



Acts 101

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Acts - Chapters 16 – 28

Forward

INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

OVERVIEW: With a flick of the fingers, friction occurs and a spark leaps from match to tinder. A small flame burns the edges and grows, fueled by wood and air. Heat builds, and soon the kindling is licked by orange-red tongues. Higher and wider it spreads, consuming the wood. The flame has become a fire.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a match was struck in Palestine. At first, just a few in that corner of the world were touched and warmed; but the fire spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea out to the world and to all people. Acts provide an eyewitness account of the flame and fire—the birth and spread of the church.

Beginning in Jerusalem with a small group of disciples, the message traveled across the Roman Empire. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, this courageous band preached, taught, healed, and demonstrated love in synagogues, schools, homes, marketplaces, and courtrooms, and on streets, hills, ships, and desert roads— wherever God sent them, lives and history were changed.

Written by Luke as a sequel to his Gospel, Acts is an accurate historical record of the early church. But Acts is also a theological book, with lessons and living examples of the work of the Holy Spirit, church relationships and organization, the implications of grace, and the law of love. And Acts is an apologetic work, building a convincing case for the validity of Christ’s claims and promises.

The book of Acts begins with the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit and the commencement of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Spirit-inspired evangelism began in Jerusalem and eventually spread to Rome, covering most of the Roman Empire.

The gospel first went to the Jews; but they, as a nation, rejected it. A remnant of Jews, of course, gladly received the Good News. But the continual rejection of the gospel by many of the Jews led to the ever-increasing proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. This was according to Jesus’ plan: the gospel was to go from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This, in fact,

is the pattern that the Acts narrative follows. The glorious proclamation began in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), went to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8 and following), and to the countries beyond Judea (Acts 11:19; Acts 13:4 and on to the end of Acts). The second half of Acts is focused primarily on Paul's missionary journeys to many countries north of the Mediterranean Sea. He, with his companions, took the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Some of the Jews believed, and many of the Gentiles received the Good News with joy. New churches were started, and new believers began to grow in the Christian life.

As you read Acts, put yourself in the place of the disciples—feel with them as they are filled with the Holy Spirit, and thrill with them as they see thousands respond to the gospel message. Since their commitment as they give every ounce of talent and treasure to Christ. And as you read, watch the Spirit-led boldness of these first-century believers, who through suffering and in the face of death take every opportunity to tell of their crucified and risen Lord. Then decide to be a twentieth-century version of those men and women of God.

THE BLUEPRINT

A. PETER'S MINISTRY (Acts 1:1-12:25)

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter preached boldly and performed many miracles. Peter's actions demonstrate vividly the source and effects of Christian power. Because of the Holy Spirit, God's people were empowered so they could accomplish their tasks. The Holy Spirit is still available to empower believers today. We should turn to the Holy Spirit to give us the strength, courage, and insight to accomplish our work for God.

1. Establishment of the church
2. Expansion of the church

B. PAUL'S MINISTRY (Acts 13:1-28:31)

Paul's missionary adventures show us the progress of Christianity. The gospel could not be confined to one corner of the world. This was a faith that offered hope to all humanity. We too should venture forth and share in this heroic task to witness for Christ in all the world.

1. First missionary journey
2. The council at Jerusalem
3. Second missionary journey
4. Third missionary journey
5. Paul on trial

MEGATHEMES

THEME: Church beginnings

EXPLANATION: Acts is the history of how Christianity was founded and organized and solved its problems. The community of believers began by faith in the risen Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to witness, to love, and to serve.

IMPORTANCE: New churches are continually being founded. By faith in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church can be a vibrant agent for change. As we face unfamiliar problems, Acts gives important remedies for solving them.

THEME: Holy Spirit

EXPLANATION: The church did not start or grow by its own power or enthusiasm. The disciples were empowered by God's Holy Spirit. He was the promised Counselor and Guide sent when Jesus went to heaven.

IMPORTANCE: The Holy Spirit's work demonstrated that Christianity was supernatural. Thus, the church became more Holy Spirit-conscious than problem conscious. By faith, any believer can claim the Holy Spirit's power to do Christ's work.

THEME: Church growth

EXPLANATION: Acts presents the history of a dynamic, growing community of believers from Jerusalem to Syria, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In the first century,

Christianity spread from believing Jews to non-Jews in 39 cities and 30 countries, islands, or provinces.

IMPORTANCE: When the Holy Spirit works, there is movement, excitement, and growth. He gives us the motivation, energy, and ability to get the gospel to the entire world. How are you fitting into God's plan for expanding Christianity?
What is your place in this movement? **THEME:** Witnessing

EXPLANATION: Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, and thousands more witnessed to their new faith in Christ. By personal testimony, preaching, or defense before authorities, they told the story with boldness and courage to groups of all sizes.

IMPORTANCE: We are God's people, chosen to be part of his plan to reach the world. In love and by faith, we can have the Holy Spirit's help as we witness or preach. Witnessing is also beneficial to us because it strengthens our faith as we confront those who challenge it.

Chapter 1 Acts 16 - 17

Chapter 16

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY / 16:1-5

Acts 16 records Paul and Silas embarking on what is called the second missionary journey. A few verses describe a quick trek over the cities of the first journey and a series of divine prohibitions about going in certain directions. Then Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia calling out for help, and God's door swung wide open in a new direction.

16:1 Acts 14:6-21 describes the rough treatment Paul and Barnabas had received during their last visit to the city of **Lystra**. That was where Paul had been stoned (the only stoning of his ministry), dragged out of the city, and left for dead. Paul had already gone back to that city once (14:21), and on this second journey, he returned.

If anyone ever doubted Paul's courage or tenacity, this verse ought to change that opinion! So concerned was Paul for the believers in these cities that he risked his life to make sure they were growing in the faith.

In Lystra lived a **young disciple** named **Timothy**. He had become a Christian after Paul's first visit to Lystra. Timothy had already had solid Jewish training in the Scriptures from his mother (a Jewish believer) and grandmother (see 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

When Paul arrived on this second journey, Timothy had grown into a respected disciple of Jesus. Verses 1 and 3 mentions that Timothy's **father was a Greek**; verse 3 explains why that mattered.

16:2-3 Timothy's excellent reputation in the church and Paul's need for an assistant compelled Paul to invite Timothy **to join them on their journey**.

Timothy wanted to go, for he submitted to being **circumcised before they left**—clearly a mark of his commitment. Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother

and Greek father.

Under Jewish rabbinic law, since his mother was Jewish, Timothy was Jewish and needed to fulfill the covenant. So Paul asked Timothy to be circumcised to remove some of the stigmas that might have hindered his effectiveness in ministering to Jewish believers. Timothy's mixed Greek/Jewish background could have created problems on their missionary journeys because many of their audiences would contain Jews who were concerned about keeping this tradition.

Timothy's submission to the rite of circumcision helped to avoid that potential problem.

Paul may appear to be inconsistent here with his teaching in Galatians 2:3-5, where he refused to let Titus be circumcised. This is easily resolved when considering the difference in the circumstances of the two situations. In Galatia, circumcision was being proclaimed (heretically!) as a method of justification. That might hinder the spread of the gospel (see Romans 9:32-33; 1 Peter 2:8; Corinthians 1:23; 9:19-23).

Although the Jerusalem council had just ruled that circumcision was not necessary for the Gentiles, Paul thought that Timothy's mixed religious background might hinder his effectiveness. So, because Timothy was partly Jewish, he was circumcised. This was merely for effectiveness in spreading the gospel, not as a prerequisite for salvation.

16:4-5 At least one of the latest items on the agenda of this trip was explaining the decision regarding the commandments that were to be obeyed, as had been decided by the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). The Jewish/Gentile issues that had been decided at the council would arise again in the Gentile areas where Paul was traveling.

Rapid growth was important to this first part of the "Gentile" thrust of the gospel. Critics of Paul's Gentile-oriented ministry (especially the Jewish element) would be waiting greedily for an opening with which to shut Paul down or at least diminish his influence. Yet here, in the first real penetration of the gospel into the Gentile world, the church thrived, in the same way, the mostly Jewish church had in its early days.

A CALL FROM MACEDONIA / 16:6-10

Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go into the provinces of Asia and Bithynia, Paul and his companions were directed instead past Mysia to the city of Troas. There Paul had a divine vision instructing him to go to Macedonia. These supernatural events served to underline the sovereign guidance of God in Paul's evangelistic efforts. Sometime during the events described in this passage, Luke became part of Paul's entourage (see the pronoun "we" in 16:10).

16:6 The regions of Phrygia and Galatia included much of modern-day Turkey, yet God, for reasons known only to him, did not allow the missionaries to go **into the province of Asia at that time.**

"Asia" referred not to the continent but to the Roman province that was the western part of what is today called Asia Minor. Ephesus would have been the leading city in this region.

16:7-8 the travelers moved on **to the border of Mysia and headed for the province of Bithynia**, a province just to the northeast of Asia, but they were prohibited by God.

The **Spirit of Jesus** is another name for the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19). The Holy Spirit had closed the door twice for Paul, so Paul must have wondered which geographical direction God wanted him to take in spreading the gospel. Paul and Silas **went on through Mysia to the city of Troas.**

There, at last, God opened the door. He saw **a man from Macedonia** who was **pleading, "Come over here and help us."** (See 9:10, 12; visions.) Macedonia had been a Roman province since 146 B.C. and was in what is today northern Greece.

The group **decided to leave** right away, knowing that **God was calling** them. In the first of many sections where this occurs, Luke unobtrusively introduced his presence on this part of the journey by the simple use of the plural pronouns *we* and *us*. The traveling group consisted at least of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Clearly, Luke had experienced what he wrote.

