teaching strengthened the church's courageous witness in a manner that would not have been possible without such overt opposition.

We live in an age when our need to be liked drains our pertinacity. C.S. Lewis once described a character in one of his novels in the following way: “Mark likes to be liked. There was a good deal of spaniel in him.” There is a good deal of the spaniel in all of us. However, opposition forces us to discover or rediscover that the true center of our security is in Christ.

4:18-20—Peter and John’s response to the threats of the Sanhedrin is a response for the ages: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” This instance is one of several acts of “civil disobedience” mentioned in Acts (see also 5:29). This is not the first occasion recorded in the Bible where God’s people chose to obey the Lord rather than the governing authorities

who align themselves against God (e.g. Ex.1, where the Jewish midwives defied Pharaoh; Heb. 11:23, recounting where Moses' parents disobey Pharaoh's hideous decree; Dan. 1, where the prophet ignores an offensive imperial order, and Dan. 3, where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ignore an idolatrous order).

This incident should be considered within the broader context of Biblical teaching on the subject. Scripture teaches that governmental authority is ordained of God and requires that Christians submit to that authority and fulfill their proper responsibilities to it (see Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Titus 3:12; 2 Pt. 2:13-17). Where government clearly oversteps its delegated bounds and sets itself against God and his directives, dissent expressed in disobedience may be necessary. That posture of civil disobedience ought not be an anarchic "acting out" but reflect a clear conscience both before God and people (16:24). Protests do not necessitate participants to be flawless, but they do require a genuine commitment that is reflected in all aspects of life, rather than the superficial approach of selective and self-righteous demonstrations. Finally, civil disobedience and protest must be a respectful, earnest witness that calls government to be accountable to God for its misuse of delegated authority.

4. Believers' prayer for power for witness: Filling of the Holy Spirit (4:23-31)—This prayer reflects the core beliefs and concerns of God's people: (1) that God is sovereign (4:24); (2) that God's plan includes believers facing opposition (4:25-28); and (3) the believers' petition is not for relief, but for boldness to preach (4:29-30).

What a prayer! They were empowered to speak boldly. Bold preaching is never the desire but ever the need of people. Albert Camus, the French existentialist, made a surprising statement before his life was suddenly cut short in his mid-forties: "What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out loud and clear ... in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could rise in the heart of the simplest man. They should get away from the abstraction and confront the ... face history has taken on today. The grouping that we need is a grouping of [people] resolved to speak out clearly and pay up personally."

Note four things about this prayer: First, it was born out of witness and service to the Lord. The believers were in need because they were actively serving. Second, they were united in their appeal. Third, they prayed based on God's Word. Psalm 2, where the nations rage against God's sovereign hand and his Anointed One, provides the conceptual backdrop to this prayer. Fourth, they prayed for power, not relief; for God's glory and will, not their own comfort and ease. They gave themselves to the glory of God and God responded by shaking the place with Holy Spirit power.

Philip Brooks, a prominent 19th century preacher, once remarked: “Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for power equal to your tasks.”

5. Early Christian community summarized (4:32-35)—The early Christians were bound together heart and mind that resulted in the ready sharing of their possessions with one another. This section reveals what the Holy Spirit wants to enable a congregation to be before he can guide it on to all he intends it to do in the world. The courage the disciples displayed beyond the fellowship was dependent on the quality of life they experienced in the fellowship. The essential ingredient in a great church is an unlimited commitment to Christ and to each other which is expressed in unrestrained loyalty. See 2:42-47 for a similar comment on Christian community.

B. Ananias and Sapphira: Internal problem of purity (4:36-5:16)—Barnabas’ generosity in 4:36 sets up the account of Ananias and Sapphira playing the comparison game but lying to the Spirit concerning the proceeds of a piece of property (5:1-10). The purifying fear of God that results from the Lord’s drastic response (5:11) supplies new energy to the explosive growth of the early believing community (5:12-16).

1. Incident and God’s response (4:36-5:11)—The money was theirs to give or withhold; there was no socialistic compulsion in the early church. Having decided to model themselves on the complete generosity of Barnabas, they could not be two-faced about it in withholding the money while enjoying community recognition for their bogus generosity. Long ago, George MacDonald wrote: “Half the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not.” Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of a common religious sin: putting on a lovely front to conceal a shabby heart or practice.

Their lie was energized by Satan (5:3), motivated by pride (5:4 – they coveted the strokes coming with generosity), and directed at God’s church. The famous Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once said: “Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle that fits them all.” The author Daniel Defoe described pride as “the first peer and president of hell.” Sometimes, what seems minor to us is much more serious than we think.

The names Ananias and Sapphira were a contradiction of their old nature. Ananias means “Yahweh is gracious” and Sapphira means “beautiful.” There was nothing gracious about what Ananias did nor anything beautiful about Sapphira’s collusive cooperation in the swindled pretense of loyalty to the Lord. Dishonesty and deception can spread like wildfire in a fellowship. When we are not authentic with others, it is difficult for them to be genuine with us.

The church was doing well when this incident occurred. Not intimidated by the most severe circumstances, they prayed for power and preached with boldness (4:1-31). It is often at times of

advance and growth that the enemy wheedles us on the inside. When things are going well, we are vulnerable to internal slippage—power plays, purity concerns, and internal divisions.

4:36-37—Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus. The Levites assisted and served the priests in the sanctuary, distributed tithes to the needy, and taught and interpreted the Law. Barnabas had strong ties to Jerusalem, where his father's family lived. John Mark was his cousin. Barnabas came to know Christ through the apostles, experienced the indwelling presence of the Spirit, and dedicated all his resources to the Lord's work. His birth name was Joseph, but the believers called him Barnabas, son of encouragement. Whenever we meet him on the pages of the New Testament, he is helping, encouraging, affirming, uplifting, and untiringly claiming the best for people. This trait was focused in his stable loyalty to the Lord, to his friends, and to new believers.

5:11—This verse highlights the real issue for the reader. The issue here is honesty and purity. These are foundational to community and witness. There is no witness apart from authentic individuals in community. Note also that the Lord judges sin most severely at the beginning of new things. After the Tabernacle was built, God killed Nadab and Abihu for offering unauthorized fire (Lev. 10). When Israel entered the Promised Land, Achan was executed for stealing things under the ban (Josh. 7). This incident is along this line of God's dealings—a very severe mercy indeed.

Luke uses the term church (*ekklesia*) for the first time in 5:11. Its original meaning was an assembly of citizens called together to discuss the affairs of a local community. There was a growing loyalty that bound the fellowship together. The early church was united—one heart, one soul, one blessing, and all rooted in one great conviction that the resurrected Christ was alive in them and prompting them to acknowledge that all that they were and had belonged to Him.

This kind of unity requires believers to be together. Congregations which are infectiously alive have some strategy for members being together in small, informal gatherings where the Scriptures can be studied, needs and joys shared, and intercessory prayer offered. One of the finest gifts we can give to each other is the openness to share what we are thinking and feeling.

4. Summary: Miraculous power and supernatural growth of the church (5:12-16)—

Acts 5:13-14 reflect the purifying effect of this event. Many believed and were added to the community. Those who really did not, stayed away. The gravity of what was at issue became apparent to both those inside and outside the community of faith. The church triumphed over this attack by Satan. The people of God were united (5:12), purified (5:13), and multiplied (5:14). They displayed certain characteristics:

- It was a supernatural church. Signs and wonders were done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

- It was a respected and growing church. It was preaching Christ boldly and setting the expectations high, not begging for new members to raise the budget or build a building. The opportunists were long gone.
- They knew they needed Christ's healing hand on their hearts, minds, and bodies.

C. Increased Jewish opposition: Arrest, miraculous release, and interrogation of the apostles (5:17-42)—This is an instance of the age-old conflict between dynamic truth and stagnant tradition. The English martyr Hugh Latimer once said: “Whenever you see persecution, there is more than a probability that truth is on the side of the persecuted.”

1. Apostles' imprisonment and miraculous release (5:17-25)—The apostles are arrested, but angelic intervention and popular favor frustrate the malice of the Sanhedrin. Note other instances of angelic ministries in Acts (8:26; 10:3, 7; 12:7-11, 23; 27:23). The angels told the apostles that they to speak to the people the words of life. A new quality of life that comes to us when we receive the life of our Lord and Savior.

The Sanhedrin's opposition arose out of envy, not legitimate complaint. It is amazing how envy can hide under the guise of defending doctrine. While the Council was educated, approved, ordained, and credentialed, they were without power. The apostles were ordinary, uneducated folks (4:13), but the unction of God rested on their ministry. The Council was self-preserving; the apostles were risking all to share the truth they had passionately embraced by God's grace.

2. Sanhedrin's second interrogation of the apostles (5:26-42)—Note the outline of this event. First, the accusation of the authorities and the defense of the apostles—they were actual witnesses of the events of which they spoke (5:26-32). Second, Gamaliel's counsel to let this activity run its course and the subsequent flogging and release of the apostles (5:33-41). Third, Luke's summation of the incident by noting the continuation of apostolic teaching and witness (5:42).

The Sanhedrin brought the apostles back for further warning. Peter replied: (1) he and the apostles must obey God rather than men; (2) Jesus is God's Messiah, and he is alive; and (3) Jesus is living among the believers. Christians are to obey their governments unless it is a sin to do so (see discussion under 4:18-20 above). The Sanhedrin was furious, torn asunder in anger. They took counsel and were resolutely determined to kill the apostles. The Sanhedrin's response reflected the fury of hell until the moderating counsel of Gamaliel prevailed and the apostles released.

5:29-32—Peter did not flinch on the message. He indicted the Jewish leaders for the death of Jesus (see 3:13-14; 4:10; 5:30) and proclaimed the Resurrection (5:29). Peter was a bold witness, completely different from the fearful apostle portrayed in John 18 when he denied the Lord three times. Peter calls Jesus “Prince and Savior.” “Prince” is a term that means “a pioneer, one who

leads the way, an originator”. The Sanhedrin was not interested in pioneering anything. All they wanted to do was to protect their vested interests and keep things exactly as they were.

5:33-41—The moderating counsel of Gamaliel, a popular rabbi of the day, won the release of the apostles. Gamaliel had an idea of God’s sovereignty, but in an incomplete way. He suggests that people responsible for group decisions can effectively resign that responsibility and just let things take their course—right or wrong. Whatever happens is what God wanted, which lets them off the hook of their uncomfortable responsibility. Sovereignty devolves into *che sara, sara* (whatever will be, will be) in this fashion. A full-blooded notion of biblical sovereignty never allows people to resign from their responsibilities in a fatalistic way. God is sovereign but we are responsible for our respective spheres and sovereignty never excuses our misfeasance or nonfeasance.

5:42—The apostles never stopped preaching for an instant! For them, the Great Commission was never to be the great omission.

D. Deacons chosen to attend to food distribution: Witness and internal purity (6:1-7)—

In the Jewish world, tensions existed between the Hellenistic Jews and the Palestinian Jews. Palestinian Jews were descendants of the exiles who returned to the Holy Land, intensely nationalistic, vigilant in the observance of the Law and the rabbinical traditions, and Aramaic speakers. The other group were the Hellenists. They were Greek-speaking Jews who lived in the Greek-speaking world around the Mediterranean and who maintained their faith through the synagogues that dotted the towns and cities of the Greco-Roman world. They were the descendants of the Diaspora (dispersion) who did not return to the Holy Land but were part of the Pentecost miracle. Many returned to Jerusalem but were never accepted by the Hebraic Jews. Ancient prejudices lingered and Luke is honest enough to acknowledge that. The food distribution to widows reflected this prejudice. The Hellenist converts felt that the Palestinian converts were given preference in this distribution.

The apostles were confronted with a double-edged sword: (1) getting entangled in the food distribution work could lead to neglect of their main task (prayer and the ministry of the Word); (2) but they dare not trivialize an important community concern. The Old Testament is full of concern for widows and orphans and other weak elements of society. The solution is a gracious one as the Hebraic believers choose seven Hellenistic men (as seen by their Greek names) to supervise the dole. The introduction of these seven servants prepares us for the ministries of Stephen and Philip, the first two men listed (6:8-8:40).

There is a tendency in human nature, even after conversion, to divide into factions. Take budget wrangles for instance. Local programs are pitted against world missions, caring for our own needs against caring for those in the broader community, local congregational needs against denominational concerns. Heated differences can arise between pietists and social activists,

evangelicals and traditionalists, high church and low church advocates, traditional church musicians and contemporary music advocates, and intellectuals and those emphasizing a relationally focused faith. The early Church was not afraid to adjust their structures to accommodate a growing ministry and address the stress points they were experiencing. The apostles focused their attention and shared their ministry and authority with others.

6:1-2—Were these the first deacons? Many think so, pointing to the nature of their ministry and the fact that the Greek noun *diakonos* (the word used for “deacon” later in the New Testament) is used in 6:1 (translated “distribution”) and the Greek verb *diakoneo* is used in 6:2 (translated “wait”). Others think that the seven held a temporary position for the purpose of meeting a specific need. The office of deacon is mentioned specifically in Philippians 1:1 and the qualifications of that office are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

6:7—This is one of several “summaries” appearing in Acts (see 2:41; 4:4; 5:12-15; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; and 28:31). These are statements intended to convey that the story has reached an important juncture.

E. Stephen’s martyrdom: Vigorous persecution by the Jews (6:8-8:3)—In this portion of the text, the church begins to burst the bounds of traditional Judaism. Stephen is a pivotal figure, attracting a considerable following. He is accused of speaking against the temple and the law (6:8-15). Brought before the Sanhedrin, he delivers a bold address, sketching Israel’s history to substantiate that God’s revelation cannot be confined to one place and one embodiment and charging the Jewish leaders with resisting the Holy Spirit (7:1-53). Stephen causes a furor, is condemned, and stoned to death (7:54-60). In the ensuing persecution, all except the apostles are compelled to leave Jerusalem (8:1-3). The leader of this persecution appears to be a young man named Saul.

Stephen’s life was like a comet—it burst on the scene in brilliant fashion and was gone as quickly as it came. We know nothing of his parents, home, upbringing, education, or occupation. He suddenly appears on the scene, has a short and highly effective ministry, makes a stirring and convicting speech, and becomes the first Christian martyr. Stephen’s powerful testimony marks the climax of the Church’s witness to the Jews. The evangelistic effort would continue but the focus of these efforts would be away from Jerusalem and the Jewish homeland for the rest of the book of Acts. The message would go first to the Samaritans and then to the Gentiles.

In Revelation 2:10, the Lord says to the church at Smyrna, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” The word translated “crown” in this verse is *stephanos*, the Greek word that is the root for the English name “Stephen.” Certainly, the protagonist in Acts 6-7 gave honor to his Lord in the way he lived and died. At the point of

Stephen's death, the Son of Man stood to welcome his heroic servant home (7:56) and most certainly bestowed upon him the crown (*stephanos*) of life.

1. Conflict with the Synagogue of Freedmen: Conspiracy to charge Stephen with blasphemy (6:8-12)—Stephen, a Hellenistic Jew who was one of those appointed for relief work, did not confine himself to the business affairs of the church, but became an outstanding apologist for the faith. Stephen went to the Synagogue of Freedmen to witness, a special synagogue made up of Hellenistic Jews from Alexandria, Cyrenia, Cilicia, and Asia. These were his people with a common background in Greek thought, culture, and philosophy. As a debater, he was without a peer (6:9-10). The Jewish leaders treated Stephen the way they treated Jesus. They produced false witnesses to testify against him, stirred up the people to accuse him, and then they executed him.

2. Stephen's arraignment and defense before the Sanhedrin (6:13-8:1a)

a. Charges: Speaking against the Temple and the Law (6:13-7:1)—False accusations lead to Stephen being brought before the Sanhedrin. Note that believers are before this tribunal four times in Acts: Peter and John (4:15); Peter and the apostles (5:27); Stephen (6:12); and Paul (22:30). The charge is that Stephen spoke against God, the law and the customs handed down from Moses, and the temple.

6:15—Stephen's appearance is reminiscent of the radiant face of Moses (see Ex. 34:29-30) at the very time that he was charged with preaching that Jesus would change the customs handed down from Moses.

b. Stephen's defense (7:2-53)—The 17th century preacher, Richard Baxter once said: "I preach as a dying man to dying men and women as if never to preach again." Stephen preaches that way here. He spends a good deal of time recounting the history of Israel. That calms the crowd a bit, establishes his credentials as a faithful student of the Old Testament, shows the faithfulness and goodness of God throughout the ages, leading up to the gracious and forgiving gift of His Son.

This speech, the longest in Acts, prepares the way for the gospel to reach beyond the pale of Judaism. Stephen meets and turns his accusers' charges back on them. He catalogs Jewish national sins. Stephen's speech has three basic points:

- There is progress and change in God's revelation and program. Stephen reviews history, recounting the promise to Abraham (7:2-8), the sojourn of Joseph (7:9-16), the great deliverance led by Moses (7:17-43), and the building of the tabernacle (7:44-46) and the temple (7:49-50).