LYDIA OF PHILIPPI BELIEVES IN JESUS / 16:11-15

In response to the Macedonian call, Paul and his associates immediately boarded a ship for Philippi (in what is now northern Greece). Acts 16 highlights the stories of three individuals who became believers through Paul's ministry in Philippi:

Lydia, the influential businesswoman (16:14), the demon-possessed slave girl (16:16-18), and the jailer (16:27-30). The gospel was affecting all strata of society, just as it does today.

16:11-12 The travelers made their way across the upper portion of the Aegean Sea from **Troas** to **Samothrace** (a small island in the Aegean), then on to **Neapolis**, the port city for **Philippi**. From Neapolis, Philippi was a ten-mile journey inland.

Philippi was a **major city of the district**, although it was not the capital. With mountains on every side and its port city of Neapolis on the Aegean Sea, Philippi had originally been a strategic site in the Greek Empire. Gold had been discovered at Mount Pangaeum to the west, tempting settlers from the Aegean island of Thasos to seize the area. They founded a city near the site of Philippi, naming it Krenides (meaning “spring”) for the spring-fed marshlands in the valley.

Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) ascended the throne of the Greek Empire, he captured the city (in about 357 B.C.), enlarged and strengthened it, and gave it his name. Philip used the yield of the gold mines to outfit his army.

In 168 B.C., the Romans conquered Macedonia. The mountain’s gold was exhausted, and the city declined. On the plains surrounding the city, Augustus defeated Brutus and Cassius (assassins of Julius Caesar). In 42 B.C., Augustus gave the city the status of a **Roman colony** to celebrate his victory.

A colony was considered a part of Rome itself. Its people were Roman citizens (a standing that carried high privilege), had the right to vote, were governed by their own senate, and had Roman laws and the Latin language.

Later, the city received the right to the Law of Italy, giving it many privileges and immunities—most significantly, immunity from taxation. Philippi was also a garrison city with a Roman garrison stationed there to keep it secure. The Philippians were proud of their Roman heritage and standing. Philippi also boasted a fine school of medicine.

Luke may have attended medical school in Philippi. Later, Paul would write a letter to the church he started in this city—the book of Philippians (from prison in Rome around A.D. 61)

The letter is personal and tender, showing Paul’s deep friendship with the believers there. The ministry in Philippi would be significant. The positive response

to the gospel in this city, as described in the next few verses, was the reason for the missionary team remaining there for **several days**

16:13 Inscribed on the arches outside the city of Philippi was a prohibition against reason for the prayer meeting being held outside the city, on a **riverbank**. Ten Jewish males were necessary for a location to establish a synagogue. It appears there was no synagogue in Philippi, forcing Paul and his companions to search for the seekers of God elsewhere.

They **supposed that some people met for prayer** at a location by the river (the Gangites River was a mile or so west of the city), and they did find and **speak with some women** there who had gathered for prayer. Jews typically gathered by rivers for prayer when a local synagogue was not available.

Paul's first evangelistic contact in Macedonia was with a small group of women.

Paul never allowed gender or cultural differences to keep him from preaching the gospel. He presented the gospel to these women, and Lydia, an influential merchant, believed.

This opened the way for ministry in that region. In the early church, God often worked in and through women.

16:14 Lydia was a merchant of expensive purple cloth, a valuable and expensive material often worn as a sign of nobility or royalty. Lydia may have been a wealthy businesswoman.

She was obviously a person of means since she had guest rooms (16:15) and servants. Greek women of Lydia's day held elevated status and were able to conduct business and hold honorary public titles. **Thyatira** was a city known for its commerce, so Lydia may have brought her business to Philippi from there.

Lydia was **a worshiper of God**. This is like the most technical description of who not official proselytes to Judaism were but who did worship the God of Abraham (see the commentary on Cornelius at 10:2). Lydia was seeking the Lord, and the Lord was about to meet her. God was at work, for he **opened her heart** to respond.

16:15 After Lydia's conversion, **she was baptized along with other members of her household**. These same words are used to describe other conversions in Acts—Cornelius Romans 16:10-11; 1 Corinthians 1:16).

The other members of Lydia's household may have included servants as well

as children. It is assumed, of course, that only those who truly had come to believe in Christ were baptized.

As is the case, however, the Lord may have reached whole families through the salvation of one of the members who shared the

Good News with the other family members. Lydia's sincerity and the genuineness of her conversion appear in her invitation to the missionaries to use her house as their home base while in Philippi. Lydia **urged** the travelers to stay at her home.

PAUL AND SILAS IN PRISON / 16:16-40

While in Philippi, Paul's missionary team encountered a demon-possessed slave girl who continually attempted to disrupt their ministry. When an exasperated Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out of her, the girl lost her fortune-telling ability

This infuriated her masters, who had Paul and Silas dragged before the city authorities and thrown in prison. God used an earthquake to free his servants and bring about the salvation of the Philippian jailer and his family.

The next day, after the city officials learned that they had unlawfully beaten and jailed two Roman citizens, they apologized and begged Paul and Silas to leave the city. They did so after a final visit with Lydia and the believers at her home.

Despite opposition, the gospel continued to spread powerfully to all the strata of society.

16:16 Luke continued his firsthand account of the events in Philippi with the word **we**. The **place of prayer** by the river continued as the spot where Paul and his companions would meet on a regular basis were many contacts, but Luke chose to describe only two others.

The next recorded contact by Paul came from a significantly different level of society. This verse describes the missionaries meeting a **slave girl**. Worse still, she was **demon-possessed** (see commentary on 5:15-16 for more on demon possession).

Fortune-telling was common in Greek and Roman culture. People used many superstitious methods for trying to see the future—from interpreting omens in nature to communicating with the spirits of the dead. This young slave girl had an evil spirit, and she made her masters rich by interpreting signs and by fortunetelling. **Her masters** were exploiting her unfortunate condition for personal gain.

16:17 What the slave girl said was true, although the source of her knowledge

was a demon.

Paul and his companions indeed were **servants of the Most High God** and, in fact, we're telling others **how to be saved**. Why did a demon announce the truth about Paul, and why did this annoy Paul? If Paul accepted the demon's words, he would appear to be linking the gospel with demon-related activities, not to mention the association would damage the message of Christ.

16:18-21 The young girl followed them every day as they made their way from Lydia's home to the place of prayer down by the river (or wherever else they went).

Finally, Paul got so exasperated that he directly rebuked **the demon** that was abusing the girl. Using the powerful **name of Jesus Christ**, Paul commanded the demon to depart. This angered her **masters** who had been using the servant girl and her demonic powers.

With cold heartlessness, they were not arguing about the young girl's cure but were infuriated that their business venture had been ruined. So, they **dragged** Paul and Silas **before the authorities at the marketplace**. The charge was not that they had performed an exorcism on a slave girl, but that these men were **Jews** and were **teaching the people to do things that are against Roman customs**.

These two government officials would be interested in keeping the peace (an important aspect of their job in a Roman colony) as well as enforcing the laws against foreign religions proselytizing Romans in a Roman colony.

They were interpreting the law to say that the exorcism was proselytizing Judaism. Thus, the accusations were effective.

16:22-24 the twisting of the truth by these accusers was effective enough to motivate **a mob** to assemble **quickly**. Wanting to keep the peace, the **city officials ordered** Paul and Silas to be **stripped and beaten with wooden rods**. Rods were wooden poles bound together and carried by these magistrates. This was not the only time that such had happened (or would happen) to Paul. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:25 that it happened three times

After being **severely beaten**, Paul and Silas were thrown in prison, and Luke subtly was ordered to **make sure they didn't escape**.

The stories of Christians mysteriously escaping from jail (12:3-17) or even of guards losing their lives (12:18-19) had made it as far as Philippi.

Whatever the case, the jailer imposed his version of maximum security—taking them to **the inner dungeon** and there fastening **their feet in the stocks**.

“Stocks” were made of two boards joined with iron clamps, leaving holes just big enough for the ankles. The prisoner’s legs were placed across the lower board, and then the upper board was closed over them. Sometimes both wrists and ankles were placed in stocks. Paul and Silas, who had committed no crime and were peaceful men, were put in stocks designed for holding the most dangerous prisoners in absolute security.

16:25 what an incredible scene this must have been! **Paul and Silas** were barely into their first stop on what promised to be a wildly effective Macedonian evangelistic campaign—God had verbally called them there (16:9-10).

In short order, however, they found themselves the victims of false and prejudicial charges, locked up in the depths of a Roman jail, in stocks! So what did they do? Moan? Whine? Blame God? Give up?

No, their jail term was marked by only two activities: **praying and singing hymns to God. The other prisoners were listening** as Paul and Silas sang and prayed.

The Greek word for “listening” is a strong word implying that the prisoners were listening intently. It is a reminder to all believers that the world is watching when they suffer.

There is intrigue, interest, and even openness to believers’ “answers” when they respond so unnaturally—so supernaturally—to difficulties.

How believers respond to their troubles can play a key role in how others will respond to the Savior.

16:26-28 The answer to the prayers of Paul and Silas came with suddenness and authority in the form of a **great earthquake**, shaking the **foundations** of the prison, bursting open doors, and breaking loose the **chains of every prisoner**. Guards were responsible for their prisoners and would be held accountable for their escape.

The punishment was usually the same sentence that would have been the prisoners. Sometimes the guards were even executed (see 12:19). To avoid a Roman execution or to avoid having to live with the shame of his career failure, the jailer **drew his sword to kill himself**.

Paul intervened, shouting, **“We are all here!”** Paul was not speaking of just himself and Silas but of all the prisoners. All the prisoners were still there, sitting in the wide open as Paul and Silas prayed and sang (16:25). They knew that the earthquake surely had something to do with the praying and singing of the two prisoners.

16:29-32 the jailer **called for lights** and torches lit the prison in the middle of the night. Once inside, the jailer **fell before Paul and Silas**. Then he **brought them out**, from the inner recesses where the stocks were located. He asked the question, the most profound and important question in life **“What must I do to be saved?”**

The serious object. It is a belief **on the Lord Jesus**. The result is that **you will be saved**. Paul and Silas **shared the word of the Lord** with the jailer’s **household**.

16:33-34 The jailer’s conversion, like Lydia’s, was followed by clear, demonstrated deeds reflecting the reality of the life-change that had occurred internally. The terms **that same hour** and **immediately** show that the new convert did not waste any time about changing his life or about making his public profession of allegiance to Jesus Christ through baptism

The **entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God**. Who in that household could ever have dreamed that one of their father’s prisoners, bound in chains, would one day bring a message that would set them all free from their sin?

16:35-36 what brought the **city officials** to the decision of freeing the prisoners is not stated. It was the way the officials had let the mob determine their actions.

It was the brutal nature of the punishment of two with so little evidence against authorities. Whatever the case, Paul, and Silas were told by the jailer, who had become a brother in Christ: **“You and Silas are free to leave.”**

16:37 that would not be the last word, however. Paul had often been unfairly treated, beaten, and stoned—all illegally considering his Roman citizenship. Yet here he chose to speak up. He may have wanted to give the new young church in Philippi some breathing room from the local authorities. The word would spread that Paul and Silas had been found innocent and freed by the leaders, expressing the truth that believers should not be persecuted—especially if they were **Roman citizens**, as

were Paul and Silas.

16:38-39 Roman citizenship had certain privileges. These Philippian authorities were alarmed because it was illegal to flog **Roman citizens**. In addition, every citizen had the right to a fair trial—which Paul and Silas had not been given. Roman citizens could travel throughout the Empire under Rome’s protection. They were not subject to local legislation or local legislators! No wonder the **city officials were alarmed** when they heard that Paul and Silas both were Roman citizens.

The officials’ jobs (and lives) were in jeopardy, in the very hands of the ones they had treated so unfairly. So they personally, politely, contritely **came to the jail and apologized to Paul and Silas**. Then **begged them to leave the city**.

16:40 Paul and Silas left the prison and **returned** to Lydia’s home. As had been their custom everywhere they had been, they spent time meeting with the new believers **and encouraged them** for a while longer before they took their message to the next city.

The book of Philippians stands as a testimony to the health of this first church in Europe. Lydia’s generosity and the jailer’s kindnesses exemplified the solid, spiritual character of the early days of the Philippian church.

Who could have known what their influence would be? A few years hence, when Paul was sitting out a trial in Rome, he would write them a note and, in it, commend them for supporting him (see Philippians 1:5, 7; 4:16-19).

Acts 17

Thessalonica was one of the wealthiest and most influential cities in Macedonia. This is the first city Paul visited where his teachings attracted a large group of socially prominent citizens. The church he planted grew quickly, but in A.D. 5051, Paul was forced out of the city by a mob (Acts 17:5-6, 10). Paul later sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the Christians were doing. Soon afterward, Paul wrote two letters to the Thessalonian believers (1 and 2 Thessalonians), encouraging them to remain faithful and to refuse to listen to false teachers who tried to refute their beliefs.

PAUL PREACHES IN THESSALONICA / 17:1-9

Leaving Luke in Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Timothy journeyed in a southwesterly direction along the Grecian coast, eventually arriving at Thessalonica. There Paul repeated his usual procedure: go first to the synagogue and preach to the Jews and God-fearing Greeks there. The response was typical—a revival among the Greeks, a riot at the hands of the Jewish leaders!

17:1 Thessalonica was about one hundred miles from Philippi, along the Egnatian Way toward Athens. **Amphipolis** was about thirty miles from Philippi, and **Apollonia**, an additional thirty miles. No record is given of any ministry occurring in these towns, though surely the missionaries would have taken every opportunity to speak about Christ.

Thessalonica was one of the wealthiest and most influential cities in Macedonia, with a population of over 200,000. This is the first city where Paul's teachings attracted a large group of socially prominent citizens. The Egnatian Way)— extending from Rome all the way to the Orient—went through Thessalonica

This highway, along with the city's thriving seaport, made Thessalonica one of the wealthiest and most flourishing trade centers in the Roman Empire.

Recognized as a free city, Thessalonica was allowed self-rule and was exempted from most of the restrictions placed by Rome on other cities in the Empire. With its international flavor, however, came many pagan religions and cultural influences that challenged the faith of the young Christians there.

After his ministry in Thessalonica, Paul would write two letters to the

Thessalonian believers (1 and 2 Thessalonians), encouraging them to remain faithful and to refuse to listen to false teachers who tried to refute their beliefs.

17:2-3 Paul spent **three Sabbaths** ministering to the Jews in the **synagogue**. This does not mean he spent only three weeks in Thessalonica. Paul was there for much longer (a time that occurred between 17:4 and 17:5). He had to have been there long enough to do everything mentioned in his letter to the Thessalonians, such as work at his trade (1 Thessalonians 2:7-9), win converts, instruct new believers in the Christian life (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2), and form a strong bond of love with these believers (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20).

Paul's letter to the Philippians indicates that he was in Thessalonica long enough to receive from the Philippians financial help "more than once" (Philippians 4:16).

17:4 the response at Thessalonica was typical of the response Paul had experienced from the beginning days of his missionary travels. **Some who listened were persuaded**, referring to Jews. In addition, **many godly Greek men** also joined, as well as **many important women**. These were influential women in the upper class (see 16:14; 17:12).

17:5 So far, Paul's ministry was following its usual course. The gospel was preached in the synagogues with the meager response from the Jews. The Gentiles, however, were responding in vast numbers (both worshipers in the synagogues and others). Then, as had been the custom, the **Jewish leaders** became **jealous** and set their sights on running these "heretics" out of town or worse. They **gathered some worthless fellows from the streets to form a mob and start a riot**.

They went to **the home of Jason**, an early Thessalonian convert who, like Lydia, had convinced the travelers to stay in his home. **17:6-7** the mob had not found Paul and Silas at Jason's house. Paul and Silas had been informed and had hurried away from the dangerous crowd. So the mob grabbed **Jason and some of the other believers** and brought them before the **city council**. Their accusations, like all good lies, bore some resemblance to the truth but were presented in their worst light. Paul and Silas were not **guilty of treason against Caesar** just because they declared allegiance to the King of kings, for Christ's Kingdom is of an entirely different sort

than Caesar's was. **17:8-9** the manipulative accusations threw **the city officials** and **the people** into **turmoil**.

Because there was no substantive case, however, and because **Jason and the other believers** had done little more than house the accused, they were **released** after posting **bail**, cash for their freedom. In Paul's first letter to this church, his statement about Satan blocking a future trip (1 Thessalonians 2:18) may refer to the events described here.

PAUL AND SILAS IN BEREIA / 17:10-15

God continued to use persecution and opposition to spread the good news of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ. The uproar in Thessalonica forced Paul and Silas to journey to Berea, where they found a very teachable and receptive Greek audience. In a brief time, however, hostile Jews came from Thessalonica to attack Paul's in Berea.

But this succeeded only in getting the great evangelist to Athens!

17:10-12 Paul and Silas had been in hiding from the riot in Thessalonica, and then went on **to Berea**. There they would begin again in the **synagogue**.

Berea was about forty-five miles south of Thessalonica. The people of Berea **were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica**. The Greek word for "open-minded" is meaning "noble" or "generous—free from prejudice." Instead of hurling attacks, **they listened eagerly to Paul's message**.

Instead of forming a mob to run the missionaries out of town, they **searched the Scriptures day after day** to confirm whether Paul and Silas were **teaching the truth**. Here, in contrast to so many cities before, **many Jews believed**, as well as **prominent Greek women and many men**.

See 17:4 for comparison with prominent people in Thessalonica. God honored the fact that these leading men and women of the city were searching for the truth.

17:13 what began as a wonderful situation did not last, however. Though there appeared to be no trouble at all from the Berean Jews, trouble followed Paul from **Thessalonica**.

When the Jews there heard of Paul's ministry **in Berea**, they **went there** to stir up trouble.

17:14-15 Again, **the believers** rushed to protect Paul, sending him **on to the**

coast.

Fortunately, the gospel message was so identified with Paul that it caused most of the Jewish anger to be directed at him, leaving his traveling companions more freedom to build up the churches. Thus, **Silas and Timothy** were able to stay **behind** in Berea. Those who were **escorting Paul** took him **to Athens**. He instructed them to tell **Silas and Timothy to hurry and join him**.

PAUL PREACHES IN ATHENS / 17:16-34

Paul's brief stay in Athens is a remarkable case study in the universality of the gospel. This chapter deals with the preliminary stages of Paul's second missionary journey. He and his fellow travelers worked their way down the peninsula of modern-day Greece.

Luke recorded Paul's message to the idol-worshiping academicians at Athens at length. That message revealed Paul's God-led wisdom for dealing with those who knew little about the true God but who felt very secure in their intellectual abilities.

17:16 what can be viewed today in Athens as wonderful works of art and architecture were, in their day, the worshipful expression of a culture steeped in godless idolatry. Athens was named after the goddess Athena, and there were temples in Athens for all the gods in the Greek pantheon. Paul was **deeply troubled** by all the idolatry he saw **everywhere in the city**.

Athens, with its magnificent buildings and many gods, was a center for Greek culture, philosophy, and education. Philosophers and educated people were always ready to hear something new—thus their openness to hearing Paul speak at their meeting in the Areopagus (17:18-19).