- God's blessing is not restricted to the land of Israel or to the temple. Stephen supports this by noting that Israel's patriarchs and leaders were blessed outside the land, the law itself was given outside the land, the tabernacle was built in the desert, and the temple, though in the land, could never be God's exclusive dwelling place. He cites Isaiah 66:1-2 in support of this last point: "Heaven is my throne and earth my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?"
- Rejection of God's ways and his servants had been the pattern of Israel's history. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (7:9). The Israelites initially rejected Moses (7:23-29). Israel rejected true worship and turned to idols (7:39-43). In addition, the people had missed the point of the temple—it was a place of worship and prayer, not the Jewish equivalent of Mt. Olympia (see 1 Kings 8:23-53).

7:14—Genesis 46:26-27 and Exodus 1:1-5 tell us that Jacob's household consisted of seventy members, while Stephen says that it numbered seventy-five. How do we reconcile this? The Hebrew text has "seventy" in both the Genesis and Exodus accounts. However, the Septuagint (the commonly used Greek translation of the Old Testament) has "seventy-five" in both accounts. Stephen, a Hellenistic Jew, would refer to the Septuagint. The Septuagint translators included Joseph's grandchildren (see 1 Chron. 7:14-15, 20-25) in the number, bringing the total to seventy-five.

7:16—Stephen implies that Jacob was buried at Shechem, but Genesis 50:13 states that he was buried in the cave at Machpelah near Hebron, along with Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah. It was Joseph who was buried at Shechem (Josh. 24:32).

The text of 7:15-16 says: "Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem ..." "Their" could refer to both Jacob and our fathers (Jacob's sons) or to Jacob's sons themselves, including Joseph. Thus construed, Stephen, in his impromptu speech, is not referring to Jacob's burial site but to those of his sons in Egypt. It is possible that when Israel carried Joseph's remains out of Egypt that they also transported the remains of the other tribal patriarchs as well.

c. Stoning and death of Stephen (7:54-8:1a)—Luke sees the pattern of Christ's death in the death of the first Christian martyr. Stephen links Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 just as Jesus did in Luke 22 (the context of these passages is the presence of Messiah at God's right hand). Stephen's forgiveness of his murderers (7:60) recalls Jesus' same demeanor towards his (Lk. 23:34).

The force of the Greek is that the members of the Sanhedrin wailed in erratic, wild, jeering shouts of anger and hostility. The phrase "cut to the heart" speaks of overriding conviction. A

raw nerve was pierced to the core. They ground their teeth at Stephen and subjected him to hateful hissing. Stephen is described as peaceful, resolute, and joyous.

Stephen's martyrdom had a tremendous impact. For Israel, it meant condemnation. For the church in Jerusalem, it meant persecution and a new avenue of ministry—to the Samaritans and then to the Gentiles. For Paul, the Jewish leader who gave hearty approval of Stephen's stoning (8:1a), it eventually meant his conversion (see 22:19-21) and a life assignment that would end as Stephen's did, in martyrdom.

3. Church persecuted and scattered throughout Judea and Samaria: Role of Paul (8:1b-3)—Stephen's martyrdom signaled the start of a general persecution of the church. Despite the persecution, the apostles and the Jerusalem church survived. Greek-speaking Jewish Christians were more easily identified and therefore targeted in the persecution. Paul is described as destroying (*elymaineto*) the church. The term is used in the Septuagint (in Ps. 80:13) concerning wild boars that ravage vineyards.

Paul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (22:3), the son of a Pharisee (23:6), and born a Roman citizen (16:37; 22:25-28). He studied in Jerusalem by Gamaliel (22:3), became a devoted Pharisee (26:4-5; Phil. 3:5), and a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5). He was devoted to the Law (Phil. 3:6) and a serious ecclesiastical climber (Gal. 1:14). His zeal for the Law expressed itself in his persecution of the church (Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:6), which he saw as an avenue of service to God. He put both men and women to death (22:4), entered homes and synagogues to seize believers (22:19), and had them imprisoned and beaten in order to force them to recant (22:19; 26:9-11). He was on his way to a bloody sequel in Damascus, when God stopped this human wild boar in his tracks in Acts 9.

III. Witness in Judea, Samaria, and Beyond: Expanded Witness as a Result of Persecution (8:4-12:25)

This is a transitional period between a ministry centered in Jerusalem and geared to a Jewish audience and one that goes worldwide and having the Gentiles in its visionary scope. The witness of refugees from the persecution in Jerusalem is briefly given, highlighting the spontaneous and effective start of the Gentile mission. Tertullian, a third century bishop, remarked that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. So often persecution does to the church what wind does to seed: it scatters it only to produce a greater harvest.

A. Philip's ministry in Samaria and beyond (8:4-40)—Philip brings the gospel to Samaria, the Samaritans respond positively, and Peter and John are sent from Jerusalem to confirm that the people long regarded as dogs by upstanding Jews were really being accepted into the kingdom of God (8:4-25). Then, Philip is divinely guided to meet and witness to an Ethiopian court official (8:26-40).

Philip was a bridge-builder, one who carried the gospel into pioneer territory and dared to challenge ancient prejudices. May his kind increase in our midst! He was one of seven Hellenistic Jews chosen in Acts 6 to oversee the daily distribution of food to widows—a lay deacon, but not one of the apostles. The laity leads the expansion of Christianity beyond its Jewish cradle.

1. Samaritan ministry (8:4-25)—A people of mixed ancestry inhabited Samaria. When the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria in 721 BC, the Assyrians deported many Jews and replaced them with settlers from other lands. The resulting mixture of peoples affected both Jewish bloodline and worship. The Samaritans mixed the worship of the true God with features of heathen worship. They maintained a temple at Mt. Gerizim. Issues of blood ancestry and proper worship increased an already tense situation. It was very surprising for Philip, a Jew, to preach and minister to the Samaritans.

a. Samaritan reception to the gospel (8:4-8)—The Samaritans heard, saw, and paid close attention to the gospel preached by Philip. The miraculous signs that accompanied Philip's ministry drew people to the ministry of the Word rather than detracting or supplanting it.

b. Simon the Magician's astonishment at signs and miracles performed by Philip (8:9-13)—Simon the sorcerer, who had amazed the Samaritans by sorcery, was himself amazed by the signs performed by Philip. The text says Simon believed. Does that mean he became a born-again believer? His subsequent self-centered interest in the display of power (8:18-19) and Peter's assessment of Simon's heart condition (8:23) suggests not. Various traditions revolve around Simon: (1) that he was the originator of the Gnostic heresies; (2) that he went to Rome and perverted Christian doctrine there; and (3) that he had a miracle contest with Peter and lost.

Ministry has its counterfeits. This was true in the Baptizer's ministry (see Mt. 3:7ff), Jesus' ministry (Mt. 23:15, 33; Jn. 8:44), and in Paul's ministry (Acts 13:6ff.; 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15). Simon dazzled crowds (8:10), but in a way that magnified himself, not the Lord Jesus (also see 8:18-20, 23).

c. Apostolic confirmation of Samaritan ministry (8:14-25)—Note the structure of this segment. First, the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit at the hands of Peter and John (8:14-17). The ambition of Simon manifests itself and Peter confronts him. The witness and purity of the church is at stake (8:18-24). Finally, Luke summarizes for us the gospel's advance in Samaria (8:25).

It is through Peter and John that the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. How debilitating it is to leave out this enabling dimension of the gospel. The apostles knew that the Samaritans could not live the new life in Christ without his indwelling Spirit. The apostles laid hands on these new converts, and they received the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had previously given them the gift of faith; now they were given the power to live the new life they had begun.

Ah, to reflect on the internal ministry of the Spirit. It is very possible to be a well-taught, Bible-believing Christian and not have the full blessing the Spirit wants to give. That may be because the ministry of the indwelling Christ by his Spirit has not been properly taught or focused upon, or that we were not listening when it was, or that life has not brought us challenges big enough to demand anything more than our own self-generated discipleship. This is not about an experience of speaking in tongues, but of allowing the Spirit free access to all dimensions of our being and of our realizing that without that access, our spiritual experience will be debilitated.

The Holy Spirit normally baptizes, indwells, and seals a believer at regeneration. Here, reception of the Holy Spirit is delayed until the coming of Peter and John and the laying on of hands as a sign of solidarity between Jewish and Samaritan believers and to show the apostles that God had accepted Samaritan believers. The book of Acts recounts four occasions on which the Spirit came upon a people in a spectacular manner: (1) to the disciples at Pentecost (2:1-4); (2) to the Samaritans (8:17); (3) to Cornelius and his household (10:44-46); and (4) to the disciples of John the Baptist (19:6). Each of these instances represents the introduction of the Spirit to a different class of people.

Note that Peter was involved. Jesus had given the “keys of the kingdom” to Peter (Mt. 16:19). Acts demonstrates what Jesus meant by that. Peter had the privilege of opening the door of faith to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2), the Samaritans (Acts 8), and the Gentiles (Acts 10-11).

8:19—We get the term “simony,” the buying and selling of things considered sacred, from the request by Simon. Simon is a warning for us. Just as it is possible to have faith in Christ as Savior and Lord and not be filled with the Spirit for Christ-centered living, so too it is also possible to desire the Spirit’s power for our own self-centered lives without repentance and commitment to the Lord of glory. Neither of these options work. Peter confronts this wickedness (*poneria*) in Simon. The word “wickedness” means a compulsive determination to continue in a direction that we know is wrong. We will not change but want God’s approval and blessing anyway. We want the Lord on our own terms without surrendering the right to ourselves. Simon illustrates this in his response to Peter’s challenge. He did not repent but wanted Peter to pray that none of the bad things attendant to the path he had chosen would happen to him. Bottom line: the gift of the Spirit is necessary to live the Christian life, and that gift is not about self-enhancement, but kingdom service.

The gospel and big business do not mix well. Ananias and Sapphira lost their lives due to insincerity in money matters (5:1-11). Paul put a fortune teller out of business in Philippi (16:16-24) and gave the silversmiths trouble in Ephesus, causing a riot (19:23-41). The church was busy preaching the gospel, not schmoozing for the greenbacks.

8:20—When asked by P.T. Barnum to join the circus tour as a preaching act, C.H. Spurgeon replied by citing this verse.

2. Ethiopian eunuch hears the gospel (8:26-40)—This is a fascinating account. Philip is in the middle of a revival in Samaria and God sends him into the boonies to speak to one Ethiopian official (8:26-28). The text records Philip's Spirit-directed witness (8:29-35), the Ethiopian's belief and baptism (8:36-39), and Philip's subsequent ministry that takes him to Caesarea (8:40).

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch broadens the inclusiveness of the church and foreshadows the Gentile mission of Paul. This encounter is due to the express leading of God. The Ethiopian official was a God-fearer rather than a Jewish proselyte since eunuchs lacked religious privileges in Judaism (Deut. 23:1; but see Isa. 56:3ff). Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch is illustrative of key principles. First, the gospel is no respecter of racial differences and prejudices. Second, an individual is as important to God as a mass revival. Third, Christianity is no Johnny-come-lately. Philip leads the eunuch from Isaiah 53:7-8 to Christ since the fulfillment of that text lies in the person and work of Jesus. Finally, Christian witness is an every member ministry.

Philip is a wonderful example of a Christian witness. He was concerned and involved, in communion with God and under the guidance of the Spirit (8:29, 39), obedient to divine direction, even when it seemed counterintuitive given the circumstances (8:26-27), and he knew the Word (8:35ff.). C.H. Spurgeon once listed the qualifications he felt were vital in a person's life to be a good witness for Christ under two categories: the Godward side and the human side. As to the person's life before God, he listed holiness, vital spiritual union with the Lord, humility, vibrant faith, zeal, simplicity of heart, and a sense of surrender or abandonment. As to the person's connections with people, he listed love, sincerity, evident earnestness, unselfishness, knowledge, tenderness, and purposeful seriousness.

8:31-35—Isaiah 53 was the passage the Ethiopian eunuch was reading. It describes our Lord in his birth (53:1-2), life and ministry (53:3), substitutionary death (53:4-9), and victorious resurrection (53:10-12). Note the rich New Testament connections with this passage: 53:4 (1 Pt. 2:24); 53:7 (Mt. 26:62-63); 53:9 (Mt. 27:57-60); 53:12 (Lk. 23:34, 37).

The Ethiopian focused on Isaiah 53:7-8, which describes the Lord as a willing sacrifice for sinners. The idea of substitutionary sacrifice or atonement runs throughout the Scriptures. God killed animals to make clothes for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). He provided a ram to die in place of Isaac (Gen. 22:13). At the Passover, innocent lambs die for Israel's sins (Ex. 12). Indeed, the entire Jewish religious system was based on the shedding of blood and the suffering of a surrogate sacrifice (see Lev. 17, especially 17:11). Jesus is the fulfillment of these Old Testament types as well as the Old Testament prophecies (Jn. 1:29; Rev. 5).

8:40—Philip goes to Azotus (this is the same city as Ashdod, the ancient Philistine capital) and then to Caesarea. He settled in Caesarea, for Paul visited him there twenty years later (see 21:8).

B. Conversion and commission of Paul (9:1-31)—This chapter records one of the most striking conversions in all the Bible. The murderous persecutor of everyone naming the name of Christ becomes the much-subdued servant of Jesus, proclaiming his praises and excellencies.

Paul has a vision of the exalted Christ which leaves the future apostle blinded (9:1-9). Ananias is sent to heal and commission Paul (9:10-19a). The chapter concludes with Paul's early preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem (9:19b-31).

Paul was born into a strict Hebrew family near the beginning of the first century. His native city was Tarsus, a busy metropolis in Cilicia. A significant road went north from Tarsus and the city's port facilities made it a minor shipping center. The university at Tarsus offered noted courses in philosophy and medicine.

Paul received an extensive education in the traditional Jewish manner, which included learning Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages, studying the Old Testament Scriptures, and mastering the trade of tent-making (Acts 18:3). At the age of twelve he went to Jerusalem to study with Gamaliel, a leading rabbi (Gal. 1:4). He became a leader in Judaism at an early age and may have been a member of the Sanhedrin (26:10, where he says he cast his vote against the Christians).

Paul was uniquely prepared by God for his role as the apostle to the Gentiles: (1) he knew the Jewish law, language and culture well (21:40; Phil. 3:5); (2) he was well acquainted with Greek culture and philosophy due to his upbringing in Tarsus (17:22-31; Titus 1:12); (3) he was a Roman citizen with its special privileges (16:37; 22:23-29; 25:10-12); (4) he was theologically trained (Gal. 1:14); (5) he had a secular trade to support himself in an itinerant ministry (18:3; 1 Cor. 9:4-18; 23 Cor. 11:7-11; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8); and (6) God gave him leadership abilities, theological insight, and zeal.

1. Vision on the Damascus road: Jesus' appearance results in Paul's blindness (9:1-9)—Paul is still on the rampage described in 8:3. He has letters from the high priest to seize the Christians in Damascus. As he nears the city, he encounters a vision of the Lord himself.

9:2—What authority did the Jewish high priest have in Damascus? The Romans may have accorded him extradition rights for religious offenses. Or perhaps at this time Damascus was under the Nabatean King Aretas IV (see 2 Cor. 11:32-33) who accorded certain favors to the Jewish high priest to court the anti-Roman Jewish faction.

9:4-5—Paul discovered that Jesus was alive, just as the Christians were affirming (2:32; 3:15; 5:30-32). He also discovered that he had been persecuting his Messiah all the while thinking that he was serving God. Note how the Lord affirms believers here. In persecuting Christians, Paul was raising his hand against the Lord himself. "[P]ersecuting me" gave Paul his first glimpse of the great doctrine of Christians being "in Christ," what theologians call the mystical union.

9:6—The Lord had a special work for Paul to do (see 22:21; 26:16-18). Some thirty years later, Paul wrote that Christ took hold of him on the Damascus road at the very time that he was seeking to take hold of others.

9:7—According to this verse, Paul’s companions hear Jesus’ voice. According to a parallel account in 22:9, they do not hear his voice. The difference in grammatical structure explains this variance. To hear (*phonen*) plus the genitive case means to hear a sound; to hear (*phonen*) plus the accusative case means to hear with understanding. The upshot of these two passages is that Paul’s companions heard sounds but did not understand what they meant.

2. Healing and commissioning of Paul by Ananias (9:10-19a)—Ananias, mentioned in the Bible only here and in 22:12-16, receives a vision directing him to go to Saul (Paul) and restore his vision (9:10-16). He obeys and Paul is healed and filled with the Holy Spirit (9:17-19a).

Ananias was to be a reconciler and bring a wonderful message to a feared enemy. He found Paul alone, blind, and helpless. All suspicion and fear of this monster of a man drained away. He addresses Paul as “Brother Saul.” Saul believes, is healed, and is baptized. The church is alive with reconciling love – a liberated Pharisee is freed from hatred and a liberated disciple is freed from fear and prejudice.