Athens had been the political, educational, and philosophical center of the world in its prime, the home of men such as Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno. But that was four hundred years before Paul's visit.

When Paul arrived, it was a small town (ten thousand or so residents), reliving the glory days and filled with intellectuals spending their days philosophizing.

17:17 Paul had a balanced and adaptive approach to his ministry in Athens. In **the synagogue**, he debated with the Jews and worshiping Gentiles, using the

arguments recorded at other places in the book of Acts (for example, 13:16-41), seeking to prove to them that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.

Between his Sabbath debates with the worshipers in the synagogues, however, Paul **spoke daily in the public square** (the agora, which was the central marketplace) to whoever would listen.

17:18 The **Epicurean** philosophers, followers of Epicurus (341–270 B.C.), believed that the chief purpose for living was pleasure and happiness.

If God existed, he didn't interfere in human affairs. Epicureans are like modern-day materialists and hedonists. The **Stoic** philosophers were followers of Zeno (320–263 B.C.), who taught on a porch or patio called the name "Stoics." The Stoics were pantheistic and felt that a great "purpose" was directing history. responsibility was to align themselves with that purpose through duty and self-discipline. This, quite logically, led to pride and self-sufficiency ("I am the master of my fate!").

These philosophers characterized Paul's arguments as "babbling." In the same way that a bird collects seeds, or a junk collector gathers trash, Paul was accused of collecting little pieces of knowledge that wouldn't take him anywhere. They were saying that his ideas were not as well thought through or as valid as theirs.

Others of these philosophers recognized in Paul's teaching **about Jesus and his resurrection** that he was **pushing some foreign religion**.

17:19-20 Paul's dialogue in the marketplace led to an invitation to address the **Council of Philosophers**, also known as the **Areopagus**, which had been the judicial and legislative seat of government of Athens. By Paul's time, however, their responsibilities involved little more than overseeing certain areas of religion and education.

The word "know" will surface a good deal in the verses that follow. Here the descendants of the most influential thinkers in Western civilization, who had been on a centuries-long quest for knowledge, were given an opportunity to receive the ultimate knowledge about God entering humanity to redeem fallen humanity and put them in a position to know the person of Jesus Christ.

17:21 Luke parenthetically explained this predisposition of the **Athenians** and many who were residing there (**foreigners**) to spend days at a time **discussing the**

latest ideas. These were highbrow intellectuals, who loved to hear and discuss the latest fads in philosophy and theology. The picture is that they rarely actually did anything they discussed; they just enjoyed tossing around ideas.

17:22-23 Paul was well prepared to speak to this group. He came from Tarsus, an educational center, and had the training and knowledge to present his beliefs clearly and persuasively. Paul was a rabbi, taught by the finest scholar of his day, Gamaliel, and he had spent much of his life thinking and reasoning through the Scriptures.

Luke recorded this sermon in more detail than many of the others, as a sample of how Paul addressed the typical lost, intellectual Greek.

Rather than arguing the Scriptures as he would with a Jewish audience, he adapted his message and backed up a step or two to speak of a Creator; then he moved toward speaking about a Savior and Judge.

Paul began his address by affirming the **religious** nature of his audience by explaining what he had seen in their city. He chose a starting point, a place where they could agree, rather than starting with their differences. The Athenians had built an idol to **an Unknown God** for fear of missing blessings or receiving punishment.

Some (believed all nature was god), so it would be natural for them to build an altar, superstitious that they might have overlooked a god. Archaeological finds have shown many such altars with the inscription, “to the unknown god(s).”

Paul’s opening statement to the men of Athens was about their “unknown god. Paul was not endorsing this god but using the inscription as a point of entry for his witness to the one true God.

17:24-27 The central body of Paul’s speech is a presentation of God as the Creator, **who made the world and everything in it.**

This Creator **doesn’t live in man-made temples**, even spectacular wonder-of-the-world Greek structures like the one a few hundred yards up the hill from where they sat on the Acropolis.

God does not need anything from humans since **he has no needs.** From the universal characteristics of the Creator God, Paul moved to the more specific Judeo-Christian claims that God created all life and all nations **from one man.**

This would rub proud Greeks the wrong way since they believed themselves to be racially superior to all other nations (whom they called “barbarians”). This

“unknown god” is not only knowable, **he is near to any person.**

This contrasted with the Greek gods, which lived in seclusion and could not be approached. The need that motivated the construction of an altar “To an Unknown God” (17:23) could be realized in Christ, for he was extremely near and available—to be known!

17:28 To illustrate and support his point, Paul quoted first from Epimenides, a Cretan poet from 600 B.C. (whom he also quoted in Titus 1:12): **In him, we live and move and exist.**

The next quote is from Aratus (a Stoic poet from Cilicia, 315–240 B.C.) in a line from his work **Phainomena: We are his offspring.** Both statements from well-known and accepted literary sources of the day served Paul’s purpose well in arguing for the fact that the creation and sustaining of life was in the hands of the one God whom they did not know but who was near and very knowable.

The sense of humanity, being God’s “offspring” means that all receive life and breath from him.

17:29-30 Paul began to wrap up his message, building this statement on all that he had presented thus far and gently correcting where the Greeks had been incorrect: **And since this is true,** they needed to make some changes. Their thinking had been incorrect. They should not **think of God as an idol** who could be constructed by human hands.

God is profoundly bigger than any idol.

Also, the Athenians had to understand that although God had **overlooked people’s former ignorance** (not in the sense that he condoned it but that he had not yet judged it—see Acts 14:16; Romans 3:25).

They would do well to hear it and respond. Whatever the nature and consequences of their former failure to respond to God, it was nothing compared to ignoring what was being offered in the finished work of Christ.

17:31 Paul confronted his listeners with Jesus’ resurrection and its meaning to all people—either blessing or punishment. The Greeks had no concept of judgment. Most of them preferred worshiping many gods instead of just one. And though their gods became angry from time to time, there was no real accountability in the way that Paul was presenting.

God **has set a day for judging the world**, however, and the judge had been selected. All judgment had been given to the one who was raised **from the dead**—Jesus Christ (see John 5:22)—the one Paul had been proclaiming in Athens since the day he had arrived (see 17:18).

To the Greek mind, the concept of resurrection was unbelievable and offensive, but on this issue, the whole gospel hinged (1 Corinthians 15:13-14). Although Paul knew it would offend their precious philosophies, he did not hold back the truth.

Paul often would change his approach to fit his audience, as he did with this one, but he never would change his basic message.

17:32 The mention of **the resurrection** would, of course, draw an immediate reaction from this group of intellectuals. **Some laughed**, yet there were others who seemed intrigued and asked if they could **hear more about this later**. The latter group may simply have been patronizing this fellow scholar and visiting lecturer. Paul's speech was not in vain, however, as the next verse shows.

17:33-34 Though the discussion had ended with a few sneers and a polite invitation to return, Paul's time had not been wasted. **Some joined him and became believers**, one of them even a **Council member** named **Dionysius**. Only one other convert is named, **a woman named Damaris**, though we are told there were **others**.

Although there is no record of a church being founded in Athens and Paul soon moved on to Corinth (chapter 18), his visit to Athens was not a failure. The responsibility of the messenger is to present the message, and Paul certainly did that (and did so brilliantly). The fruit was God's responsibility.

Chapter 2

Acts 18

Corinth was the political and commercial center of Greece, surpassing Athens in importance. It had a reputation for great wickedness and immorality. A temple to Aphrodite—goddess of love and war—had been built on the large hill behind the city. In this popular religion, people worshiped the goddess by giving money to the temple and taking part in sexual acts with male and female temple prostitutes. Paul found Corinth a challenge and a great ministry opportunity.

PAUL MEETS PRISCILLA AND AQUILA IN CORINTH / 18:1-17

The spread of the gospel requires a team effort by individuals with different gifts. In Corinth, Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple (and fellow tentmakers) who proved to be faithful partners in the gospel (see Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19).

Paul's ministry in this decadent city was long and fruitful (18:11). Not even a concerted effort by the Jews could stop him from teaching the word.

18:1 Ancient **Corinth** had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C., but it had been rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. because of its strategic seaport. By Paul's day (A.D. 50), the Romans had made Corinth the capital of Achaia (present-day Greece). Only fifty miles from Athens, Corinth by this time was regarded as the most influential city of Greece.

The population was about 650,000—250,000 free citizens and 400,000 slaves. Corinth was a major center of commerce. Located on a narrow strip of land near two bustling seaports, and at a busy crossroads for land travelers and traders, the city was wealthy and very materialistic. Corinth was a center of culture. Though not a university town like Athens, there was great interest in Greek philosophy and wisdom.

The city was permeated with religion—at least twelve temples were located there. The most infamous of these temples was dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and featured one thousand “sacred” prostitutes. Another temple, dedicated to Apollo, employed young men whose job was to fulfill the sexual desires of male and female worshipers. Due to this fact, the city was notorious for its immorality.

So brazen was the unbridled licentiousness that a new Greek verb was

eventually coined: to “Corinthianize” meant to practice sexual immorality. When Plato referred to a prostitute, he used the expression “Corinthian girl.”

From a human point of view, Corinth was not the type of place where one would expect to launch a thriving ministry, but Paul didn’t view things from an earthly perspective. He saw Corinth as both a challenge and a great ministry opportunity. Later he would write a series of letters to the Corinthians dealing in large part with the problems of immorality. First and Second Corinthians are two of those letters.

18:2-3 Aquila and Priscilla had just been expelled from Rome by Claudius Caesar’s order. Trained as tentmakers, Aquila and Priscilla had packed up the tools of their trade and had made their way to Corinth. There they met Paul, who joined them in the business of tent making.

Jewish boys were expected to learn trades from which they could earn their living, so Paul learned tent making. Tents were much in demand because they were used throughout the Empire to house soldiers. Tentmakers also made canopies and other leather goods. It is highly likely, therefore, that the Roman army was a major purchaser of Paul’s tents.

As a tentmaker, Paul had a transportable livelihood that he could carry with him wherever God led him. Since ancient craftsmen did not compete as merchants do today but formed cooperative trade guilds and often lived near, it is not surprising that Paul and Aquila worked together. Because many of the trade guilds had adopted pagan practices, two God-fearing artisans would have been delighted to work together.

Paul chose to work to support himself during his stay in Corinth. The presence of so many religious promoters in Corinth may have added an incentive for Paul to earn his own living. Paul wanted to disassociate himself from those teachers who taught only for money.

As Paul lived with Priscilla and Aquila, he must have shared with them his wealth of spiritual wisdom. They were already believers (or else Luke, it seems, would have mentioned their conversion). They had embraced the gospel through the ministry of the Roman natives who had been in Jerusalem at Pentecost (see 2:10). They may even have been founding members of the church of Rome.

18:4 Paul never veered from this ministry philosophy. Because of his great burden for his lost Jewish brothers (see Romans 9:2-3), Paul would go **each Sabbath**

to the **synagogue** (9:20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:19; 19:8). There he would speak to both **Jews and Greeks** (Gentiles who had converted to Judaism).

18:5 Upon the arrival of his colleagues, Paul was able to set aside his tentmaking and devote himself to **full time preaching**. **Silas and Timothy** must have brought with them a financial gift from the believers in Macedonia (see Philippians 4:15). They also brought a good word about the perseverance of the believers in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:6-8). Paul must have been encouraged by all these factors.

18:6 Some **Jews** in Paul's audience **opposed** and **insulted** Paul. That he **shook the dust from his robe** was a dramatic gesture separating him from even the dust found in such a rebellious synagogue. His pointed statement,

“Your blood be upon your own heads!” is a reference to the Jews' own responsibility for their eventual spiritual destruction and suggests the sobering warning of Ezekiel 33:4. Paul was telling the Jews that he had done all he could for them. Because they continued to reject Jesus as their Messiah, he would turn his attention **to the Gentiles**, who would prove to be more receptive.

18:7-8 The home of **Titius Justus** became Paul's base of operations, and its proximity to the synagogue gave the apostle convenient and ongoing contact with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks. As the synagogue **leader**, **Crispus** would have been responsible for maintenance of the synagogue complex and the services held there. Such a position would have made him a prominent and well-to-do person in the community.

Thus, his conversion (and that of his household) was a significant breakthrough for the church.

18:9-11 The conversions of Crispus and other Corinthians (18:7-8), together with the formation of a growing “house church” right next door to the synagogue, must have provoked great controversy and opposition. But in contrast to his treatment elsewhere (see 17:5, 13), **no one** would **harm** Paul—he would not endure bodily harm during this time in Corinth. Because of this divine word of assurance, Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth preaching and teaching. During that **year and a half**, Paul established a church and wrote two letters to the believers in

Thessalonica (1 and 2 Thessalonians).

18:12-13 God's promise was that Paul would not be personally harmed (18:9); this guarantee did not preclude an attack on his ministry. In time, the **Jews** would successfully manage to have Paul charged with promoting a religion not approved by Roman **law**. Such behavior amounted to treason. But Paul was not encouraging obedience to a human king other than Caesar (see 17:7), nor was he speaking against the Roman Empire. Instead, he was speaking about Christ's eternal Kingdom.

This sequence of events took place when **Gallio**, the brother of Seneca the philosopher, was **governor of Achaia** (modern Greece). He had come to power in A.D. 51-52, and he enjoyed a good reputation among his people as a pleasant man.

18:14-15 This was an important judicial decision for the spread of the gospel in the Roman Empire. Judaism was a recognized religion under Roman law.

If Christians were a sect within Judaism, the court could **refuse** to hear cases brought against them. Gallio's decision proved to be extremely beneficial for the emerging Christian church for the next ten years. His ruling became a legal precedent used in Paul's trial in Rome. If Gallio had found Paul guilty, every governor in every province where Paul or other missionaries traveled could arrest the Christians. By not ruling against Paul, the Romans were including Christianity (as a sect of Judaism) as one of the legal religions (*religio licita*) of the Roman Empire. Gallio, in effect, helped spread the gospel throughout the Empire.

18:16-17 The fact that Gallio had Paul's Jewish accusers driven **out of the courtroom**, rather than merely sent away, reveals his irritation with what he felt were petty, trumped-up charges. The gathered crowd, however, became unruly and erupted in violence.

This **mob** may have been Greeks venting their feelings against the Jews for causing turmoil, or it may have included some Jews. If the latter is true, **Sosthenes**, the newly designated **leader of the synagogue** (after the conversion of Crispus, see 18:8) became the focal point of the mob's anger and frustration probably because he was the one responsible for losing the case against Paul and leaving the synagogue worse off than before. A man named Sosthenes is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1, and this may be the same man. If so, he would later become a convert and a companion of Paul.

PAUL RETURNS TO ANTIOCH OF SYRIA / 18:18-23

Leaving Corinth, Paul set sail for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila. He made a brief stop in Ephesus, leaving his faithful colleagues there, and hoping to return later. From there he continued in a southeastward direction to Caesarea, where he visited the church at Jerusalem to report on his activity. Then he traveled north to Antioch. This marked the end of Paul's second missionary journey.

18:18 Following the failure of the Jewish plot against him, Paul continued ministering in **Corinth**. The **vow** Paul took at **Cenchrea** (the seaport for the city of Corinth) may have been a temporary Nazirite vow, which would end with shaving the head and offering the hair as a sacrifice (Numbers 6:18). Or it could have been a personal vow of thanksgiving, offered considering God's providential protection while in Corinth. **Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila** then **sailed for the coast of Syria** and Paul's sending church.

18:19-21 Arriving at **Ephesus**, the missionary team disembarked. Paul paid a quick visit to the Jewish synagogue, but Priscilla and Aquila settled in Ephesus (18:23- 28). Though the **Jews** were receptive to Paul's message, he felt a pressing need to return to Antioch. A few ancient manuscripts imply that Paul was also eager to arrive in Jerusalem in time to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. If this is accurate, Paul wanted to take advantage of the evangelistic opportunities presented by such a gathering of devout Jews. He promised to return to them, "**God willing**" (see James 4:15).

18:22 With the five-hundred-mile voyage from Ephesus completed, Paul went to **Jerusalem**, then to **Antioch**. Having been away from Antioch of Syria for some two years, Paul had much good news to report to his fellow believers. This verse marks the end of Paul's second missionary journey.

18:23 This verse marks the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey, which lasted from A.D. 53 to 57. Leaving the church at **Antioch**, Paul headed toward Ephesus, but along the way, he revisited the churches in **Galatia and Phrygia**. The heart of this trip was a lengthy stay (two to three years) in Ephesus. Before returning to Jerusalem, Paul also visited believers in Macedonia and Greece. As Paul set out,

one of his priorities was **helping** the believers **to grow**. Such was Paul's regular practice—to keep checking up on those he had led to Christ and the churches he had founded.

APOLLOS INSTRUCTED AT EPHESUS / 18:24-28

Left in Ephesus by Paul, Priscilla and Aquila met a gifted speaker named Apollos, who had a great passion for Christ but an incomplete knowledge of the gospel. Equipping him with a more accurate message, they sent him on to Achaia, where he was used powerfully by God. This small investment in one life by the faithful Priscilla and Aquila resulted in enormous eternal dividends!

18:24 From **Alexandria**, the second most influential city in the Roman Empire, there came a **Jew named Apollos**. Growing up in that Egyptian city's university atmosphere, Apollos was highly cultured and trained in philosophy and rhetoric. As a Jew, he also **knew the Scriptures well**. It is not stated what prompted him to move to **Ephesus**.

18:25 Apollos was an eloquent and powerful speaker. He had an accurate though incomplete message. While he had knowledge of the Old Testament, he **knew only about John's baptism** (referring to John the Baptist). Likely, Apollos's preaching was a more polished version of John's message: "Turn from your sins and turn to God" (Matthew 3:2).

John had focused on repentance from sin and on water baptism as an outward sign of commitment to and preparation for the Messiah's Kingdom. Apollos was urging people in a more eloquent fashion to do the same. Apollos needed to get the entire picture, and then he would be a powerful witness for Christ.

18:26 The eloquent, fiery young man who was so ably interpreting and applying the Old Testament Messianic Scriptures in the synagogue was quickly noticed by **Priscilla and Aquila**. Upon hearing Apollos preach, they immediately recognized the deficiencies in his message. Consequently, they **took him aside** (to their home) and **explained the way of God more accurately**, telling him about the life of Jesus, his death and resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

As Aquila and Priscilla set forth the historical facts of the gospel, Apollos must have seen many Old Testament prophecies become clear. The reports of his subsequent ministry suggest that he was filled with new energy and boldness after

he received the complete gospel message.

18:27 With his more complete theology, Apollos, who **had been thinking about going to Achaia**, was encouraged to do so by **the Christians in Ephesus**. They sent along a glowing letter of introduction, asking the **believers in Achaia to welcome him**. He quickly became the verbal champion of the Christians in Achaia (Corinth), debating the opponents of the gospel in public. Read what Paul says of Apollos's impact in 1 Corinthians 4:1, 6.