9:11-14—Paul was praying as he waited. C.H. Spurgeon once described prayer as the autograph of the Holy Spirit on the renewed heart of a person. Ananias was hesitant to meet Paul because of his reputation, but he did obey. Note the lessons of this vignette: (1) God can use obscure people—he didn’t summon Peter or John but assigned this to Ananias; (2) we should never be afraid to obey God; and (3) we must never underestimate the value of single person brought to Christ.

9:17—Compare 22:14-16.

3. Paul’s early preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem (9:19b-31)—Paul’s zealous preaching gets him run out of both Damascus (9:19b-25) and Jerusalem (9:26-30). Putting Paul’s comments together from various letters, his movements around the time frame of Acts 9 might have been as follows: (1) Jerusalem (9:1-2); (2) Damascus (9:3-22); (3) Arabia (Gal. 1:17); (4) Damascus (9:23-25; Gal. 1:17; 2 Cor. 11:32-33); (5) Jerusalem (9:26-29; Gal. 1:18-20); (7) Caesarea (9:30); and Tarsus (9:30; Gal. 1:21-24).

9:20-25—Paul met opposition immediately, an opposition astounded by Paul’s transformation. Paul’s early preaching initially focused on Christ’s deity, which was a great stumbling block to his faith beforehand. The assertion of Christ’s deity must have struck his Jewish ears as utter blasphemy. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was God (Jn. 1:14, 18) and attributes to him divine names, attributes, and offices. As for divine names attributed to Jesus, consider—Emmanuel (Mt. 1:23); Lord (Mt. 7:21-22; Lk. 1:43; 2:11; Jn. 20:28; Acts 16:31; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11); Son of God (Jn. 5:21-26; 10:36); God (Jn. 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pt. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:15-16). As to divine attributes, consider – eternal (Jn. 1:1-3; 8:58; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:8-12; 7:3; 13:8; Rev. 1:8; 22:13); self-existent (Jn. 1:4; 5:26-27; 10:30; 14:10; Phil. 2:6); holy (Lk. 1:35; Jn. 8:46; Acts 3:14; 4:27; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26); omnipotent over disease (Lk.

4:39), death (Lk. 7:14-15), nature (Mt. 8:26-27), and demonic activity (Lk. 4:35-36, 41); omniscient (Mt. 28:20; Jn. 1:48; 3:13); perfect love (Mk. 10:21; Lk. 23:34; Jn. 10:11; 14:31; 15:13; Rom. 5:8; 8:37-39; Eph. 3:19); unchangeable (Heb. 1:10-12; 13:8). As to divine offices or activities attributed to Jesus, consider—creator (Jn. 1:3, 10; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16-18; Heb. 1:2, 10); preserver (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3); forgiver of sins (Mt. 9:2; Mk. 2:5-10; Lk. 5:20-24; 7:48); conqueror of death (Jn. 6:39, 44; 11:25); judge (Mt. 13:39-43; Jn. 5:22-23; Acts 10:42; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1).

This is the only place in Acts where Jesus is called the Son of God. Paul uses this title at least fifteen times in his epistles.

9:26-30—Paul was initially rejected by the Jerusalem church (9:26) until Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the church leaders (9:27). Paul did not meet the apostles at this time (see Gal. 1:18). “Apostle” is sometimes a technical term, meaning the foundational leadership of the church, and sometimes a nontechnical term, meaning “a sent one” – a Christian leader engaged in ministry. James, Barnabas, and others are described in the New Testament by this term (see 14:4, 14; Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25).

Barnabas sponsored Paul in this situation (9:27) and would do so again seven years later when Paul begins to minister at Antioch (11:25). It is likely that Paul was active in the ministry during this interval and based in Tarsus. Some of the events mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:24-26 may have taken place during this time.

9:31—Once again, we encounter one of Luke’s summaries (see 2:26-27; 4:4, 32; 5:12-14). This verse describes the peace and expansion of the faith throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria and makes it clear that Paul was the instigator and driving force of the persecution described in chapters 8-9.

C. Beginnings of the Gentile mission (9:32-12:25)—Actually, Luke’s account of the Gentile mission begins with the conversion of Paul in 9:1-31, since he is certainly the leading character in the book of Acts engaged in that endeavor. Paul’s conversion also brings closure to the Samaritan mission, because his persecution of the Christians was the occasion for the scattered witness so effectively conducted in Samaria. Luke places his summary text at 9:31 and reintroduces Peter’s ministry.

This section focuses on Simon Peter’s role in opening the way to the Gentiles. The Lord had given Simon a new name. He was called *Kepha* in Aramaic and *Petros* in Greek, meaning “rock”. What happens to Peter in this part of Acts is that he recognizes that the ancient molds were shattered, the centuries-old walls of separation were fallen, and that the church was being led beyond Jewish exclusivity to being an inclusive fellowship, one that included all races and national backgrounds.

It is Peter who has the privilege of launching the ministry to the Gentiles, just as he inaugurated preaching the gospel to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2) and was the lead agent for the Samaritans to receive the fullness of the Spirit in Acts 8.

1. Peter's ministry among the Gentiles (9:32-43)—Peter performs two outstanding miracles, healing Aeneas at Lydda (9:32-35) and Dorcas at Joppa (9:36-43). Both towns were in areas that were partially Gentile in makeup. In addition, he was staying with a new believer who was a tanner. Orthodox Jews could not interact with those handling dead animals. But Peter saw this as different, this tanner was a believer. He was being liberated from the prejudices of his background. He had a parabolic vision—the church was not to call non-Hebrews unclean and to make the Body of Christ exclusively Hebrew. The vision was not about slamming the regulations of Leviticus or Deuteronomy or about giving Peter a new diet. It was about getting through to him about a people he should love and reach with the gospel.

9:32-35—Aeneas had been paralyzed for eight years. He was a burden to himself and to others with no prospect of ever getting well. God works a miracle akin to Acts 3 at the hands of Peter again, this time at Lydda, a Gentile town twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. Did the similarities between the two miracles give Peter the idea that God was no respecter of racial barriers between people?

9:36-43—Joppa, modern Jappa, is located on the seacoast, ten miles beyond Lydda. The prophet Jonah embarked from this port to flee from God's assignment to preach to Nineveh centuries earlier (see Jonah 1:1-3).

Peter's raising of Dorcas resembles Jesus' raising of Jairus' daughter (see Lk. 8:49ff.).

Repeatedly in Acts, we see the truth of John 14:12: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father."

2. Cornelius conversion: Gentile inclusion established (10:1-11:18)—Through visions and direct commands God brings Peter and Cornelius together (10:1-23). At Cornelius' house, Peter's sermon is interrupted with God's bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles in so evident a manner that Peter and the Jewish Christians with him could not but recognize that God had accepted the Gentiles into the church (10:24-28). Peter recites the incident to Jewish Christian skeptics back in Jerusalem to establish the reality of Gentile inclusion (11:1-18).

The conversion of Cornelius is of vital importance. First, it indicated that salvation is not limited to one race or people. Second, his conversion is the opening wedge for Gentile inclusion into the church. Luke repeats this story three times (Acts 10; 11; 15:6-9) to underscore its importance.

Here, Peter uses the "keys of the kingdom" for the third and final time. He opened the door of faith for the Jews (Acts 2), the Samaritans (Acts 8), and now for the Gentiles. This event took place about ten years after Pentecost.

a. Cornelius' vision: Divine instructions to send for Peter (10:1-8)—Cornelius was a Roman centurion, part of the Italian cohort, a regiment of soldiers who had shone gallantry and valor. His station at Caesarea indicates that that he was highly regarded and rewarded with a prominent post.

Caesarea is sixty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem and thirty miles north of Joppa. It was the Roman capital of Judea. Cornelius was a God-fearer (see 13:16), Gentiles who were tired of pagan myths and empty rituals and whose hearts yearned to worship the true God. He was highly respected by the Jews and possibly a convert to Hebrew monotheism. The difference between Cornelius and other religious types was that he knew that his religious devotion was not sufficient to save him. By separate visions, Cornelius was prepared to meet God and Peter was prepared for this significant advance in the gospel witness.

10:5-8—Why send Peter, who was in Joppa thirty miles away, when Philip the evangelist was already in Caesarea? In Acts 9, God uses those on the scene (Ananias) to witness to Paul. But here, he sends for Peter? Why do this when the Lord had such a proven and capable servant locally? The answer is that Peter, not Philip, was given the “keys of the kingdom” (Mt. 16:19).

b. Peter's vision of eating unclean food: Do not call impure what God has made clean (10:9-16)—God uses a vision about food to teach Peter that the Gentiles were not unclean. The distinction between clean and unclean foods (Lev. 11) was a major barrier between Jews and Gentiles. Peter's friends would later criticize him for eating with Gentiles (11:1-3), understood as a matter of kosher propriety rather than racial bigotry. Here, God uses Leviticus 11 regulation to re-teach Peter an important lesson. In Mark 7:1-23, the Lord taught the apostles that cleanness and uncleanness was not a matter of what went into a person's body but what came out of his or her heart. Peter was about to find out that God was not fundamentally concerned with dietary regulations but with refocusing the apostles' mission. The Jew was not clean before God and the Gentile unclean. Both were unclean and God's cleansing grace reached both groups.

c. Arrival and reception of Cornelius' messengers (10:17-23a)—What marvelous timing and coordination by the Spirit! The messengers from Cornelius arrived just as Peter was wondering (*dieporei*) about the vision. The Lord did not want him just to think and ruminate about this. Men from Cornelius showed up and the Spirit directed Peter to go with them. The Lord is coupling insight and application. Action is an essential stage of learning. People only appropriate the truth they implement.

d. Peter's ministry to the Gentiles at Caesarea (10:23b-48)—The walls are coming down! Peter invited the Gentiles in to be his guests (10:23a) and then went with them to Joppa (10:23b). “Some of the brothers” who went along to Joppa (10:23b) were six Jewish believers (11:12), three times the number of witnesses needed.

Peter began by explaining why he came, telling them that God had taught him not to consider the Gentiles unclean (10:23b-29). That was a breath of fresh air. Then he asked why they sent for

him and received Cornelius' report (10:30-33). The coincidence of Cornelius' vision and his own opened Peter's eyes to God's intent to include the Gentiles in his redemptive provision on the same basis as the Jewish brethren.

Peter's sermon on the impartiality of God (10:34-43) is an excellent example of evangelistic preaching by the apostles. It is a brief historical summary of the life of Christ, emphasizing his death, resurrection, and coming judgment. Peter's insight into the Gentile inclusion was revolutionary. The Jews saw themselves as uniquely the chosen people of God, despite Old Testament revelation of the provision of salvation to the Gentiles (see Gen. 12:3; Jonah 1-4).

God gives his Spirit to the Gentiles immediately upon their exercise of faith, even before Peter finishes preaching (10:44-48). This was an event parallel to Pentecost. The same Spirit who came on Jewish believers now comes on the Gentiles. God shows that Gentile believers should be accepted equally with Jewish believers. This had a significant impact (11:15-17; 15:7-9). The Jerusalem church was already aware of this event when Peter returned in Acts 11, indicating that some from the circumcision party quickly left to prepare for confrontation. The powerful preaching, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the evidence of sincere praise to God did not make the storyline. Jealousy, legalism, and ethnic or clannish pride make for a nasty brew!

Note three things. First, one religion is not as good as another. Cornelius was a virtuous man by the world's reckoning. However, by God's reckoning, he was an unsaved sinner in need of the redeeming grace of the gospel. Second, the Lord seeks out his own (Lk. 19:10), but we must be obedient and respond to the message. Scripture does not use election as a rationale for believers to disregard the Great Commission. Sovereignty is never understood in a way that allows disciples to thumb their noses at the Sovereign's instructions. Third, what a model congregation! They were expectant, eager to hear, hanging on the words proclaimed, believing, and quick to respond and obey. What more could a preacher ask for?

10:47-48—This passage does not imply that baptism is essential for salvation any more than Acts 8:14-16 suggests that salvation is exclusively imparted through the laying on of apostolic hands. People are saved by grace through faith. This passage and the one in Acts 8 address Peter's use of the "keys of the kingdom" in introducing the gospel to groups that were previously excluded.

e. Peter's report to the Jerusalem church (11:1-8)—The party of the circumcision still thought of cleanness in terms of the Mosaic Law (11:1-3). Correcting this misunderstanding was the centerpiece lesson of Peter's vision (10:9-16) and recounting this quieted the objections of the Jewish believers. Peter appeals to three witnesses in this speech: (1) his own vision from God (11:4-14); (2) the outpouring of the Spirit like that at Pentecost verified by six Jewish witnesses; and (3) the witness of the Word confirming their experiences and observations (11:16).

This event was huge in the life of the church. The church moved from being a Jewish sect to becoming an inclusive inter-ethnic, interracial, and eventually international movement. The

believers glorified God and with reflective analysis received the guidance that the Way was open to all people. The church's epicenter had shifted. That was not apparent immediately, but it would be soon enough. This discussion certainly did not end the controversy. The Jerusalem Council reaffirmed the inclusion of the Gentiles on an equal footing with the Jews (Acts 15). Even afterwards, Judaizers plagued Paul throughout his ministry (see Gal. 1:6ff; Phil. 3:1-3, 17-21).

11:2—"Criticized" is the same word as that translated "hesitate" (10:20) or "hesitation" (11:12). Its basic meaning is "to make a difference" or "to draw a distinction." The legalists were making an age-old distinction between the Gentiles and the Jews. God was making it clear that that did not pass muster anymore.

3. Antioch church: Establishment and ministry (11:19-26)—The Gentile mission begins in earnest with the establishment of the church at Antioch. Antioch was to become the sending church for the Gentile mission. For the first time, the church actively preached to and sought out the Gentiles. The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch, and he immediately recognized this as a genuine work of God and recruited the apostle Paul to help him with the growing ministry.

Antioch was in Syria, fifteen miles from the Mediterranean Sea on the Orontes River. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria with a population estimated as high as 500,000. The city was the "eyes of Asia" for the Empire, an important political and military center. In addition, it was a commercial hub, home to a large Jewish population, and a decadent citadel of pagan worship. It was this city that became the apostle Paul's base of operations.

The Antioch church was founded in the late 30s or very early 40s, not long after the martyrdom of Stephen. Some distinctives of the Antioch church include: (1) it was the mother of the early Gentile churches; (2) the written gospels may have originated at Antioch; (3) it was distinguished for its teachers; (4) its ascendancy was hastened by the persecution of Herod Antipas in 44; and (5) "Christians" were first designated as such at Antioch (only so designated three times in the New Testament (11:26; 26:28; 1 Pt. 4:16)).

11:22-26—Barnabas was assigned to investigate the situation with the Gentiles. The "son of encouragement" (4:36) was an excellent choice. He was a good man, above reproach, full of faith and of the Spirit (11:24). His ministry resulted in many new believers (11:24) and in Paul recruited to help him (11:25-26). Why Paul? Probably because Barnabas knew that God had commissioned and gifted Paul for precisely this work among the Gentiles (9:15; 22:21; 26:17). Barnabas had befriended Paul in Jerusalem when everyone was wary of him (9:26-27) and was useful in bringing about Paul's acceptance by the church there. Now Barnabas is useful again in getting Paul to the point of his life's task. A great lesson for us. Mature believers need to have an eye for the gifting of the body and to enlist and encourage others in their service to the Lord.

4. Relief for the Jerusalem church (11:27-12:25)

a. Antioch church sends famine relief through Barnabas and Paul (11:27-30)—The Gentiles' provision of famine relief for the Jerusalem church tangibly expressed solidarity between the Jewish and Gentile wings of the church. This famine occurred in the early 40s. Agabus (11:28) prophesied during the reign of Claudius (41-54). A series of severe famines struck various sections of the Roman Empire during his reign.

This passage illustrates an important spiritual principle. When people are a spiritual blessing to us, we should minister to them materially (see Gal. 6:6). The Jews had brought the gospel to Antioch and had sent Barnabas to minister there. The Gentiles reciprocated with material provision when their Jewish brethren were in need.

b. Death of Herod Agrippa I provides relief from persecution (12:1-23)—This section records the persecution of Herod Agrippa, his arrest of Peter, and Peter's miraculous escape from prison (12:1-19). Luke concludes with the gruesome details of Herod's death (19:20-23).

The grandson of Herod the Great, posing as a champion of Judaism, kills James and imprisons Peter to curry Jewish favor. God's estimate of this is seen in the activity of the angel of the Lord in rescuing Peter from prison and in striking Herod with a fatal disease. Herod appears fully in control at the chapter's start. At the end of it, Herod is dead, and the church is alive and growing. Why? A praying church and a faithful God are the answer. When times are tough, let us keep our chins up and our knees bent because we are on the victor's side!

(1) James martyred by Herod (12:1-2)—Herod Agrippa I ruled over Palestine from 37-44. His grandfather was Herod the Great, who ordered the slaughter of the innocents (Mt. 2:16-18) and his uncle was Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist (Mt. 14:1-12) in order to keep a drunken party oath. Nice guys, these Herods!

It is sobering to read 12:1-2 in connection with Matthew 20:20-28. There, James, John, and their mother on their behalf, ask for places of privilege in Jesus' kingdom. Jesus' reply was to ask them if they could drink the cup of suffering that those places required. James said he could, and here drinks the dregs of that cup to the last drop.