18:28 Apollos proved to be a master debater. His arguments for the messiahship of Jesus were so powerful and logical that the Jews could not oppose him. His reputation spread far and wide (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4-6; 4:6), and Paul came to view him as a trustworthy coworker in the gospel (1 Corinthians 16:12; Titus 3:13).

Chapter 3

Acts 19 – 20

Ephesus was the capital and leading business center of the Roman province of Asia (part of present-day Turkey). A hub of sea and land transportation, it ranked with Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt as one of the great cities on the Mediterranean Sea. Paul stayed in Ephesus for a little over two years. There he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians to counter several problems the church in Corinth was facing. Later, while imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote a letter to the Ephesian church (the book of Ephesians).

Chapter 19

PAUL’S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY / 19:1-7

After the parenthetical story of Apollos, Luke continued his record of Paul’s third missionary journey, begun in 18:23. Evidence from Paul’s epistles suggests the great apostle launched out on his third missionary trip to undo the damage caused among the churches by numerous opponents of the gospel.

Beginning at Antioch, Paul journeyed in a northwesterly direction through Galatia and Phrygia (18:23), eventually coming to Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor.

19:1 Paul traveled an interior road across Asia Minor, arriving in **Ephesus**, a hub of sea and land transportation, ranking with Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt as one of the great cities on the Mediterranean Sea. The population of Ephesus during the first century may have reached 250,000. The temple to the Greek goddess Artemis (Diana is her Roman equivalent) was located there.

The worship of Artemis was also a great financial boon to the area because it brought tourists, festivals, and trade. Upon his arrival, he promptly found a group of **several believers**.

Paul would stay in Ephesus for about three years. Ephesus had great wealth and power as a center for trade. It was a strategic location from which to influence all of Asia. From Ephesus, he would write his first letter to the Corinthians to counter several problems that the church in Corinth was facing. Later, while imprisoned in

Rome, Paul would write a letter to the Ephesian church (the book of Ephesians).

19:2 Paul's question to this group of Ephesian men underlines the truth that apart from the **Holy Spirit**, there is no salvation (Romans 8:9, 16; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13). The Spirit is the one who imparts life (John 3:5). The men were unaware that the time of the Spirit's outpouring had come at last. Whatever the case, like Apollos (18:24-26), these men needed further instruction on the message and ministry of Jesus Christ.

19:3-4 John's **baptism** was a sign of turning **from sin** only (Matthew 3:2, 6, 8, 11; Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:8), not a sign of new life in Christ. John's ministry had been preparatory. His baptism had anticipated something greater, pointing forward, toward **Jesus**, the fulfillment of all things.

After the adequate explanation, these men **were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus**. Given Paul's remarks in 1 Corinthians 1:14-17, it may be that an unnamed associate of Paul performed this ceremony. This is the only place in the New Testament where we find an instance of rebaptism.

19:6-7 When Paul laid his hands on these **twelve** disciples (either to greet them as brothers or as a final part of the baptism rite), **the Holy Spirit came on them** in a similar fashion as at Pentecost. Pentecost was the formal outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the then mostly Jewish church, and it included outward, visible signs of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Similar supernatural manifestations had occurred when the Holy Spirit first had come on Gentiles (see 10:45-47). The other outpourings in the book of Acts were God's way of uniting other (mostly Gentile) believers in the church. The mark of the true church is not merely right doctrine but the right actions, the true evidence of the Holy Spirit's work.

In Acts, believers received the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways. Usually, the Holy Spirit would fill a person as soon as he or she professed faith in Christ. Here that filling happened later because these believers had not fully trusted in Christ as Savior. God was confirming to these believers, who did not initially know about the Holy Spirit, that they were a part of the church. The Holy Spirit's supernatural filling endorsed them as believers and showed the other members of the group that Christ was the only way.

What was the significance of the speaking in **tongues** among these Ephesian

men? To show that Paul had the same apostolic authority as did Peter to bestow the Spirit (see chapters 2 and 8). In any event, this is the final recorded instance of speaking in tongues in the book of Acts.

To interpret (and apply) the work of the Holy Spirit in Acts, believers must remember several truths.

First, Acts is a book of transitions—documenting the end of the “old covenant” age of Israel and the law and the beginning of the “new covenant” age of the church and grace.

Second, Acts is a history book that describes what did happen, not necessarily a doctrinal manual intended to prescribe what is supposed to happen.

Third, there really is no set pattern for the reception of the Spirit in Acts. Sometimes people received the Spirit at baptism (2:38; 8:38), sometimes after baptism (8:15), and sometimes before baptism (10:47).

The instances of tongues-speaking in Acts are erratic, not the general rule (see 2:4; 10:44-46; cf. 8:39; 13:52; 16:34). In Acts, Luke was primarily describing the spread of the gospel and its inclusiveness. In the epistles, the apostolic witnesses presented a more comprehensive doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

PAUL MINISTERS IN EPHESUS / 19:8-20

Paul was making good on a promise. He had paid an earlier visit to this synagogue in Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey, while on his way back to Antioch and Jerusalem (18:19-21). Though his visit had been brief, he had found a receptive group of Jews and had pledged to return at the first opportunity. Paul’s ministry in Ephesus lasted more than two years and was marked by an obvious movement of God’s Spirit.

19:8-9 Given Paul’s volatile history with the Jews (and his blunt preaching about Jesus as Messiah), it is surprising that he was able to minister at the synagogue for **three months** before the Jews **publicly spoke against the Way** (a common name for early Christianity—see 9:2; 19:23; 24:14).

Consequently, Paul moved his ministry to a nearby **lecture hall** (school). Such halls were used in the morning for teaching philosophy, but they were empty during the hot part of the day (about 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.). Because many people did not work during those hours, they would come to hear Paul’s preaching.

19:10 Paul faithfully labored in Ephesus. His lectures were “daily” (19:9) and continued **for the next two years**. These were two of the most fruitful years for the expanding church. **The province of Asia** refers to Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey. During this time, spiritually hungry Asians must have traveled to Ephesus to hear Paul speak.

19:11-12 Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was accompanied by **unusual miracles**— long-distance healings as well as exorcisms. The miracles had a threefold purpose:

- (1) to demonstrate God’s ultimate power and authority (in a city where Satan had a stronghold; see 19:18-19);
- (2) to authenticate Paul as an apostle and a spokesman for the one true God (Mark 16:20; Romans 15:18-19; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Hebrews 2:1-4); and
- (3) most obviously, to demonstrate compassion and mercy to those in great need.

19:13-14 This **team of Jews** was making a living by claiming to heal and drive out demons. This was a common occurrence in Israel (see Luke 11:19). Often such people would recite a list of names in their incantation to be sure of including the right deity. Here they were trying to use Jesus’ name to match Paul’s power.

Many Ephesians engaged in exorcism and occult practices for profit (see 19:18-19). The **sons of Sceva** were impressed by Paul’s work, obviously more powerful than their own. But they failed to see that Paul’s power to drive out demons came from God’s Holy Spirit, not from incantations and magic formulas. These men were calling on the name of Jesus without knowing him personally.

19:15-17 The self-proclaimed exorcists were so overpowered by one **evil spirit** in a man that they all were **attacked** and **severely injured**. Eventually, they fled for their lives, feeling fortunate that they had lost only their clothes. Here is a clear incident that demonstrates the truth that knowing about Jesus is different from knowing him. The surprising knowledge and great strength of a demon-possessed person is recorded in other places (Luke 4:33; 8:28).

The report of the encounter between the sons of Sceva and the evil spirit spread quickly throughout the area. The **name of the Lord Jesus** came to be viewed as the most powerful name and not one to be taken lightly.

19:18-20 Ephesus was a center for black magic and other occult practices.

Superstition and sorcery were commonplace.

Many of the Ephesian converts had been involved in these dark arts. However, the demonstrated power of the name of Jesus over evil spirits became the impetus for a spiritual spring cleaning in the lives of many of the new believers in Ephesus. Specifically, they renounced their fascination with all occult practices. Then, taking the remnants of their pagan pasts, they **brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire**. Making a clean break with sin was costly—the magic books alone were worth **several million dollars**.

THE RIOT IN EPHEBUS / 19:21-41

In the great cosmic conflict for the souls of men, every intrusion of good is met by the fierce resistance of evil. Such was the case in Ephesus.

A silversmith named Demetrius, who manufactured small idols of the Greek goddess Artemis, became alarmed by the mass conversion of Ephesians to Christianity. Gathering his fellow tradesmen, he convinced them that Paul and his message were a serious threat to their livelihood.

19:21-22 Wherever Paul went, he could see the influence of **Rome**. Paul wanted to take the message of Christ to the world's center of influence and power. Paul had already decided to depart from Ephesus before the trouble recorded in 19:23-41 broke out. But **he stayed a while longer**, sending **Timothy and Erastus** ahead to do advance work in **Macedonia**.

19:23-24 Artemis was a **goddess** of fertility. She was represented by a carved female figure with many breasts. A large statue of Artemis (see 19:35) was in the great temple at Ephesus. That temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Supported by 127 pillars each six stories tall, the edifice was about four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. The religious and commercial life of Ephesus reflected the city's worship of this pagan deity.

After a period of relative peace and steady growth for the Ephesian church, the gospel became offensive and intolerable to the city's **craftsmen** because it was undermining their ability to sell silver idols of Artemis. Converts to Christianity were no longer buying these products. Consequently, for economic and religious reasons, **the Way** (a reference to those who followed Christ) came under scrutiny,

suspicion, and eventually attack. **Demetrius**, a prominent member of the silversmiths' guild, was the instigator of this trouble.

19:25-26 In the first century, craftsmen united with one another to form professional trade guilds. Like modern-day unions, these groups adhered to self-prescribed standards and practices. In this instance, Demetrius, the leader of this powerful guild, gathered not only the silversmiths who produced the miniature images of Artemis for sale at the temple but also **others employed in related trades**. (Archaeologists have also located images of the goddess made from terra-cotta and gold.)

During the months that Paul had preached in Ephesus, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen had not quarreled with his doctrine. They only became concerned when his preaching threatened their profits. Because they derived major income from making and selling silver statues of the Ephesian goddess Artemis, the craftsmen knew their livelihood would suffer if people started believing in Jesus and discarding the **handmade gods**.

19:27 Demetrius's strategy for stirring up a riot was to appeal to his fellow workmen's love of money and then to encourage them to hide their greed behind the mask of patriotism and religious loyalty. It would be difficult to get Ephesian citizens worked up about the slumping sales of a group of idol makers. However, it would be easy to rally the masses behind a noble campaign to defend the **prestige** of the **goddess** and her magnificent shrine.

19:28-29 The ploy of Demetrius worked perfectly. In short order, the gathered crowd **boiled** with anger at the Christians in their city and the subversive message of the gospel. They began to cry out, "**Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!**" As the gathering became an unruly mob, they **rushed to the amphitheater**, to stage a large demonstration. Archaeologists have determined that this open-air auditorium, cut into the western slope of Mount Pion, could seat nearly twenty-five thousand people.

As the crowd rushed along, fueled by their fury, they managed to seize two of Paul's known **traveling companions—Gaius and Aristarchus**. (Aristarchus, a native of Thessalonica, would later accompany Paul on other journeys—see 20:3-4; 27:1-2; Gaius is not the same Gaius mentioned in Romans 16:23 or 1 Corinthians 1:14.)

19:30-31 Paul **wanted** to go to the theater, most likely to speak up and defend his companions but also to have the opportunity to preach to such a large crowd. But the other believers, fearing for his safety, wouldn't let Paul go. These **officials of the province** were the most prominent men of the province of Asia, responsible for the religious and political order of the region. Clearly, Paul's message had reached all levels of society, crossing all social barriers, and giving Paul **friends** in high places.

Out of a dual concern for both public order and the well-being of their Jewish Christian friend, these powerful authorities begged Paul **not to risk his life by entering the amphitheater**.

19:32 Luke's observations about many in the rioting crowd not even knowing **why they were there** would have brought a chuckle to his original readers, for Greek playwrights and authors mocked human foibles. Irony and parody were common elements in Greek comedy. The scene in the theater was one of total **confusion**.

19:33-34 This **Alexander** may have been pushed forward by the **Jews** as a spokesperson to explain that the Jews were distinct from the new religion that was causing economic problems for the silversmiths. An uninformed mob might vent their anger on the Jews since they were well known for their monotheistic refusal to believe in pagan deities like Artemis. But the attempt was futile. The gathering had become anti-Jewish as well as anti-Christian. Reasoning with a hysterical mob that has whipped itself into a frenzy is impossible. They shouted down Alexander by chanting, "**Great is Artemis of the Ephesians,**" and keeping it up **for two hours!**

19:35-36 Into the chaos stepped **the mayor** of Ephesus. Perhaps fearing Roman reprisal—specifically, the suspension of Ephesus's privileges as a "free" city with its own elected assembly—this respected leader somehow managed to get the attention of the angry mob. The mention of the **image** that **fell** to the Ephesians **from heaven** was likely a reference to a meteorite that was regarded as divine and placed in the Ephesian temple for the purposes of veneration. The presence of this mysterious object from above was considered proof that Artemis was a great and powerful goddess. In short, the mayor's argument was that the citizenry need not (for religious reasons) fear the intrusion of Christianity and should not (for political purposes) degenerate into incivility and disorder. Law and order, he was suggesting, should prevail in this instance.

19:37-39 With the crowd quiet and under some semblance of emotional control, the mayor briefly reiterated the facts of the case involving the Christians. First, they had **stolen nothing from the temple**, nor had they **spoken against the goddess**. Given that, if this was a conflict involving economic matters, Ephesus had an adequate legal system through which personal grievances could be addressed. Consequently, the mayor urged **Demetrius and the craftsmen** to pursue their dispute with the Christians **through legal channels**.

19:40-41 The city of Ephesus was under the domination of the Roman Empire. The main responsibility of the local city leaders was simply to maintain peace and order. If they failed to control the people, Rome would remove the appointed officials from office. The entire town could also be put under martial law, taking away many civic freedoms. The mayor's straightforward reminder must have had a sobering effect on the Ephesian populace, for they **dispersed**.

The riot in Ephesus convinced Paul that it was time to move on. But it also showed that the law still provided some protection for Christians as they challenged the worship of the goddess Artemis in the most idolatrous religion in Asia.

ACTS 20

While in Greece, Paul spent much of his time in Corinth. From there he wrote the letter to the Romans. Although Paul had not yet been to Rome, believers had already started a church there (Acts 2:10; Acts 18:2). Paul wrote to tell the church that he planned to visit the Roman believers. The letter to the Romans is a theological essay on the meaning of faith and salvation, an explanation of the relation between Jews and Gentiles in Christ, and a list of practical guidelines for the church. craftsmen had not quarreled with his doctrine.

They only became concerned when his preaching threatened their profits. Because they derived major income from making and selling silver statues of the Ephesian goddess Artemis, the craftsmen knew their livelihood would suffer if people started believing in Jesus and discarding the **handmade gods**.

PAUL GOES TO MACEDONIA AND GREECE / 20:1-6

This chapter records the conclusion of Paul's third missionary journey. Paul was heading for Jerusalem, intending to arrive before Pentecost. On the way, he took time in Troas to encourage the believers, then he had a tearful farewell with the elders of the church in Ephesus.

20:1 When **it** was over referred to the riot in Ephesus (19:26-41). Paul then **sent for the believers**, those he had been teaching in Ephesus for two years. After he **encouraged them**, he **left for Macedonia** to continue his ministry of encouragement.

20:2-3 Second Corinthians 2:12-13 and 7:5-7 give a few more details about this journey.

Second Corinthians was written somewhere during this part of the journey. On this trip Paul retraced many of his steps, revisiting many of the churches he had established on his second journey (see 16–18) and arriving in **Greece** (specifically Corinth), **where he stayed for three months**. From Corinth, Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. Although he had not yet been to Rome, believers had already started a church there (2:10; 18:2). Paul wrote to tell the Roman believers that he planned to visit them.

Paul's three-month stay was ended in typical fashion: a Jewish **plot** was **discovered** against the apostle, causing him to decide to **return through Macedonia** instead of sailing **back to Syria**.

20:4-5 This is an unusually complete listing of those who **were traveling with** Paul on this section of the journey. The company provided accountability. Paul was carrying the offering from the Asian churches for the suffering church at Jerusalem (see 2 Corinthians 8–9). Paul would not want the Jerusalem church to think he handled the money by himself, without others to account for it.

These men who were traveling with Paul also represented churches that Paul had started in Asia: (1) Galatia—**Gaius** and **Timothy**; (2) Asia—**Tychicus** and **Trophimus**; (3) Macedonia—**Sopater, Aristarchus,** and **Secundus**. Having the men deliver the gifts to Jerusalem gave the gifts a distinctive touch and strengthened the unity of the universal church.

This was also an effective way to teach the church about giving because the men were able to report back to their churches the ways in which God was working through their giving. Paul discussed this gift in one of his letters to the Corinthian church (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-21).

20:6 The **Passover** was here a calendar marker, telling when all these things occurred. The use of **we** shows that Luke again had joined the group. The last “we” section was 16:10-40.

PAUL'S FINAL VISIT TO TROAS / 20:7-12

In Troas, the believers gathered on Sunday, and Paul preached a lengthy, late-night sermon. A young man by the name of Eutychus fell asleep and fell to his death out of the third-floor window in which he was sitting! Paul calmly restored Eutychus to life, and the church resumed its worship service.

20:7-8 The gathering of this group was **on the first day of the week**. This is one of the clearest New Testament references to the church meeting on Sunday rather than on Saturday, the Sabbath. Because Paul and his companions were **leaving the next day**, Paul had an extended teaching time, talking **until midnight**. Paul did not want to leave Troas until he had made the most of every minute he had with the believers.

The **many flickering lamps** were candles in lanterns. The combination of the heat from the candles and the gathered number of people in an upstairs room made the room very warm. This no doubt helped Eutychus fall asleep.

20:9-10 Paul **spoke on and on**, and **Eutychus**, sitting on the **windowsill** because of the crowd in the room, **sank into a deep sleep**. He **fell** out of the window, **three stories**. Luke, the physician, confirmed the fact that Eutychus was dead. Paul went to the boy and **took him into his arms**. Paul addressed the concerned flock. **“Don’t worry,”** he said. Then, with those powerful Resurrection reminiscent words, he added: **“He’s alive!”**

20:11-12 Following this amazing miracle, the meeting was resumed **upstairs** where they celebrated the **Lord’s Supper**, followed by Paul’s continuing to teach **until dawn**. The believers were **relieved** (literally, “encouraged”)—a repeated feature of Paul’s ministry.

PAUL MEETS THE EPHESIAN ELDERS / 20:13-38

Traveling south to Miletus, Paul summoned the elders of the Ephesian church to bid them farewell. In his charge to them, Paul reviewed his ministry among them, described the Spirit’s leading him to Jerusalem, and challenged them to shepherd the church in their care. This discourse reveals Paul’s pastoral heart (20:18-20, 31, 36-37), reiterates Paul’s preoccupation with preaching the Kingdom of God (20:24-25), and records the presence of a well-trained group of disciples who would be able to carry the message of Christ throughout Asia.