(2) Peter's imprisonment and miraculous release (12:3-11)—The fickle Herod sees that the Jews are pleased with the execution of James and imprisons Peter (12:3-5). However, before he can execute Peter, God miraculously delivers the Peter in answer to the prayers of the church (12:6-11). Why does James die while Peter is rescued? Both were dedicated servants of God and both were needed by the church. The answer lies in God's sovereign will, the very thing the church prayed for when they began to encounter persecution (4:24-30).

12:4-7—The heaviness of the guard and the personal chaining to the soldiers reflect that the authorities remembered Peter's earlier escape from prison (5:19-24).

12:8-11—Note how God joins the miraculous with the ordinary. It was a three-part miracle: (1) to get Peter out of the chains that fettered him to the guards; (2) to get him past the guard posts; and (3) to get him through the iron gate of the wall surrounding the prison. However, those things were not as difficult as getting the comatose Peter moving. The angel was there to miraculously deliver Peter, just as soon as the big guy got dressed. The picture of Peter sleeping so soundly the night before his execution is quite a portrait of faith.

(3) Reaction to Peter’s escape by praying believers and by unsuspecting guards (12:12-19a)—The believers are praying fervently for Peter’s release. Nevertheless, Cephas is left standing at the door knocking because they cannot imagine that God had granted their request. The scene is almost comical. Even at the most fervent prayer meeting, there exists a spirit of doubt, fear, and unbelief.

After this episode, Peter seems to fall off the page of Luke’s account of the early growth of the church. Except for a brief appearance in Acts 15, Peter disappears from Acts. He was undoubtedly busy, but we lack an inspired account of that activity.

Excursus—Roman Catholic tradition asserts that Peter was instrumental in founding the church at Rome and had a long and fruitful ministry in Rome from 42 to 67 when he suffered martyrdom. However, when one examines this tradition in the light of the New Testament record, there is little to go on. The only New Testament reference that has led people to suggest Peter’s presence at Rome is 1 Peter 5:13. That text reads: “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.” The argument is that Peter uses the name “Babylon” symbolically for Rome. However, there are other options, including taking “Babylon” in a literal sense either as a reference to the Mesopotamian Babylon of historical fame or to Egyptian Babylon, which served as a Roman military outpost.

What we know of the origins of the church at Rome is surmise at best. It was probably founded by former Jews and Jewish proselytes present in Jerusalem at Peter’s Pentecost sermon recorded in Acts 2. Luke explicitly states that there were in the audience that day “visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism)” (2:10c-11). We do know that there was a flourishing church in the capital city in the late 50s when Paul wrote his Roman epistle. However, the existence of the Roman epistle itself is problematical in shedding light on Peter’s whereabouts. It is written at the height of Peter’s episcopacy, yet Paul never addresses Peter nor gives any indication of Peter’s presence in Rome. In Romans 16, Paul sends greetings to twenty-six specific individuals, including their families and churches that met in their homes, but not to Peter. How strange for the missionary apostle to write such a doctrinal letter, load the closing chapter with personal greetings to everyone he knew in Rome, and to avoid greeting or even mentioning the chief shepherd of the flock.

The same observation holds for the Pastoral epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul wrote these letters while a prisoner in Rome during the latter part of Peter’s

episcopacy (early 60s). In these letters, Paul references several colleagues in Rome, yet he does not mention Peter's name (see Eph. 6:21-22; Phil. 4:18, 21-22; Col. 4:7-18; Phile. 23). Acts 28:30 records that Paul's Roman imprisonment lasted two entire years, and yet there is no mention of Paul meeting or greeting Peter. In 2 Timothy, Paul is at the end of his earthly pilgrimage (2 Tim. 4:6-8). All his friends had deserted him (2 Tim. 4:10-11), and no one stood with him at his defense before the Roman authorities (2 Tim. 4:16). Strange indeed if Peter was alive and well in Rome at this time.

(4) Account of Herod's death (12:19b-23)—The whole scene is idolatrous. The people are brown-nosing to get what they want, and the king delivers to get a lift for his gargantuan ego. This goes far beyond "normal" pride, and Herod faces fatal consequences. Some prophetic futurists think, that in this scene with Herod, we see a snapshot of the future "man of sin" and his devilish pride and idolatrous claims (see 2 Thess. 2; Rev. 13).

(5) Summary of growth; Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch (12:24-25)—Luke's summary of the growth of the Jerusalem church again restates a central theme of Acts—the continuing outreach and progress of the gospel despite opposition (see 6:7; 9:31; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31).

IV. Worldwide Witness: To the Ends of the Earth (13:1-21:16)

A. First Missionary Journey: Witness in Asia Minor Provokes Jewish Opposition (13:1-14:28)—Several significant transitions occur between Acts 1-12 and the subsequent chapters of the book. In Acts 1-12, Jerusalem is the center of ministry and Peter and the Twelve are the leaders whose ministries are highlighted. From Acts 13 on, Antioch in Syria will be the new center of missionary activity, and the apostle Paul is the leader whose ministry is emphasized. Acts 1-12 focuses on the Jewish element in the early church and its slow realization that God was stretching them beyond their ethnic comfort zone. Acts 13-28 will focus on the rapid growth of the Gentile element in the church. Acts 1-12 has the Palestinian countryside in the backdrop. Acts 13-28 will illumine the progress of Christian ministry in the urban centers of the Greco-Roman world.

However, this latter portion of Acts continues with the dominant theme of the book: how Spirit-empowered witness overcomes all hindrances. Acts 1-12 has prepared us for this portion of the book by developing the Jew-Gentile tension concerning ethnic limits on God's salvation and the increasingly significant role of the civil authorities. Acts 13-28 will expand our vision of God's commission still further—to the ends of the earth.

Note the characteristics of Paul's missionary expeditions: (1) his focus on urban centers which then become the base of operations for expanding the witness to the interior regions; (2) his initial focus on preaching to the Jews; (3) his subsequent turning to the Gentiles when stymied by Jewish opposition; (4) the persistent reality of Jewish opposition; (5) religious persecution that

leads to persecution by civil authorities; (6) Paul's pattern of returning to strengthen the churches he founded; and (7) Paul's pattern in returning to his home base at Antioch and reporting on his work.

1. Barnabas and Paul set apart by the Spirit for missionary work (13:1-3)—Luke lists five men who were ministering in the Antioch church. Barnabas, whom we have already met (4:36-37; 9:27; 11:22-26); Simeon called Niger (meaning black which may mean that he was from Africa); Lucius, who was from Cyrene (located in modern Tunisia) and may have been one of the founders of the church (11:20); Manean, who perhaps was the foster brother of Herod Antipas (the murderer of John the Baptist); and, last but not least, Saul of Tarsus.

The Antioch church was not built on homogeneity principle. The leaders of the church are from all around the eastern part of the Empire, from divergent backgrounds, with different stories. God chooses an inclusive church with a big heart and wide arms to be his missionary center.

The men listed were serving as prophets and teachers in the Antioch church. The prophets helped lay the foundation for the church as they proclaimed the Word of God (see 1 Cor. 14:29-32; Eph. 2:20). They were more didactic “forth-tellers” of the Word than prophetic “foretellers” of events, though at times they did announce things to come (see 11:27-30). They were doing the preaching. The teachers helped ground the converts in the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit took the initiative throughout the foundation of the Gentile mission in Acts. Here, he directs the separation of Barnabas and Paul for a special work. The two men had an inner call which the church recognized by releasing them to the task. The Lord provided his two missionaries with trusted friends whose authentic relationship with Christ prepared them to be channels of the Spirit to confirm what the two men were contemplating. Note how people prayed. Acts documents God's people praying and the Spirit moving.

The Scripture speaks of Paul being set apart (*aphorizo*) at three different times in his life: (1) at birth, set apart for God (Gal. 1:15); (2) at conversion, set apart for the gospel (Rom. 1:1); and at Antioch, set apart for specific service for the Lord (Acts 13:2).

2. Cyprus (13:4-12)—Cyprus was home to Barnabas (4:36), initially the leader of this expedition. Luke records the apostolic proclamation of the gospel in the Jewish synagogues (13:4-5), the incident with Bar-Jesus, and notes the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul and a man of intelligence (13:6-12). Bar Jesus is full of deceit, but intelligent men see through that and recognize the integrity of God's witnesses and the truth of his message.

On Cyprus, the leadership of the missionary team changes. After the confrontation with Bar Jesus, Luke consistently mentions Paul before Barnabas rather than vice-versa (except in 15:12). The ministry in Cyprus brought out Paul's leadership gifts and Barnabas graciously recognized this.

13:5—Barnabas and Paul took John Mark along on the first missionary journey. He was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10) and his mother's home in Jerusalem was a gathering place for believers (12:12). John Mark may well have been a convert of the apostle Peter (1 Pt. 5:13).

13:9—This verse is where the name Paul first appears in the New Testament.

3. Antioch Pisidia (13:13-52)—Antioch Pisidia was founded by Seleucus I Nicator in 281 BC on a lake-studded plateau about 3600 feet above sea level. In Paul's day, it was located on the Via Sebaste, the main Roman road from Ephesus to the Euphrates. Augustus incorporated the city into the Roman province of Galatia in 25 BC. It was south Galatia's most important city .

Paul's strategy for preaching in the cities was to go to the local Jewish synagogue first. The synagogue presented an established opportunity for preaching, as it was customary for qualified visitors, such as Paul, to be given a platform to address the congregation. The audience included Gentile proselytes, God-fearing individuals, and Jews. Many of these people listened sympathetically to the gospel message. A pattern developed: (1) preaching in the synagogue; (2) success, especially among the Gentile proselytes and God-fearers; (3) Jewish hostility and Paul's withdrawal from the synagogue; (4) further ministry among the Gentiles; and (5) persecution and flight.

Two things happened to Paul coming into this region: he becomes physically ill, and John Mark leaves the missionary team. The illness was either a form of malaria, prevalent at the time around the lowlands of Perga, or a painful eye problem, deduced by his reference in Galatians 4:4-5, written to the cities he visited in that area after his sickness. In another place (2 Cor. 12:7), he refers to a "thorn in the flesh" that he petitions the Lord to remove. It may be that the decision to go on to Antioch Pisidia (at 3600 feet elevation) was at least in part for the purpose of recovering from this illness.

a. Journey to Antioch Pisidia (13:13-14)—John Mark leaves the team for unspecified reasons, which caused Paul's serious displeasure and created tensions with Barnabas, who was Mark's cousin. Indeed, Paul and Barnabas will split at the outset of the second missionary journey (15:36ff) over whether to take Mark along on that journey. What caused Mark to leave? The text does not say, and this has been the subject of much speculation. Suggestions include Mark's immaturity in Christ, the strangeness of the foreign territory, the demands of travel, Paul's rigorous and vigilant commitment to the mission objectives, or Paul's own driving personality amped up by his physical ailments which may have made him even less patient than he naturally was. Whatever the cause of the break-up, it was painful for all involved with repercussions in later years.

b. Paul's sermon in the synagogue: Through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed (13:15-43)—Problems primed the pump for the powerful preaching that we see at Antioch Pisidia. Vulnerability deepened Paul's already forceful style. A sharing of Christ's sufferings birthed a new freshness. He found a ready audience of Jews and God-fearing proselytes.

Luke provides detail to the substance of Paul's preaching. The sermon has three parts: (1) the anticipation of and preparation for the coming of Messiah (13:16-25); (2) the rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus (13:26-27); and (3) the application to the hearers and an appeal to believe (13:38-41). Here, Paul explicitly bases a person's justification before God solely based on faith. Several converts resulted, and another invitation to preach was extended (13:42-43).

c. Jewish hostility towards the gospel: Paul turns to the Gentiles (13:44-52)—The pattern mentioned above begins. The Jews oppose the message (13:44-45), Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles (13:46-49) and then get tossed out of town (13:50-52).

13:48-49—Acts 13:48 gives us the divine side of evangelism—God has his elect people (see Eph. 1:4). The term translated “appointed” could be “enrolled.” Acts 13:49 provides the human side of evangelism—we must preach the gospel. By God's design, both sides must be operative (see Rom. 10:13-15; 2Thess. 2:13-14). We do not honor the High King by using sovereignty as an excuse to thumb our noses at the sovereign's instruction to go to the world with the gospel.

4. Iconium (14:1-7)—Iconium was located on the high plateau of south-central Asia Minor, surrounded by fertile plains and verdant forests. It began as a Greek city-state and preserved this character under Roman rule. The name “Iconium” was derived from a Greek myth where the gods Prometheus and Athena recreated humankind in the area after a devastating flood by making images of people from mud and breathing life into them. The Greek word for image is *eikon*, which becomes *ikon* and formed the root of the city's name.

Here, Paul's preaching in the synagogue meets both belief and opposition (14:1-4). The opposition crystallizes quickly, and Paul flees to Lystra and Derbe to escape a plot afoot among both Jews and Gentiles (14:5-7).

14:3—God enabled Paul and Barnabas to perform miraculous signs and wonders to confirm their message. These were their credentials, as it were, showing that they were indeed servants of the true God. While faith is never based on miracles (see 8:12-13), the miraculous bolsters credibility.

5. Lystra (14:8-20a)—Lystra was in the Roman province of Galatia about eighteen miles from Iconium. In 6 BC, the city became a Roman colony, the easternmost fortified city of Galatia. Augustus settled army veterans and their families here and these people constituted the ruling elite. A few Greeks controlled the town's commerce. The local Lycaonians were mostly uneducated and spoke their own dialect.

This is the first of three visits of Paul to this town. Paul will enlist Timothy in Lystra (16:1-5) on his second missionary journey and he will make a visit to the church here on his third missionary journey as well (18:23).

On this visit, Paul healed a man crippled from birth (14:8-10) and the pagan crowd misinterprets the miracle and directs glory to Paul and Barnabas rather than to God (14:11-18). There was a legend that in the past an elderly Lystrian couple, Philemon (no relation to the person addressed in the New Testament book by that name) and Baucis, unknowingly hosted Zeus and Hermes, visiting incognito, and were rewarded. The people of Lystra, in pagan credulity, envisioned the legend repeating itself and misidentified Barnabas and Paul as Zeus and Hermes, respectively. The apostles put a stop to this idolatry, but only with great difficulty. After the crowd quieted down from the first uproar, troublesome Jews from Antioch arrive and induce them to stone Paul (14:19-20). One minute, Paul is a god to be worshiped; the next, he is a criminal to be slain. These folks were a fickle lot! Emerson's quip defining a mob fits them well: "A society of bodies voluntarily bereaving themselves of reason."

6. Return to Antioch: Strengthening believers and reporting to the church (14:20b-28)—Paul and Barnabas return to the churches they founded, taught by word and deed, organized congregations, appointed elders, and encouraged these fledgling flocks. Then they returned to Antioch and reported to the sending church.

The results of the first missionary journey were significant: (1) it brought Paul into the foreground as a leader in the church; (2) it contributed to John Mark's education which would have substantial impact on the second missionary journey; (3) Paul's contact with Timothy probably occurred during his visit to Lystra (14:8-20); and (4) Paul seemed to refine his thinking on the doctrine of justification by faith. Galatians may have been written while Paul was at Antioch at the time described in 14:26-28.

Some additional observations are in order: (1) the missionary team worked primarily in key cities and encouraged believers there to take the gospel to the more remote areas; (2) they used different approaches for Jews and Gentiles—in the synagogue they reasoned from the Old Testament Scriptures (13:14ff), while with the Gentiles they emphasized the God of creation and his goodness to the nations (14:15-17); (3) they focused their efforts in establishing and organizing churches; and (4) they diligently grounded believers in the Word of God.

14:23—The word translated "appointed" means to elect by a show of hands. It is possible that Paul chose elders, and the people of the congregations voted their approval or that the congregation selected, from a pool of men approved by Paul, elders that the apostle later ordained.

B. Jerusalem Council: Implications of Gentile inclusion worked out (15:1-35)—The epicenter shift that began in Acts 10 was still a hot topic. If Peter's experience began the shift, Paul's preaching to the Gentiles and his disregard for insisting on obedience to all requirements of the Mosaic Law widened the cleavage between two distinct groups in the church. The struggle for justification by faith alone was on.

1. Controversy with the Judaizers: Are Gentile believers subject to the Law (15:1-5)—

The rapid growth of the Gentile church posed a problem. Should Gentile observe the Mosaic Law? The Judaizers, insisted that the Gentiles be circumcised. They may have argued that circumcision was a sign of God's covenant (Ex. 12:48) which had never been abolished. In fact, God had required it of Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14) prior to the giving of the Law as a sign of the covenant foundational to the Law. Furthermore, the outward significance of the rite was applied to the inner life under the Law, which spoke of being circumcised in heart (see Deut. 10:12-16).

The upshot of this line of reasoning was that the Gentile believers were to come into the church like Gentile proselytes into Judaism. The Judaizers were just integrating Jesus into the Old Covenant system. They were attempting to mix Law and grace and to pour new wine into old wineskins, stitching up the rent veil in the Temple, and rebuilding the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile that Jesus had broken down at the cross (Eph. 2:14-16). To impose these requirements on the Gentiles was to relegate Christianity to the status of a small Jewish sect.

The mindset of the Law as a ladder to righteousness was the issue. The Decalogue provided an expression of God's love for his people, regulations for life, health, and survival. The people took it as assurance that if the Law was impeccably kept, they would be sure they were right with God. God never intended for Law-keeping to be a substitute for relationship with him nor did he ever intend the mental machinations that allowed people to imagine that they could keep the Law perfectly. Now these "obey-to-please" people were to accept that God would offer a relationship to others who have not been on this "obey-to-please" line at all and who they had generally looked down upon.

The legalists were playing the role of the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son. They had kept the rules and that was the way to please the father. Today, there are those who have standards that must be met before they will accept others into the church. Those standards may be good in themselves and are usually rooted in parental and cultural conditioning. However, Jesus becomes a part of the ladder to salvation, not the only way.

The issues at the Jerusalem Council addressed the problems of adding to the gospel the cultural trappings of the dominant group's liking to the nature and inclusiveness of the church's missionary enterprise. Will the gospel be held hostage by a crony klatch that add their ceremonies and regulations to it? Will God's message be an addendum to the in-crowd's implicit agenda which tells all comers that you have to be just like us, or you don't count?

There were probably at least four meetings involved in this strategic conference: (1) a public welcome for Paul and Barnabas (15:4); (2) a private meeting between Paul and Barnabas with the apostles and other key leaders of the church at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:2); (3) a second public meeting where the Judaizers presented their case (15:5-6; Gal. 2:3-5); and (4) the public debate and discussion leading up to the decision (15:6ff).

2. Debate at the Council (15:6-21)—This was a significant issue. There was considerable discussion (*zeteseos*). The term is translated “debate” in 15:2, “controversies” in 1 Tim. 6:4, and “arguments” in 2 Tim. 2:23. In the public debate and discussion leading up to the Council’s decision, Peter reviewed God’s ministries to the Gentiles in the past, focusing on the reality of salvation by grace (15:6-11), Paul and Barnabas reported on God’s work among the Gentiles in the present confirmed by signs and wonders (15:12), and James focused on the future, suggesting that the Gentiles not be put under the yoke of the Law but that they be asked to refrain from practices offensive to their Jewish brethren (15:13-21).

The Jerusalem Council was not composed of “good guys” and “bad guys”. They were good people, disagreeing about an important issue. Note aspects of their decision-making:

- They did not deny their differences.
- They strongly stated their differing ideas.
- The people aired their feelings before the leaders spoke.
- What seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to the group at the conclusion was the basis of the decision. The Holy Spirit can use the group to communicate a better strategy than anyone can discover alone.

15:6-11—Peter made a number of points in his talk: (1) how God had directed him to preach to the Gentiles (15:7); (2) how God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles as a witness to Peter and Jewish companions (15:8); (3) that God had erased the Jew-Gentile barrier (15:9, 11); and (4) that God had removed the yoke of the Law (15:10). Peter’s testimony was key. He said that the Jews and the Jewish believers had not kept the Law themselves. Why put it on the necks of new converts?

15:16-18—James quoted Amos 9:11-12 as Old Testament authority for Gentile salvation apart from the Law.

3. Council’s judgment summarized in letter to Gentile believers (15:22-35)—The Council adopts James’ judgment: the Gentiles should not be burdened with ritualistic compliance with the Mosaic Law but should refrain from practices offensive to their Jewish brethren. Reciprocal consideration is enjoined. The decision is a doctrinal one about the nature of salvation and a practical one about how to live graciously. On the doctrinal front, the church concluded that Jews and Gentiles are all sinners before God and are saved only by faith in Jesus Christ. Legal or cultural baggage should not divert attention from this central concern. On the practical front, the Gentiles were to accommodate their Jewish kin in the exercise of their Christian liberty. The Gentiles should not offend Jews scattered in the Gentile world by blatantly parading their disregard for Jewish ritual traditions.

This verdict is crucial: all believers are saved by grace through faith apart from the works of the law. Salvation is opened beyond ethnic boundaries on non-Mosaic terms. The Council also worked a number of practical benefits: (1) it prevented the fissure of the body into “law” and

“grace” groups; (2) it allowed the church to present a united witness; and (3) that letter stating the decision brought great blessing to the Gentile congregations.

C. Second Missionary Journey: Witness in Europe (15:36-18:22)

1. Dispute between Paul and Barnabas concerning Mark: Division of the team (15:36-40)—The sweet reasonableness of the Jerusalem Council did not rub off on Paul’s hard attitudes towards Mark. Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement (*paraxusmos*=*cutting with a sword or sickle*) over John Mark. It was no surprise that Barnabas should champion Mark’s cause. He and Mark were cousins (Col. 4:10) and family ties were strong. Furthermore, Barnabas was a kind man who eagerly tried to help others, especially in times of need. His name means “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36) and episode after episode in Acts indicates how well that name fit him. Barnabas “kept on insisting” that John Mark be given an opportunity to prove himself.

Paul was just as adamant that Mark should not go along. John Mark had deserted them on the first trip. The ministry was too important and the work too demanding to enlist someone who might again prove unreliable. The discussion turned into a serious argument. The missionaries who had won the battle of unconditional love shown to the Gentiles could not work out their differences in relation to one of their own countrymen.

The solution was to divide the territory between them and separate. Barnabas took Mark and went to his native Cyprus and Paul took Silas and headed for Asia Minor. Silas had prophetic gifts (15:22, 32) and was chosen by the Jerusalem conference to take the Council’s decrees to the Gentile churches (15:27). Silas is subsequently recognized as a co-author with Paul of the Thessalonian epistles and served as the amanuensis (secretary/editorial assistant) for Peter’s first epistle (1 Pt. 5:12). Like Paul, he was a Roman citizen, a privilege that was soon going to come in handy (see 16:37).

This episode is illustrative of how two earnest believers can disagree sharply on an issue of importance and yet both are partly correct. Barnabas’ sponsorship of Mark, particularly at this point in the latter’s career was a crucial encouragement. Barnabas’ trust was vindicated by Mark’s spiritual development (see Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phile. 24; 1 Pt. 5:13). However, Paul’s jealous zeal for pioneer missionary work may have averted a second failure by Mark and brought new workers to the field. Paul and Barnabas did not hold grudges as evidenced by Paul’s later remarks concerning Barnabas (see 1 Cor. 9:6; Col. 4:10).

2. Strengthening the churches; Timothy joins the team (15:41-16:5)—Timothy’s status posed a problem for Paul. He was a Greek who had not undergone circumcision and might face rejection from the Jewish community, which had already shown hostility towards Paul and his teachings. If Paul had Timothy circumcised, it would seem to be a concession to the Judaizers, the very thing he had refused to do in the case of Titus (see Gal. 2:3, speaking of events recorded in Acts 15). This decision reflects 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Circumcising Timothy was a personal

concession that violated no principle but removed an obstacle to further work among the Jews of the area. Should a person be circumcised to be saved (Titus' case)? A thousand times NO! Should a person be circumcised to minister more effectively (Timothy's case)? Of course.

3. Macedonian vision: Spirit-directed call to ministry in Greece (16:6-10)—Holy Spirit blocks Paul's attempts to minister in Phrygia and Galatia. While at Troas, two significant things happen: (1) Paul receives his Macedonian vision calling him to ministry in Europe; and (2) Luke joins the team in an unspecified manner. We know that because of the "we" passages of Acts beginning in 16:10. There are three distinct "we sections" in Acts: 16:10-17; 20:5-15; and 27:1-28:16. Luke changes from "we" to "they" in 17:1, which suggests that he remained behind in Philippi to pastor that church after Paul moved on. The next "we" section occurs in 20:5 when Paul revisits Macedonia.

Let us look a little more carefully at how the Spirit directed Paul. He was forbidden (*koluthentes*) by the Spirit to go to the Roman province of Asia. This is an aorist participle of *koluo*, "to hinder." The Spirit guided Paul's mind and feelings to a decision that Asia was not the venue of action this time. The Spirit of Jesus did not allow him to go into Bithynia. This guidance came as they were about to go into the province rather than from the outset as was the case with Asia. Finally, a dream concludes the Spirit's guidance. It was time to take the gospel to Macedonia. The door into Europe was opening.

4. Philippi (16:11-40)—Philippi was located twelve miles inland on the Gangites River and on the Egnatian highway, a main route to Asia Minor. Philip of Macedon founded the city as a center for mining the gold and silver that was available nearby. It became a Roman colony and a site for the settlement of veterans on several occasions. Its colonial status made its inhabitants Roman citizens, entitling them to special tax breaks and privileges and to a Roman-style government. Three significant events happened while Paul was in Philippi: (1) a businesswoman named Lydia was converted (16:13-15); (2) a slave girl was exorcised resulting in the imprisonment of Paul and Silas (16:16-24); and (3) a very unusual jail-break resulted in the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his family (16:25-34).

Luke takes pains to detail Paul's Roman citizenship and the falseness of the charges made against him. Note the anti-Semitism of the charge (16:20-21). Shortly before this incident, the Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome (see 18:2), an event that occurred around 49. Philippi, a Roman colony, was quick to notice what was in vogue in Rome. There is clearly an apologetic to the Roman civil authorities going on in this text.

There are two instances in Acts where Paul was harmed or threatened by the Gentiles—in Philippi (in this text) and in Ephesus (see 19:23-41). In both cases, people with vested interests were losing money and Paul was vindicated by Roman officials.

a. Journey to Philippi (16:11-12)

b. Preaching at the place of prayer: Conversion of Lydia (16:13-15)—In Lydia’s conversion, we see once again a conjoining of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in the task of evangelism. God opened Lydia’s heart, but Lydia’s part was not entirely passive. She is at the river for prayer, and she listened attentively to the Word. Also, the God who ordained her salvation, was the same God who called Paul to preach to the Gentiles. Paul was not disobedient and was used by God to bring a receptive person to the Savior.

c. Exorcism of a demon-possessed slave girl (16:16-18)

d. Imprisonment of Paul and Silas: Conversion of the Philippian jailer (16:19-34)—The slave girl’s owners lacked concern for the girl’s well-being. They were only interested in the income her misery provided for them. Pagan credulity made the slave girl’s psychic predictions very profitable. The conflict between proclamation and payola, between ministry and money, appears often in Acts: 5:5-11; 8:18-24; 16:16-18; 19:23-41; 20:33-34.

The slave owners’ only recourse was to Roman law. They thought they had a good case with the added benefit of the missionaries being Jewish and propagating a religion not officially approved by Rome. They framed their arguments to appeal to both religious and racial prejudice and received the quick and rash judgment they sought. The Philippian magistrates did not investigate the matter fully before tossing Paul and Silas in the slammer.

An earthquake allowed for an easy jailbreak. Assuming the prisoners had escaped, the jailer was about to take his own life. According to Roman law, if a guard lost a prisoner, he received the same punishment that the prisoner would have received. If anyone in that jail was there for a capital offense, the jailer would die. It seemed the Philippian jailer preferred suicide over shame and painful execution. However, Paul informs him that none of the prisoners availed themselves of an easy escape. Stunned and trembling, the jailer asks the question of the ages—What must I do to be saved? A hard-hearted person would have let this callused jailer kill himself—served the oaf right. But Paul was not that kind of man by the grace of God. It was the jailer who was the prisoner, not Paul. Paul not only saved this man’s physical life but pointed him to real life in Christ.

16:26—The supernatural deliverance is reminiscent of Peter’s imprisonment experiences (see 5:18-20; 12:3-11).

16:30-34—The question and answer for the ages. Note that this passage has been used to justify so-called “household salvation,” that a decision by the head of the household brings salvation to the other members of the household. However, there is no suggestion here that infants or small children were involved. “All his family” is the only way they are described. In each instance of “household salvation” in Acts (the households of Cornelius (10:24), the Philippian jailer (16:31-32), and of Crispus (18:8), the members of the household may well have been old enough to respond for themselves. The text simply does not elaborate on the point.

This passage has been cited in discussions both supporting and opposing infant baptism. The passage simply is not an exegetical tract on that subject, either in support or in opposition.

e. Release of Paul and retraction of false charges by the authorities (16:35-40)—Paul and Silas use their Roman citizenship to underline the arbitrary action by the Philippian authorities. The magistrates wanted to send him off secretly as an itinerant Jew who had exorcised a slave girl. A Roman citizen had preached of Christ, the Lord of the universe, in their city and they would not be rid of him so easily. The alarm of the civil authorities and the way they handled the apostolic team is part of Luke’s civil apology. Christianity is not and should not be an illegal religion in the Empire. This issue will resurface at Corinth in the proceedings before Gallio (18:12-17).

5. Thessalonica (17:1-9)—Thessalonica (modern Salonika) was the dominant commercial center and capital of Macedonia, located approximately one hundred miles from Philippi on the famous Roman road, the Via Egnatia. Located on key trade routes with a great harbor, it had around 200,000 residents in the first century. It was a “free city,” which meant that it had an elected citizens’ assembly, could mint its own coins, and had no Roman garrison in the immediate vicinity.

It is here that the missionary team was given the unintended accolade “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (17:6). 1 Thessalonians 1 gives witness to a fruitful ministry in Thessalonica despite opposition, a ministry that was soon spiritually reproducing. Paul pursued his strategy of ministering in the larger city and making that the hub of operations to reach the entire region (see 1 Thess. 1:7-8). There was a response among the Jews and the Gentiles to Paul’s synagogue preaching (17:1-4) but also determined, petty opposition (17:5-9). This opposition followed Paul even after he left Thessalonica (17:13).

a. Witness in the synagogues: Response from God-fearing Greeks and prominent women (17:1-4)

17:2-3—The text uses four different verbs to describe Paul’s evangelistic activity in the synagogue. He *reasoned* with them. There was a give and take in their dialogue. He *explained* or exegeted the Scripture for them. His message was text driven. He *proved* that Jesus was the Messiah. “*Proved*” means to contend and then substantiate by laying down alongside one’s contentions credible evidence for their veracity. Finally, the text says that Paul *proclaimed* Christ. This verb speaks of preaching. Paul was no policy wonk dispassionately proving his ideas. There was a preacher’s fire in his belly!

The text records Paul preaching in the synagogue for three weeks. However, he stayed in Thessalonica longer than that as evidenced by (1) the Philippians sent money to him at least twice while he was there (Phil. 4:15-16); (2) Paul supported himself by manual labor indicating the passage of some length of time (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10); and (3) the converts were Gentiles steeped in idolatry requiring some time for sound instruction (1 Thess. 1:9).

b. Persecution instigated by the Jews: Arrest and release of Jason (17:5-9)—Once again Jewish opposition stirs things up and Paul is run out of town.

6. Berea (17:10-15)—Under cover of night, Paul and Silas head for Berea (modern Verria), about fifty miles away. Berea was a sizeable town in the first century, located in the foothills of the Olympian range but of no historical or political importance. The Berean response to Paul's preaching was of more noble character than that of the Thessalonians. They examined the Scriptures eagerly and daily (17:10-12). This kind of noble-spirited inquiry ought to characterize God's people of every age. This continued until Jews from Thessalonica showed up (17:13-15). Shortly thereafter, Paul was on the road again. Timothy and Silas stay on for a while, teaching and encouraging the church (17:14).

7. Athens (17:16-34)—Athens was once, and now is again, the premier city of Greece. When the Persians invaded Greece in 480 BC, Athens took the lead in resisting and eventually defeating them. Under Pericles (495-429 BC), Athens reached its ancient zenith. An intellectual center, the city was a beehive of activity where literature, philosophy, science, and rhetoric flourished. Sparta defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) and Athens' ancient greatness faded rapidly. In Paul's day, Athens was no more than a town of 10,000 people with an intellectual pedigree that was full of itself. This section of Acts is a "how to" tract for those who will invade the ivy halls of academia and present Christ to people who are wise and intelligent in this world's estimation but who are ignorant of the true wisdom of the kingdom.

a. Witness in the synagogues and marketplace leads to controversy with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (17:16-18)—Two spheres of witness were open to Paul in Athens: (1) the synagogue, where he met the usual congregation of Jews and Gentile proselytes (17:17); and (2) the marketplace, where he encountered pagan thinkers (17:18). Scoffing intellectuals gave Paul an opportunity to preach.

17:18—One group ridiculed Paul and his teachings and called him a "babbler" (*spermologos*), a term coming from the Athenian slang referring to birds who flitted about picking up seeds. The idea applied to people who hung around the marketplace picking up scraps of information without having any clearly developed thought of their own. The irony is that this term accurately described the Athenian intelligentsia, rather than Paul.

b. Address on Areopagus: Witness to the intellectual pagan (17:19-31)—Note the structure of the passage. First, Luke describes the variety and emptiness of pagan philosophy (17:19-21). Then, he accurately distills Paul's sermon on the unknown God revealed (17:22-31), providing another sample of Paul's preaching, this time to a sophisticated and skeptical Greek audience. In this message, Paul makes four basic points about God: he is the creator, provider and sustainer, the ruler, and the Savior. Finally, Luke records the reaction of the audience. Some believe but most continue in sneering procrastination (17:32-34).

Paul makes the case for Christianity before a group of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers that resulted in a hearing before the Areopagus, the ruling body of Athens. This passage provides a window into Paul's approach to the educated pagan of his day. He began where the philosophers were, taking the altar to the unknown god as his metaphor and authority. Stoicism and Epicureanism represented the popular Gentile alternatives for coming to terms with life apart from biblical revelation and God's work in Christ. Paul's approach was to find common ground with his audience without compromising or altering the gospel message.

The Stoics were a school of philosophy founded by Zeno (340-265 BC) who took their name from the stoa or colonnade where he taught. The Stoic worldview was one of materialistic pantheism. They understood matter to be of two kinds: a grosser kind, corresponding to our ordinary conception of matter, and a more refined kind, which was associated with deity. They regarded God as world-soul. They stressed the importance of reason as the principle which was inherent in the structuring of the universe and by which people ought to live.

Epicurus (342-270 BC) founded the school named for him. He espoused a mechanistic materialism which held that pleasure was the chief goal of life. The pleasure most worth enjoying was a life of tranquility, free from pain, disturbing passions, superstitious fears, and anxiety over death. The Epicureans did not deny the existence of God but argued, in deistic fashion, that he took no interest in human affairs. While Epicurus himself believed that justice, honesty, and simplicity produced the most pleasure in life, his philosophy gave no compelling reason to be virtuous. Eventually, Epicureanism became a byword for profligacy and luxurious vice.

In his defense before the Areopagus, Paul makes common ground with his audience by seizing upon an inscription on an altar to an unknown god to begin his proclamation of the true God. Paul's address concerns the nature of God and the responsibility of people to him, and paralleled the beliefs of the higher paganism of his day. Higher paganism agreed with Paul's affirmation in 17:24, that God did not live in temples built by people. The Epicureans agreed with Paul's statement in 17:25, believing that the divinity had no need of anything human beings could give to him. The Stoics agreed with 17:27-28, that God was the source of all life and emphasized his immanence in the world. Paul confirms these points by quoting two Greek poets, Epimenides and Aratus, utilizing poetry expressive of Stoic pantheism and applying it to the true God.

But while Paul used the insights of the philosophers, he is not fully agreeing with them. His statement in 17:24-25 did not concede to the Epicureans any deistic conception of God. Quite to the contrary, his assertions in 17:26, that God made every nation of men and determined the times set for them and the location of their habitations, flew in the face of their deistic beliefs. Nor did his comments in 17:27-28 grant an impersonal, intellectual, pantheistic idea of God to the Stoics but merely emphasized that the living God is near his worshipers despite his transcendence and greatness. When Paul moves to the climax of his address and proclaims the physical resurrection of Jesus, his proclamation runs counter to the beliefs of his entire audience.

Many Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but the concept of a bodily resurrection was alien to them since they increasingly regarded the body as earthly and evil.

Some have claimed that Paul failed in Athens (equating the number of converts with success) and that this failure stemmed from a change in his preaching which he later repudiated (see 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5). They charge that he spoke of providence and of being “in God”, but not of grace and of being “in Christ”; about creation and appealed to Greek poets, but not of redemption and citing Scripture. This criticism is too harsh. What we have here is an example of Paul reaching for common ground with his audience in proclaiming the gospel. His approach to the Greeks at Areopagus was by no means out of character with his determination to be “all things to all [people]” for the cause of Christ (see 1 Cor. 9:19-23).

17:22-23—The city was given over to a “cultured paganism” that was nourished by idolatry, novelty, and philosophy (17:21). The Greek religion was a mere deification of human attributes and the powers of nature and devoid of moral authority. The Greek myths spoke of gods and goddesses that acted more like humans, and very petty ones at that. And there were gods aplenty! One wit jested that, in Athens, it was easier to find a god than a man.

17:30—The gospel cries out for repentance. Repentance is a change of direction, a complete turnabout. True repentance involves a change in a person’s whole being: intellect, emotions, and will. Intellectually, there is a change of mind regarding sin, self, and God. Emotionally, there is deep sorrow for sin. Volitionally, repentance leads to action in accordance with changes in view and feeling.

8. Corinth (18:1-17)—Corinth was a commercial center located at the isthmus which connected the Peloponnesian peninsula to mainland Greece. It had two seaports, Lechaum on the Adriatic Sea (west) and Cenchrea on the Aegean Sea (east). Corinth was known for its licentiousness centered on the temple worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Finally, it was a political center, the capital of the province of Achaia.

This chapter is an excellent basis for studying the causes and cures for discouragement. A fifty-mile journey from Athens to Corinth provided Paul with ample time to reflect on his rejection at the intellectual hub of the Empire. In the future, he would cut short the lofty words of wisdom and proceed to proclaim the cross and the resurrection more directly and quickly. Driven out of Macedonia, mocked at Athens, he now meets hostility from the Jews at Corinth. The ambiance of Corinth did not help. It was a center of vice for the ancient world, with its Temple of Aphrodite and its consecrated prostitutes. To corinthianize was a synonym for to fornicate. Meager results, sheer exhaustion, negative attitudes of people you are trying to reach, sin and moral rot all around stirred the pot of discouragement. The Lord brought Paul new friends, response (both positive and negative) to his preaching, and a refreshing vision to encourage him to keep on.

a. Tentmaking with Priscilla and Aquila and preaching in the synagogue (18:1-4)—

Whether Aquila and Priscilla were Christians when they first met Paul is not known. They were among those of Jewish background that were expelled from Rome by Claudius' edict of 49-50. They were tentmakers with whom Paul stayed and worked. In this episode, one can see the wisdom of the Jewish rabbinical practice that insisted that their sons learn a trade to support themselves, regardless of what profession they might eventually pursue. "He who does not teach his son to work, teaches him to steal" was their slogan. Paul learned to do leather work in tents and thus support himself.

b. Blessings on the Gentile ministry after rejection by the Jews (18:5-11)—When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, bringing financial aid (see 2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 4:15), and enabling Paul to devote himself to preaching. Once again, Paul turns to the Gentiles after initial Jewish opposition.

18:6—Old Testament images abound in this verse. To shake out one's garments was an act of judgment that said that your opportunity is over. The person was "washing their hands of the situation." To have blood on your hands meant that you bore the responsibility for another's death. Many of the Jewish prophets understood their role as one of being a watchman, charged to warn the people of what God revealed to them. If they did not warn them, they bore the responsibility for their intended audience's plight and death (see Ezek. 33:1-9). Paul had warned the Jews, as required. Their rejection of the truth made them responsible. "Your blood be on your own head" is to say that you are responsible for your own poor judgment.

18:9-11—The Lord encourages Paul when he needs it badly. Note how often the Lord or his angel appears to Paul, either to win him or to encourage him (9:1-6; 22:17-18; 23:11; 27:23-25; 2 Tim. 4:16-17). The Lord does this frequently in Scripture. He encouraged Abraham (Gen. 15:1), Isaac (Gen. 26:24), Jacob (Gen. 46:3), Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:15-17), Daniel (Dan. 10:12), Mary (Lk. 1:30), Peter (Lk. 5:10), and hosts of others. Whenever you feel alone and defeated, think on Isaiah 41:10, 43:1-7, and Hebrews 13:5b. He is the God who is always there!

18:10—Once again, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are joined. "I have many people in this city" encourages Paul to continue to do what he is called to do, not to say "Oh well, those who the Lord wants to come, will come. It is more comfortable for me elsewhere."

c. Proconsul Gallio ignores Jewish charges against Paul (18:12-17)—While it was true that the Jewish council prohibited the apostles from preaching (4:17-21), there is no record in Acts of Rome ever doing so. This is a key point in Luke's apologetic to the civil authorities. Charges born of Jewish jealousy do not affect the Roman Empire. Gallio's judgment establishes a legal precedent legitimating Christianity in the eyes of Roman law. It is of added significance that it was Gallio, brother of the Roman philosopher Seneca, who rendered the verdict. Seneca was a person of enormous influence in Rome. Elsewhere in Acts, government officials are portrayed as tolerant and cooperative (see 16:35-40; 19:31; 21:37-40; 22:30; 23:12ff; 27:3).

18:17—If this Sosthenes is the one mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:1, he converted, requiring the Jews to find a new synagogue ruler.

9. Return to Antioch via Jerusalem (18:18-22)—Paul’s vow and the shaving of his head (18:18) might mean that he took aspects of the Nazarite vow recorded in Numbers 6. This vow was purely voluntary, a matter of personal devotion. Paul was not abandoning the gospel of grace for a ritualistic legal observance by taking this vow. He clearly taught that the observance of religious rituals was neither a means of justification nor an essential feature of sanctification. Christians are at liberty to follow their conscience if they do not cause others to needlessly stumble or grow judgmental in their spiritual disciplines. This and his subsequent behavior in Jerusalem (21:26 ff.) indicate that Paul had no trouble worshiping through the Mosaic Covenant. There was integration in his thinking.

18:22—After his vow, he landed at Caesarea and “went up” (Luke is speaking in terms of altitude, for Paul is going south to Jerusalem) and greeted the church at Jerusalem and then “went down” (again, speaking of altitude, for Paul is going north now) to Antioch. Once again, he reported back to the sending church (see 14:26-28).

D. Third missionary journey: Exhorting and strengthening the churches (18:23-21:16)—Paul bypassed western Asia Minor on his second missionary journey, working in Macedonia and Greece by the direction of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 16). It was natural for his third journey to be toward western Asia. He used Ephesus as his base of operations.

1. Summary: Strengthening the Galatian and Phrygian churches (18:23)—This brief verse is a focal point of discussions concerning the dating of the epistle to the Galatians. The north Galatian theory posits the founding of the churches addressed in that letter at this time and on this leg of Paul’s third missionary journey.

2. Apollos’ instruction by Priscilla and Aquila and his subsequent ministry in Achaia (18:24-28)—This episode and the one with the disciples of John the Baptist (19:1-7) underscore how transitional Acts is during church history. With Apollos, Luke paints a picture of a well-qualified man lacking the experience of the grace and power of the indwelling Lord:

- He was an educated man.
- He was eloquent in speech.
- He was well versed in Scripture.
- He was spiritually enthusiastic.
- He was an accurate teacher as far as he knew.
- He spoke with boldness.

18:24-25—Apollos came from Alexandria, the second most populous and important city in the Roman Empire. It was a center for education and particularly for philosophy. Luke emphasizes Apollos’ learning, eloquence, and powerful use of the Old Testament in refuting the unbelieving

Jews in public discourse. He further portrays Christianity as rooted in, and the fulfillment of, Judaism. Apollos later ministered at Corinth where his learning and eloquence attracted attention (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6). It was unfortunate that a clique began to form around him. However, there is no evidence that this was something he promoted. Certainly, Paul speaks of him as a friend and trusted fellow servant (1 Cor. 16:12; Titus 3:13).

18:26—Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned multiple times in the New Testament (18:2-3, 18-19, 26; Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19). Priscilla is referred to first in four out of six references. This is a reversal of what we would expect (the husband was usually listed first). In other places in the Bible, such reversal in conventional reference signifies that the person so cited took some prominent role in the situation described. In Acts, Luke usually lists the primary speaker first when there are two or more in a group. We see that clearly in Paul's first missionary journey. Luke consistently refers to the missionary team as Barnabas and Saul up to the point of the encounter with Bar-Jesus in Acts 13, after which Paul becomes the primary spokesperson. Then the typical reference becomes Paul and Barnabas (except for 15:12). In Acts 18:26, Priscilla is listed first and that indicates that her role in the conversation with Apollos was more involved than merely being at her husband's side. She may well have been the primary spokesperson. Note too that the conversation was much more than sharing personal insights with others. Priscilla and Aquila were instructing a teacher in the way of God more accurately.

Give credit to Apollos for receiving instruction from Priscilla and Aquila. After swaying the crowds, he can listen to two tentmakers. And kudos to Priscilla and Aquila for approaching Apollos in such a way that he could receive what they had to say. What Apollos needed was to experience the substitutionary sacrifice of Calvary as the only basis of righteousness and an infusion of the Spirit as the only source of power to live life abundantly. Apollos' own fresh experience of grace through the Spirit's enlightenment made him a resource for the church in Achaia.

3. Ephesus (19:1-41)—Ephesus was a city of 300,000 people and the foremost commercial center and capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor in Paul's day. It was a major seaport, and the origin/destination point for a major caravan route to the east. Roman roads made communication from the city to the entire Asian hinterland possible, a reality Paul utilized (19:10). The city also grew wealthy from the hosts of visitors attracted to the temple of Diana, one of the wonders of the ancient world. The majority of these tourists were not interested in architectural wonders, but in taking a holiday from morality. Diana (Artemis in the Greek pantheon) was a fertility goddess, and cultic prostitution was part of her worship. Over a thousand priestesses (called *hetarii*) were available "to enhance your worship experience" in the temple precinct.

Three major events occur during Paul's stay at Ephesus: (1) an incident with the disciples of John the Baptist (19:1-7); (2) the experience of the sons of Sceva and the exposure of counterfeits (19:8-20); and (3) a riot over a pagan deity (19:23-41).

a. Disciples of John receive the Holy Spirit (19:1-7)—Each of the spectacular bestowals of the Holy Spirit in Acts have to do with the visible entrance of different groups into the church: the original Jewish believers (Acts 2); the Samaritans (Acts 8); the Gentiles (Acts 10); and the followers of John the Baptist (Acts 19). This evidence of God’s approval contributes to Luke’s emphasis on God’s salvation devoid of ethnic boundaries.

Paul’s reply to the disciples of John the Baptist reveals that the filling of the Holy Spirit is key to Christian testimony and maturity. Paul’s first assignment in Ephesus was to bring sincere but immature believers up to date. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance that looked forward to the coming of the promised Messiah. Christian baptism is a baptism that looks to the finished work of Christ on the cross and his victorious resurrection.

Some Bible students question whether the descent of the Spirit on John’s followers indicates that Ephesus is now a new center for Gentile ministry. They argue that apostolic laying on of hands occurs at significant points where God chooses to show wonders and confirm significant kingdom advances.

19:5—This is the only place where the New Testament refers to anyone being rebaptized.

b. Witness and miracles at Ephesus: Sons of Sceva and exposure of counterfeits (19:8-20)—Paul uses the school of Tyrannus from 11 am to 4 pm to teach, after spending his morning making tents. The Spirit must have been moving for so many to willingly forego their midday siesta. Paul ministered effectively here for two years, and his disciples went out from Ephesus preaching the gospel. The effect was tremendous: “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.” Now that is impacting your community!

Paul’s second assignment in Ephesus was to deal with the occult. The sons of Sceva were the people that highlighted the extent to which superstition and occult practices had progressed. God enabled Paul to perform special miracles to demonstrate God’s power in the enemy’s territory. This incident demonstrated the exclusive claims of the gospel. For the Christian, there is to be no pretender in the heart that rivals the solitary right of Christ to rule there.

19:10—Paul ministered in Ephesus for two years (but see 20:31, where he says it was three years). This means that his ministry covered parts of three calendar years, but actually he was active in Ephesus somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty-four months.

19:18—The tense of the verb indicates that the people kept on coming, kept on confessing, and kept on delivering over their scrolls. The Lord dealt decisively with the occult and the people made a clean and thorough break from their enslavement.

c. Paul’s future plans: Jerusalem and Rome (19:21-22)—Luke notes Paul’s determination to go to Rome and then records in the remainder of the book of Acts how he got there.

d. Riot over a pagan deity: Business and devotion of artisans of Artemis of Ephesus (19:23-41)—Artemis (Diana) was a local fertility goddess. Her image on the Ephesian temple consisted of a meteorite thought to resemble a many-breasted female. The religious practices that grew up around this myth made a profitable living for silversmiths promoting idolatry and immorality. The disturbance that rocked the city was caused by those in religious commerce more interested in trade than truth, payola than the profession of the true God.

In only two incidents in Acts did the Gentiles oppose Paul: here (19:23-41) and in the case of the Philippian fortune-teller (16:16-24). In both cases, vested monetary interests drove the disruption. Whenever the gospel is preached with power, it will be opposed by people who make money from sin and superstition. Note that Paul did not arouse the silversmiths by picketing the temple, staging anti-idolatry rallies, or by organizing cultic shrine boycotts. What he did was to preach the truth daily to the lost people in the city. As he gained more and more converts, the “paying pagan” clientele dwindled and that hurt business. It was the silversmiths who were leading the ugly protests!

The upshot of this disturbance is that those making charges against Paul make themselves look foolish. There was really no reason for the uproar. Luke records the officials’ statements that Paul was innocent of any offense (19:37, 40). Luke continues his civil apologetic as the city leaders judge Paul to be blameless. While Paul was at Ephesus, he wrote 1 Corinthians and may have made a third, unrecorded visit to Corinth.

4. Return to Jerusalem: Exhortation of believers along the way (20:1-21:16)—Paul had two goals as he visited the churches on his way to Jerusalem. First, he wanted to strengthen the believers in the Lord and encourage them in their witness for Christ. Second, he finished taking up a collection for the needy Jewish church in Jerusalem (see Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9). His companions, listed in 20:4, were representatives of the various churches appointed to travel with Paul and handle the collection (see 2 Cor. 8:18-24).

a. Macedonia and Greece: Encouragement for the brethren and hostility from the Jews (20:1-6)—Paul left Ephesus, traveled through Macedonia before arriving at Achaia. During the three-month stay in Greece (probably in Corinth), Paul wrote Romans (see Rom. 15:23-16:2). Due to a Jewish plot against his life, Paul went back to Macedonia and sailed for Troas from Philippi, rather than from a Grecian port.

20:5—2 Corinthians 2:12-13 and 7:5-7 give further information about Paul’s stop at Troas for evangelistic purposes and of his desire to see Titus for a report on the Corinthian church.

20:6—Another “we” section of Acts begins. The last one ended while the team was in Philippi in Acts 16:16. Luke had remained in Philippi to shepherd the nascent church and now reunites with Paul.

b. Sermon snorer at Troas: Eutychus revived (20:7-12)—Acts 20:7 provides evidence that the early Christians normally worshiped on Sunday. The early church shared a potluck supper, after which they observed the Lord's Supper (see 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:17-34). They may have observed the Eucharist each Sunday. The service also included the public reading from and preaching of the word of God (2 Tim. 4:2).

Eutychus fell asleep in the service and fell to his death from a window. He was miraculously revived by Paul, who was not good at taking subtle hints and kept preaching until morning. Eutychus is so like us—the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. His name was the title of a long-running cartoon in Christianity Today, a humorous parody of incidents characteristic of everyday church life.

Remarkably, one commentator wrote the following on this verse: “The presence of many lamps would contribute to a soporific atmosphere because the lamps consumed oxygen. Probably crowded conditions exacerbated the situation.” An editor failed to inform the professor where to get off. Drowsiness during a sermon is not the kind of human experience that needs a great deal of explanation.

c. Troas to Miletus (20:13-16)

d. Paul warns and exhorts the Ephesian elders to shepherd the church of God (20:17-38)—Here is another sample sermon, this time in the shepherding context. Paul reviews his past ministry in Ephesus (20:18-21), describes the present dangers and situation (20:22-27), and then delineates the future responsibilities of these elders (20:28-35). In the first part, the apostle emphasizes his faithfulness to the Lord and to the church at Ephesus to whom he ministered for parts of three years. The second section reveals Paul's personal feelings and concerns in view of both the past and future. The third part of the sermon constitutes a warning to the elders of the dangers the church will face.

Paul's charge to the Ephesian elders was to guard (*prosechete* = pay attention to, give heed to, attend to, care for) the flock of God. Against the adversaries that would harm the church, the elders were to interpose themselves. For this task, Paul commits them to God and to the word of his grace (20:32).

Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders emphasizes their complete sanctification. Paul longed for his friends to grow up in Christ. The “word of his grace” is the secret to sanctification. The unmerited, unchanging, forgiving love of the Lord enables us to own the failures of the past, disown them in the Lord's tender mercy, and move on to the next step of growing up into the full stature of Christ. In addition, this text shows Paul to be not only a dynamic preacher and teacher but a caring friend.

20:20— Note that Paul went from house to house. In Ephesus, house churches were common, and teaching occurred in homes.

20:22-27—Paul uses various word pictures for his apostolic task. First is that of an accountant (20:24a). He considers or reckons (this is the accounting term) his life only in terms of God’s assignment to him. Second, he pictures himself as a runner finishing the race set before him—that of testifying to God’s grace (20:24b). Third, he sees himself as a royal herald (20:25). The word “preaching” is used of a herald declaring the message of a king. Finally, he views himself as a watchman (20:26). He had faithfully preached the message and was not guilty of blood for not warning others (see Ezek. 33:7-9 for this concept of the watchman in the Old Testament).

20:28-38—Paul warns of dangers around them, “wolves” that will ravage the church if allowed (20:29). He warns of dangers within the ranks of the church itself (20:30). There are those within that will mislead their fellow believers. Finally, there are dangers from within Christians themselves. Paul begins this segment by counseling the elders to keep watch over themselves as well as the church of God. The elders of a church can be careless (20:31) in dealing with issues facing God’s people. They can be shallow and covetous (20:32-33) and lazy and selfish (20:34-35), just as any Christian can be. Spiritual vigilance is a demanding and multifaceted task!

e. Miletus to Tyre: Warnings to Paul through the disciples (21:1-6)—Paul met the Ephesian elders at Miletus. After his charge to them, he goes to Cos, Rhodes, then Patara and finally on to Tyre. He stayed with the disciples there for seven days. These disciples perceived, by the Spirit, that prison and hardship awaited Paul (21:4), just as he himself had perceived (20:23).

f. Tyre to Caesarea: Warning through Agabus the prophet (21:7-14)—The journey continues to Caesarea where Paul visited with Philip the evangelist. Philip was one of the original deacons (6:5) who also served very effectively as an evangelist to the Samaritans (8:5ff). He settled in Caesarea and made it his ministry headquarters (8:40). Since Philip had been associated with Stephen and Paul had taken part in Stephen’s martyrdom, this must have been an interesting meeting. While in Caesarea, Agabus (see 11:28) prophesied of Paul’s upcoming captivity (21:10-11).

g. Caesarea to Jerusalem (21:15-16)

V. Witness in Chains: Paul’s Imprisonment and Trials (21:17-28:31)

This section of the book describes Paul’s witness to Christ in chains. It details his defenses before a mob in Jerusalem (21:37-22:21), before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:10), and before the Roman proconsuls Felix (24:1-27) and Festus (25:1-12). Luke carefully records the apostle’s hearing before King Agrippa (25:13-26:32), his shipwreck at sea (27:1-44), and his final witness to the Jews at Rome (28:17ff) before once again turning to the Gentiles (28:28-31). The book ends with Paul preaching boldly and without hindrance.

As Paul nears Rome, the book becomes increasingly detailed. Luke is writing for the Romans and is aware of what interests them. This long section on Paul’s defense emphasizes the apostle’s

innocence and establishes that Jewish jealousy is the basis of the charges against Paul. This section is both a final appeal to the Jews and the summation of Luke's apologetic to the civil authorities.

Luke's description of Paul's arrest, imprisonment, and repeated trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea, and his comportment on the way to Rome, provides us with a magnificent portrait of Christian courage. When ministering to people, you will always be on target when you help them live courageously.

A. Paul's arrest and initial defense before the Jewish crowd (21:17-22:29)

1. Paul takes a vow to reassure Jewish Christians concerning his attitude towards the Law (21:17-26)—Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul's initial meeting with the church leadership focused on fellowship and personal matters (21:17). He then met with James and the elders and reported in detail on his ministry among the Gentiles (21:18-19). You get the impression that the Jewish legalists had been working behind the scenes. No sooner had Paul finished his report than the elders mentioned the rumors circulating about Paul within the Jerusalem church (21:20-22). The elders had a plan (21:23-26). Four Jewish Christians had become ceremonially defiled during the period of a temporary Nazarite vow (see Num. 6:1-21). This vow involved: (1) abstaining from wine or fermented drink (Num. 6:3-4); (2) avoiding cutting one's hair (Num. 6:5); and (3) avoiding going near a dead body (Num. 6:6). They were amid a seven-day period of purification required by the Law (Num. 6:9-12). Paul was asked to underwrite their expenses (see Num. 6:13-17) to show the zealots for the Law that there was nothing to the rumors of Paul speaking against the Law.

2. Seizure of Paul upon Jewish accusation of temple defilement (21:27-36)

a. Seizure of Paul upon charge of bringing Gentiles into the temple (21:27-30)—Certain Jews from Asia Minor, who had previously seen Paul in Jerusalem with a Gentile companion Trophimus, mistakenly supposed that Paul had brought a Gentile into the inner court of the temple. This was prohibited. The razor-sharp reasoning of Paul's opponents went like this: (1) wherever Paul went, his Gentile friends went; (2) Paul went to the temple; therefore, he must have brought the Gentiles with him. Actual observation of the offense charged was not necessary. Suspicious extrapolation would suffice.

b. Paul rescued from Jewish mob by Roman garrison (21:31-36)—The scene reminds you of the riot at Ephesus recorded in Acts 19 (compare 19:29 and 21:30; 19:32 and 21:34). The ensuing riot and Jewish attempts to kill Paul show how unbelieving Jews, not Christians, were the cause of the social unrest surrounding the new faith. The rescue of Paul by Roman soldiers casts the governmental authorities in good light.

3. Paul's testimony before the Jewish crowd upon initial arrest (21:37-22:29)—Paul receives the Roman officer's permission to speak to the crowd (21:37-40) which grows quiet

when it hears Paul addressing them in Aramaic (22:1-2). Paul outlines his life: his early life in Judaism and as a persecutor of Christians (22:3-5); his conversion on the road to Damascus (2:6-11); his commissioning and healing at the hands of Ananias (22:12-16); and his call to preach to the Gentiles (22:17-21). Only when Paul mentioned his call to preach to the Gentiles did the hatred of the mob burst into flame and Paul removed to the Fortress of Antonio, which adjoined the Temple area on the northwest. During the Jewish uproar, Paul avoids a flogging by invoking his Roman citizenship (22:22-29). Two things are obvious from these events: (1) Paul's innocence of any political or criminal offense; and (2) the strategic value of Paul's Roman citizenship.

This is witnessing at its best. Paul shares his personal experience of the saving power of God in Christ. Illustrations of real people who have allowed the Lord to heal them of prejudice and personal resistance pack a wallop. The most effective way to get inside the closets of untouchable subjects is to discuss the problem in a way that people can define for themselves what it is within them that needs Christ's healing.

a. Obtaining permission from Romans to address Jewish crowd (21:37-40)

b. Testimony before the Jews (22:1-21)

(1) Getting their attention: Address in Aramaic (22:1-2)—Paul's ability to be all things to all people in the proper mode, wins him an audience. The crowd quiets down when they hear this much demonized vagabond speak in the familiar Aramaic dialect. Knowing absolutely nothing of the caliber of the individual standing before them, the crowd's reaction was surprise: "Where did he learn to talk right?" However, the interruption to the crowd's knee-jerk rioting to actually listen to Paul, was only a momentary return to sanity. Bedlam would reign again shortly.

(2) Early life in Judaism: Persecutor of the Way (22:3-5)—Paul had been a leading rabbi in his day (Gal. 1:13-14). Here, he piles up his credentials: he was a Jew brought up in Jerusalem, trained by Gamaliel, a strict follower of the Law, and he was a zealous persecutor of the church.

(3) Conversion on the Damascus road (22:6-11)—This is one of three places in Acts that record Paul's famous encounter with the risen Christ (see also 9:1-9; 26:12-18).

22:7-8—In these verses, Jesus states that Saul was persecuting him. Yet, it was the disciples of Jesus that Saul was hounding. Saul never, as far as we know, was directly involved with the Jewish opposition to the Lord or with his trial and death. The explanation is that Jesus identifies so closely with his followers that any insult to them is an insult to him. The truth of our identification with Christ is key to the progress of God's grace in our lives. Let's examine several aspects of that identification:

- In the new nature. We are born with our nature corrupted and incapable of pleasing God (Rom. 8:6-8; Eph. 2:1-3). When we believe on Jesus, he imparts to us a new nature.

- In the new life. Christ is life (Jn. 14:6), and when he indwells us by his Holy Spirit, he imparts life to us as a vine to the branches (Jn. 15:5).
- In our relationships. We are also one with Christ in his relationships. His Father is our Father, his kin, our brethren in the Lord.
- In our service. As believers, our work in the world is the continuation of the work which Christ began (Mt. 28:19-20; Jn. 17:18).
- In suffering. Our oneness with Christ, and our continuing to grow in the reality of that oneness, means that things which pain him, will increasingly pain us, and those who hate him, will increasingly hate us. We ought not be surprised by this (Phil. 1:29; 3:10-11).
- In our inheritance. God's unique Son is heir to all his Father's possessions, and we, being one with him, are joint heirs with him (Rom. 8:16-17).
- In his future glory. His glory will be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18-21; Rev. 1:6; 5:10) as well as to us and the rest of creation.

(4) Commissioning and healing through Ananias (22:12-16)—This passage is one of only two instances where Ananias is mentioned in the Bible (see also 9:1-9).

22:16—Our calling on the Lord, in response to his calling of us, is what effects a cleansing from sin, not the administration of baptismal waters. Saved by his grace through faith, we give evidence of that reality by being baptized. According to 9:17, Paul was regenerated and filled with the Holy Spirit before being baptized.

(5) Vision in the temple: Mission to the Gentiles (22:17-21)

c. Jewish uproar: Paul avoids a flogging by invoking his Roman citizenship (22:22-29)—Paul's Roman citizenship came in handy several times in his stormy career. Note how Luke presents the Roman authorities in a fundamentally sympathetic light throughout Acts.

B. Proceedings before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:11)—The Roman commander had a problem. As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to know the official charges against him. The commander needed to produce charges to report the incident to his superiors. Otherwise, how do you explain sudden bedlam in Jerusalem to officials already wary of this Jewish tinderbox.

Since the commander knew that the charges against Paul were Jewish in origin, the Sanhedrin was the tribunal to decide the matter. A number of things contribute to Luke's defense and promotion of Christianity: (1) Paul's good conscience (23:1); (2) his unlawful mistreatment by the high priest (23:2-4) (Ananias' actions were in keeping with Josephus' assessment of him as an insolent, hot-tempered, profane, and greedy man); (3) Paul's respectful apology for unknowingly rebuking the high priest (23:5); and (4) the division of the Pharisees and the Sadducees over the resurrection of the physical body (23:6-10). This last point forcefully makes the argument that since unbelieving Jews disagree among themselves over significant issues,

their disagreement with Christians does not rule out Christians as a sect rooted in Judaism for purposes of being an accepted faith under Roman law.

1. **Council assembled to ascertain charges against Paul (22:30)**

2. Confrontation with Ananias: Lawless traditionalism (23:1-5)—When Paul pleads his good conscience to the Sanhedrin, the high priest Ananias orders him to be struck, in violation of the Law. Paul reacts angrily to this obvious hypocrisy. In calling the high priest a “whitened wall,” he was saying that the man was a hypocrite to violate the Law while pretending to enforce it (see Mt. 23:27; Ezek. 13:10-12 for other examples of the similar use of the term). Ananias was known as a brutal thug who cared more for Rome’s favor than for Israel’s welfare. When the Jews revolted against Rome in 66, Ananias fled but was discovered by Jewish guerrillas in an aqueduct in Herod’s palace. This self-important and corrupt man died a thoroughly ignominious death.

Paul’s evident anger at the arrogant behavior of the high priest shows a very human side to the apostle. It also reveals his humility. Paul does show respect for the office of the high priest and admits his fault before everyone. Very few in that room could have done that.

23:1—Paul will also plead a good conscience in his defense before Felix (see 24:16). Conscience is that inner voice that approves when we do right and disapproves when we do wrong (see Rom. 2:15). Our consciences do not make the standards; God does. What conscience does is apply the standards to our behavior. The Scripture speaks of a good conscience (23:1; 24:16) and a clear conscience (1 Tim. 3:9). These examples illustrate the conscience working the way it is meant to. A defiled conscience (1 Cor. 8:7) is one that has been violated so often in the past that it is no longer reliable. Continuing to sin against your conscience leads to a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2) or a guilty one (Heb. 10:22), one that misfires badly, approving what is wrong and condemning what is right (see Rom. 1:32).

3. Resurrection controversy: Paul’s defense splits Sadducees and Pharisees (23:6-10)—The Resurrection of Christ is the heart of the Christian message. Paul focuses his defense here. Also, it served as a useful wedge to divide his opponents. The Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed vigorously over this doctrine. Soon that disagreement was visible on the floor of the Council itself.

4. Divine encouragement for continued witness (23:11)—Jesus appears to Paul a number of times in his ministry, providing guidance and encouragement (see 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 27:22-25; 2 Tim. 4:16-17). “And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:30) was not just encouragement for Paul, but for us as well. In times of uncertainty and conflict, the Lord stands by us and supplies us with the gift of courage (*tharsei*). We are never abandoned.

C. **Proceedings before Felix (23:12-24:27)**

1. Jewish conspiracy to kill Paul uncovered; Removal to Caesarea (23:12-35)—The Jews bound themselves with an oath to kill Paul (23:12-13). “Bound themselves with an oath” (*anethematizo*) means that they put themselves under a curse if they did not fulfill their objective. The chief priests and the elders show the baseness of their characters by being accomplices in the plot (23:14-15). Paul’s nephew gets wind of the plot, alerts Paul, and the apostle sends his nephew to Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander.

We know nothing about Paul’s sister and nephew except what is recorded here. Philippians 3:8 suggests that Paul lost everything, including his family ties, when he became a Christian. While it is not likely that his sister and nephew were believers, they were devout Jews and must have known that the plot was evil.

23:25-30—Paul is moved to Caesarea under armed guard with a letter from Lysias which basically exonerates Paul (23:29, compare similar comments by Gallio in 18:14-15, the Ephesian leader in 19:40, the Pharisees in 23:9, Festus in 25:25, and Herod Agrippa II in 26:31-32). Even the Jewish leaders in Rome had to confess that they had received no official recriminations against Paul (28:21).

Luke presents conflicting dimensions to Felix’s character. He has “a more accurate knowledge of the Way” than others but that does not temper his greedy soul. He hoped to get money from Paul. Felix was subsequently recalled by Nero amid accusations that he encouraged banditry and raked off personal profit from the bandits’ plunder. Felix and Drusilla must have thought that hearing Paul would be an entertaining encounter. They had not counted on the crisis of conscience that they underwent. Felix put things off. His lust for money overcame any urgency in responding to Paul’s message.

2. Jewish charges presented to Felix: Paul charged as troublemaker and for temple desecration (24:1-9)—Antonius Felix was procurator of Judea from 52-59. Felix was the brother of Pallos, a favorite of Nero. The Roman historian Tacitus describes him as “exercising the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave.” He was a ruthless climber. Three political marriages had propelled his ascent. At the time of this encounter with Paul, he was married to Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (the Herod of Acts 12), who left her husband to become Felix’s wife. Intrigue, greed, and unscrupulous lust for advancement characterized Felix and made him a feared and formidable foe of all those who got in his way.

The charges brought against Paul were threefold: (1) he stirred up trouble wherever he went (24:3); (2) he was a leader of a sect that was not *religio licita* (24:5); and (3) he had desecrated the temple (24:6). The first charge had substance to it because the Romans were apprehensive of anything that upset the delicate peace of the Empire. They reacted fiercely to any turbulence and Paul certainly had a way of stirring things up. The second charge sought to distinguish Christians from Jews in the perception of the Romans. That would mean that the Christians were practicing a faith not officially recognized by the Romans and that would spell trouble. The third charge

(relating to temple desecration) dealt with Jewish internal concerns with which the Romans wanted nothing to do if they could help it.

3. Paul's reply to Jewish charges: Assertion of clear conscience and the hope of the resurrection (24:10-21)—Paul's defense was (1) he did not cause trouble, the Jews did (24:12-13); (2) Christianity was not an illegal sect but the legitimate outgrowth of the Jewish Old Testament (24:14-15); and (3) the temple desecration charge was not properly brought since the Sanhedrin had not acted on the charge and the original accusers were not present at the hearing before Felix (24:17-21). In answering these charges, Paul addressed three sets of accusers: the lawyer Tertullus (24:10-16), the Asian Jews (24:17-19), and the Jewish Sanhedrin (24:20-21).

4. Felix adjourns legal proceedings: Subsequent private audience with Paul (24:22-27)—It may have been the curiosity of Drusilla that prompted Felix to give Paul another hearing. Quite possibly she wanted to hear Paul because her family had been involved with the infant church for some time. Drusilla's great-grandfather had tried to kill the infant Jesus in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:16-18). Her great-uncle killed John the Baptist (Mt. 14:1-12) and mocked Jesus at his trial (Lk. 23:7-12). Her father killed the apostle James and had Peter imprisoned and intended to execute him as well (12:1-11).

Paul preached to them about righteousness, self-control, and judgment and gave the royal couple compelling reasons to believe. Felix was convicted by Paul's preaching, as his third marriage to Drusilla and his unjust rule displayed his lack of self-control. Felix was known for his violent use of repressive force and his corrupt self-aggrandizement. He had been a slave, won his freedom, and owed his position to the currying of imperial favor. In the end, he put off the decision and tried to extract a bribe from Paul (24:22, 26).

24:25—The text says that Felix was afraid and uses a word that may be translated “terrified.” He could not hide the deep conviction of God. But instead of responding, he procrastinated, that thief of time and souls. He dismissed Paul for a more convenient time that never came. “One of these days” often means “none of these days”.

As an Australian preacher once opined, we make our decisions and then those decisions turn around and make us. This text underlines the urgency of responding to God and of serving him. As one author writes: “I shall pass through this world but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do, let me do it now; let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

D. Proceedings before Festus and Herod Agrippa II (25:1-26:32)—Paul languishes in prison for the next two years before Festus replaces Felix and takes up Paul's case again by entertaining Jewish charges. Paul appeals to Caesar (25:1-12), and, before leaving Caesarea, gives a defense of himself before Festus and Herod Agrippa II (25:13-26:32).

1. Before Festus (25:1-22)—Porcius Festus, the new Roman procurator, was a nobler soul than his predecessor. He seemed like he was intent to take up his duties and to do what was right. Meanwhile, a new high priest had taken up the ephod. Ishmael replaced Jonathan, whom Felix executed. Thinking it unlikely that the new procurator knew anything about the original Jewish plot against Paul's life (23:12-15) or even suspected that the Jews were out for blood, the new high priest and the Jewish leadership took this transition period as an opportunity to press again their bogus charges against Paul. They also requested a change of venue. Since a Roman court could meet as easily in Jerusalem as in Caesarea, transferring Paul could ease the administration of justice since the witnesses lived in Jerusalem and the offenses alleged occurred there. Sounds like a good argument, especially when you leave out pertinent details like conspiracies, plots, and blood oaths.

a. Hearing set for Caesarea: Jewish plot to kill Paul foiled (25:1-5)—Festus refused the change of venues request and unwittingly foiled the Jewish ambush plans. He invited the Jewish leaders to accompany him to Caesarea and there present their case against Paul.

b. Change of venue proposed: Paul's appeal to Caesar (25:6-12)—Obviously, the danger was escalating. The Sanhedrin itself was plotting this one, not just outsiders. The Jews repeated the same false and unproven accusations. Festus inquired of Paul if he had any objection to moving his trial, as requested by the Jews. Paul wanted nothing to do with a trial in Jerusalem, if he even got there, and appealed to Caesar. His reasons for opposing the switch may have been: (1) the trip between Caesarea and Jerusalem would be very dangerous, especially given the Jewish plots to kill him; (2) the possibility of a fair trial in Jerusalem was remote; and (3) he had already been a prisoner in Caesarea as a favor to the Jews and enough was enough.

c. Festus seeks Agrippa's counsel on Paul's case (25:13-22)—Festus was up to his neck in legal alligators. How could he send a notable prisoner who was a Roman citizen to the emperor on unstated or completely unsubstantiated charges? King Agrippa happened to be visiting Festus to welcome the new procurator of Judea. Festus decided to share his dilemma with Agrippa and see if the young king could help him out of his predicament.

Festus introduces Herod Agrippa II to the conflict between Paul and the Jewish chief priests. The history of the Herods and the earthly career of Messiah were interwoven. King Herod, Agrippa II's grandfather, was the king the wise men foiled who took out his vengeance on the innocents under two years of age. Jesus' family escaped to Egypt and later became a threat to subsequent Herods. Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great by Malthace, murdered John the Baptist. Herod Antipas was also present in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' crucifixion and Pilate Jesus to him (Lk. 23:6-12). Herod Agrippa I executed James, imprisoned Peter, and subsequently was judged by God resulting in a horrible death (Acts 12:20-23). The hall in which Agrippa II would meet Paul was built by the king's grandfather.

Agrippa II was born in 27 and was in Rome at the time of his father's ignominious death in 44. In 50, Claudius gave Agrippa II the kingdom of Chalcis, the northeast portion of Palestine, and

the right to appoint the Jewish high priest. In 53, he exchanged Chalcis for the larger territory of Batanea, Gaulonitis, Trachonitis, and Abila. In 56, Nero gave Agrippa the regions of Tiberias, Tarichaea, and Julius in Perea. Bernice was Agrippa's sister who had married his brother. When the brother died in 48, she came to live with her brother with whom she had an incestuous relationship. The Herod family was a corrupt one. Murder, power maneuvers, incest, and moral dissoluteness marked its branches.

2. Before Festus and Agrippa (25:23-26:32)

a. Festus announces the purpose of the hearing: Specify the charges (25:23-27)—The purpose of this hearing was to specify charges with which to indict Paul. The irony is striking. The apostle has been in prison for over two years, has had several hearings, and yet his captors still do not know what to charge him with. And now the rascal goes and appeals to the emperor. This could make the big wigs look bad!

25:25-27—Festus, like others before and after him, found that Paul had done nothing deserving of imprisonment and death (see 23:9, 29; 26:31). Luke continues to make his apologetic to the civil authorities.

b. Paul's testimony before Agrippa (26:1-23)—Luke's purpose in this section is to show that Agrippa, an expert in Jewish law and culture, agreed with the opinion of the Roman procurators, Felix and Festus, that Paul had not committed any crime.

(1) His early life in Judaism (26:1-11)—Paul was a devout Pharisee (Phil. 3:5) and the son of a Pharisee (23:6). Even his peers realized that his star was on the ascent as a rabbi (Gal. 1:13-14). He had also been a zealous persecutor of Christians and cast his vote against them in the persecution in Jerusalem (26:10). This may mean that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin and cast a vote against Christians or that he favored putting Christians to death and lent his voice to that effect as a special representative of the high priest. At any rate, Paul was a rising ecclesiastical star in Judaism prior to his conversion.

(2) Damascus road experience (26:12-18)—Acts records Paul's conversion experience three times (see also 9:1-9; 22:6-11). It must have been both a crushing and a liberating blow to the apostle. On the one hand, in a brilliant flash, it became perfectly clear to Paul how wrong he was. In the name of religious orthodoxy, he was opposing his Messiah. On the other hand, he had come face-to-face with the living Lord and was given his life's assignment.

(3) Subsequent witness and arrest (26:19-23)—He was not disobedient to this heavenly vision. In Damascus (9:20-25), in Jerusalem (9:29-30), and through numerous incidents of threats, dangers, and discouragements, Paul faithfully proclaimed the gospel to Jew and Gentile alike. Nothing swayed him from his calling.

(4) Festus' outburst and Paul's challenge to Agrippa to believe (26:24-29)—Was Festus' outburst evidence of heartfelt conviction? One would like to think so. However, in reply to the procurator's exclamation, Paul directly addresses the king. When he asked Herod Agrippa II if he believed in the prophets, he was putting the king on the line. Would the king repudiate what every Jew believed? If he affirmed his faith in the prophets, then what of this Jesus of whom they wrote?

26:28—One wonders about this verse. Is it uttered sarcastically or wistfully? Is it spoken with disdain: "In such a short time, do you imagine yourself converting someone such as me?" Or do the words betray an empty life: "You are with a little effort convincing enough to persuade me to become a Christian"?

(5) Agrippa's opinion of Paul's innocence (26:30-32)—Both procurator and king affirm that Paul was innocent of any crime deserving death. Luke keeps stockpiling these official statements of Paul's innocence (see 16:35-40; 18:12-17; 23:29; 25:25; 26:30-32). What is most remarkable about this hearing is that one senses that the real prisoners are Festus and Herod Agrippa II. Shown the light and the way to life, they deliberately turned away and remained in their sin.

E. Paul's journey to and arrival at Rome (27:1-28:31)—Paul plays four roles in these final two chapters: counselor (27:1-20); encourager (27:21-44); helper (28:1-10); and preacher (28:11-31). Paul's ministry was multifaceted and always like one among the brethren. A truly excellent example to follow.

1. Shipwreck: The comportment of faith (27:1-44)—Why does Luke record this episode in such detail? As a device to emphasize Paul's journey to Rome under the sovereign hand of God. This chapter supplies wonderful lessons for facing the storms of life. "The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," to borrow a phrase from Hamlet, are oft-times revealing:

- They sometimes come when we disobey God (e.g. Jonah).
- They reveal and build character.
- They cannot hide the face of God or hinder his purpose.
- They provide excellent opportunities to serve others and to witness for Christ.

a. From Caesarea to Fair Havens (27:1-8)—Julius' kindness to Paul again puts the Roman authorities in a good light in stark contrast to Paul's Jewish countrymen. As the ship approached Fair Havens, the sailing was getting tough. It was late in the season and danger lurked in continuing the voyage.

b. Unheeded advice and divine promise for deliverance from a storm at sea (27:9-26)—Paul's counsel not to continue is ignored, but not out of disdain. Fair Havens was not a comfortable place to winter. It was too open to blustery storms (27:12). The centurion listens to the advice of the ship's pilot and its owner and the party sails on.

c. Deliverance through shipwreck: Ashore at Malta (27:27-44)—Paul’s courage is notable. There is an alien dignity to the people of God that God uses in a pinch. The divine hand has remade us of so much more than we know. When we face life’s storms, let us remember that we are in God’s hands, and not in anyone else’s. Courage-confidence-concentration. Let us behave in a way that brings honor to God by relaying on his ready supply every moment.

What we see on the voyage is the Lord’s power in dangerous circumstances. Life is a voyage and its winds, angry seas, and crises threaten our survival. The Lord cares for us by his commands meant to keep us out of trouble. He may step in when we face the consequences of our own or other’s foolish decisions. Calmness in turbulent waters is often provided by the Lord who never panics. He knows the ultimate outcome and so do we in our better moments. That outcome is our Rome (God’s destiny for us) ... and beyond that an eternal abode with the Lord in heaven.

2. Miracles performed by Paul at Malta (28:1-10)

a. Paul unharmed by snakebite (28:1-6)—Paul was a great leader because he knew how to be a servant. Here, after helping rescue the voyagers, he pitches in and helps with the common labor. Seeing Paul bitten by a snake caused the superstitious islanders to initially conclude that he was a murderer receiving a just penalty and then, upon seeing that him unaffected by the viper’s bite, that he was a god. Undoubtedly, Paul’s response to the latter conclusion was like his reaction at Lystra (see 14:8-18).

b. Publius’ father healed (28:7-10)

3. Paul arrives at Rome (28:11-31)—Luke records Paul’s journey to Rome (28:11-16), his witness to the Jews before turning to the Gentiles (28:17-29), and his unhindered witness while under house arrest (28:30-31).

a. Journey from Malta to Rome (28:11-16)

28:13-14—At Puteoli, Paul found Christian fellowship. The gospel had already spread from Rome to this seaport 150 miles south of the capital city of the Empire. The church in Rome was probably started by Roman Jews who first heard the gospel preached at Peter’s Pentecost sermon and returned home with the good news (see 2:10).

This section illustrates the Lord’s care for the apostle through a new Christian community committed to each other and to the Lord. When he arrived at Puteoli, a delegation of believers were sent to meet him and rejoiced at his arrival. Luke uses the Greek word *apantesin*, which was a technical term for the official welcome of a dignitary by a deputation sent to greet and escort him. The believers were treating a prisoner of the emperor as a special dignitary. They knew his circumstances and wanted to give him the hero’s welcome he deserved.

b. Paul's witness to the Jews before turning to the Gentiles (28:17-29)—Paul follows his ministry pattern (see Rom. 1:16). The final word of Acts is an address to the Jews concerning their hard-heartedness before moving to the Gentiles once again.

An alliteration of “d’s” summarizes the response of the Jewish leaders of the synagogue at Rome. They disbelieved, departed, and disputed among themselves. Paul’s point was to demonstrate to them that they had come to a dreadful stage of spiritual dullness. They heard words but failed to understand; heard the truth but would not respond. Their emotions were insensitive to and their ears weary of great ideas which they had not lived. The tragic result of this faithless familiarity was that they were no longer able to receive the truth and order their lives around it.

c. Paul under house arrest: Unhindered witness at Rome (28:30-31)—Paul was probably chained to a Roman soldier (see Phil. 1:13-14) and confined to a house he rented. Otherwise, he had some freedom of association because he was a Roman citizen against whom no charge was proven. The summary reinforces the dynamic of the book—unhindered witness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

During this two-year period, Paul probably wrote the Prison epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Some speculate that he was released after this captivity, made additional missionary travels, possibly to Macedonia, Achaia, Asia Minor, and Spain (see Rom. 15:22-28), was arrested again and taken to Rome, and executed near the end of Nero’s reign. However, this is speculation, and most scholars are skeptical that Paul was released and place the time of his execution earlier in Nero’s reign.

These last two verses summarize powerful Christian communication:

- Christian communicator’s message—Paul’s central theme was the kingdom and the King, the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah and King of all.
- Christian communicator’s method—Paul was preaching (*kerusson*) and teaching (*didaskon*) the Lord Jesus. All great preaching involves the communication of dynamic truth. All creative teaching involves forceful witness and persuasion.
- Christian communicator’s magnanimity—Paul received all who came. He was open and welcoming.

We have completed a study of the “acts” of the early Christians. What will be the “acts” of later-day Christians, people like you and me. Charles Spurgeon once remarked: “What was begun with so much heroism ought to be continued with ardent zeal since we are assured that the same Lord is mighty still to carry on his heavenly designs.” With the assurance of his presence, the power of his Spirit, the rich heritage of our faith, let us continue on with his cross as our glory and his praise as our song.

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