20:13-15 Paul traveled ahead **by land to Assos**, which was about twenty miles away, a much shorter distance than a ship had to travel. The rest of the party **went on ahead by ship**. At Assos, the party was reunited, and Luke faithfully recorded the inland passage trek of their ship—to **Mitylene**, then past **the island of Kios and Samos**, eventually arriving **at Miletus**. Miletus was situated at the mouth of the Maeander River on the Aegean Sea (in modern-day Turkey).

20:16 Paul had missed attending the Passover in Jerusalem, so he was especially interested in arriving on time for **Pentecost**, which is fifty days after

Passover. He was carrying gifts for the Jerusalem believers from churches in Asia and Greece (see Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15). The **Jerusalem** church had been experiencing grim times.

20:17-19 Paul wanted to meet with **the elders of the church at Ephesus**, so he sent word for them to come to meet him at **Miletus**. Paul's message to the elders is an example of a typical address of Paul to the spiritual leaders of the churches he had begun. Paul described his ministry among the Ephesians, reminding the elders that they had observed his character.

As wildly successful as Paul's ministry was—the miracles, decisions, baptisms, and successfully disciple believers and planted churches—he did not boast. Under his ministry there, the word of the Lord had spread widely (19:20). The glory, however, was consistently given back to the one directing it all—it was the **Lord's work**, not Paul's. Another characteristic of Paul's ministry to the Ephesians was the presence of **tears**. In other words, his work was done with passion and compassion. Paul's ministry also showed endurance. He spoke of the **trials** that he had endured.

20:20-21 Paul's ministry in Ephesus exuded boldness in **telling the truth**. The mention of **homes** may refer to house churches. Paul had **one message** for all. Both **Jews and Gentiles** alike were included in his mission, and both needed the central message of **turning from sin and turning to God**.

In this day of growing complexity, the church often falls prey to the temptation to become sophisticated and complicated, to fit into the culture. Believers must never let the message get lost in the trappings of the ministry (buildings, programs, schedules, calendars) or the ever-present busyness of church activities. The message must not be prejudiced—it's applicable to Jews and Gentiles alike. It is not optional, and it must not be overly complicated. It is just one message: turn from sin, turn to God, and believe in Jesus Christ.

20:22-23 Paul's message to the Ephesian elders shifted from a description of his past work among them to a description of the present and immediate future for him. That future would begin in **Jerusalem**, where Paul said he was being **drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit**.

The Holy Spirit **told** Paul that he would be imprisoned and experience

suffering. Even knowing this, Paul did not shrink from fulfilling his mission. His strong character was a good example to the Ephesian elders—as well as to all Christians, many of whom would suffer for Christ.

20:24 Paul’s statement of his priorities and values is a great perspective for any believer of any age. Self-preservation must be subservient to the faithful completion of **the work assigned by the Lord Jesus.** Paul was a single-minded person, and the most important goal of his life was **telling others the Good News** (Philippians 3:7-13). No wonder Paul was the greatest missionary who ever lived.

20:25-27 Paul may have been convinced that **none** of these men would **ever see him again.** It is unknown if he ever did, but at this somber moment, Paul was saying goodbye to a group, most of whom were led to Christ by him and all of whom had been taught by him. In a solemn declaration, Paul claimed his innocence of anyone’s **damnation.** He was referring to the people of Ephesus before whom he had boldly and thoroughly proclaimed what they needed to know to be saved and to grow in Christ. All of God’s purpose that had been revealed to Paul, he had taught them.

20:28 Paul outlines the philosophy of the ministry that pastors and church leaders should follow as he charged these **elders** in Ephesus to **beware**—first for themselves and then for the **church.** Although Paul had chosen and trained most of them, the operative force behind everything had been the **Holy Spirit.**

Those who lead God’s people must beware by keeping a careful watch over themselves and the flock. The leadership (elders, pastors, deacons) would be the first line of attack from the enemy (the “wolves” mentioned in the next verse). Before the flock could be protected, the shepherds must protect themselves! These leaders were also to **feed and shepherd God’s flock.** They were to guide, direct, protect, feed, and help the flock to grow into its full potential (see Psalm 23; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

20:29-30 With a vivid, colorful shepherding image, Paul forewarned the Ephesian elders of the coming attack on the **flock** by **vicious wolves.** Some would attack from outside the church. These **false teachers** would invade the church after the departure of Paul and, like wolves, ruthlessly attack the flock. They would bring

with them their fine-sounding words, **not sparing** a soul who would believe and follow them.

Other attacks would come from inside the church (**even some of you**). Paul warned that some of their own members, to build a **following**, would **distort the truth** and lead away a portion of the flock to their own doom. False teachers did, in fact, hound the church at Ephesus. This is confirmed in the later books of the New Testament (1 Timothy 1:6-7, 9-20; 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:17-18; 3:1-9; Revelation 2:1-7).

20:31 Paul's final warning is simply, "**Watch out!**" The leaders needed to **remember** Paul's example of wakefulness, his **constant watch, and care** for them. Since the vicious enemy is always around (both inside and outside the church) and always looking for victims, the shepherd must never let down his guard.

Paul pointed to his own **three years** of shepherding of the Ephesian church as an example. The few incidents recorded in chapter 19 serve as examples of how constant and vicious the attacks could be. This is a good word for every church leader and the person who seeks to live for Christ.

20:32 Paul pronounced a benediction of sorts to this group into whom he had poured so much of his life; he entrusted them to **God** and to **the word of his grace**. This was a common parting phrase, as it occurs elsewhere in the book (14:23, 25; 15:40).

The **message** had two essential characteristics: (1) it was **able to build them up**, and (2) it was able to **give them an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself** (26:18; Ephesians 1:18; Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4). This message is the word of God, by which the believers would be built up in the faith.

20:33-35 Returning to remarks similar to those with which he opened (20:18-20), Paul reminded the elders of three more characteristics of his ministry: (1) contentment and self-restraint—he had not **coveted** anyone's **money or fine clothing**; (2) diligence—he had **worked to pay his own way**, and that of his companions as well; and (3) selflessness—he had **been a constant example** of how to **help the poor by working hard**, following Jesus' words concerning the advantage of giving over receiving?

These words of Jesus, "**It is more blessed to give than to receive,**" are not

recorded in the Gospels. Obviously, since not all of Jesus' words were written down (see John 21:25), this saying must have been passed on orally through the apostles. Certainly, the theology of this statement is found abundantly in Christ's teachings.

20:36-38 Paul's relationship with these believers is a beautiful example of genuine Christian fellowship. He had cared for them and loved them, even **wept** with them in their needs. They responded with love and care for him and sorrow over his leaving. They **prayed** together and comforted one another.

Like Paul, all believers can build strong relationships with other believers by sharing, caring, sorrowing, rejoicing, and praying with them. And—like Paul—the best way to gather others around is by giving oneself away to them and to the gospel. It is not surprising that these men **accompanied him down to the ship**.

They may have stood, wept, and prayed until the mast of their beloved shepherd's ship disappeared over the Aegean horizon, and only then returned to Ephesus, determined more than ever to shepherd their flock with the passion of the one who had so lovingly shown them the way.

Chapter 4

Acts 21 – 22

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM / 21:1-14

Upon making his way to Tyre, Paul was urged by the believers not to go to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the apostle pressed on. At Caesarea further prophecies were given, warning Paul of certain imprisonment if he journeyed to Jerusalem. Unmoved, Paul adamantly determined to complete his mission. God's sovereignty was at work.

This becomes more apparent upon viewing how this Jerusalem visit paved the way for Paul's trip to Rome!

21:1-3 Having said **farewell to the Ephesian elders** at Miletus, Paul continued his How many miles and memories had passed since then, not to mention how long the journey to Jerusalem. The stops along the way—**Cos, Rhodes, and Patara**—were a normal day's run for the smaller ship they were on. At Patara, they boarded a different ship, a larger vessel that could make the longer, open-sea trip to **Phoenicia**.

Luke recorded the sighting of **Cyprus** in their transit of the Mediterranean—surely sparking memories for Paul of his first journey with Barnabas. Many souls had found the Savior!

The ship put in at **Tyre, in Syria**, its destination, giving Paul and his group a week's rest before they shipped out again. **21:4** A church had been founded in Tyre, soon after the dispersion of believers from Jerusalem following Stephen's martyrdom (8:1; 11:19).

Certain believers who had the gift of prophecy **prophesied through the Holy Spirit**, warning Paul **not to go to Jerusalem**. Was Paul disobeying the Holy Spirit by continuing his journey to Jerusalem? More likely, the Holy Spirit warned these believers about the suffering that Paul would face in Jerusalem.

They drew the conclusion that he should not go there because of that danger. This is supported by 21:12-14, where the local believers, after hearing that Paul would be turned over to the Romans, begged him to turn back. Acts 20:22 and 21:14 show that Paul determined that it was God's will for him to go to Rome, as does the fact that God directly told him that he was supposed to go to Rome (23:11). Paul

said that he was “drawn irresistibly” by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem (20:22).

But Paul’s importance to the church organizationally, and their love for him personally, compelled these believers to interpret the certainty of danger to mean he should stay safe. But, like his Savior before him, Paul “resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51).

21:5-6 After the week was over, the **congregation** of believers, **including wives and children**, went down to the **shore** to see them off. As at Miletus (20:36-38), the farewell from Tyre was a tender time of prayer. Whenever someone says that Paul was cold or harsh (based on the stinging rebukes he passed out to churches like those in Galatia and Corinth or to individuals like Barnabas and even Peter), lead the person to passages such as these. Whether it was from the elders at Ephesus or the believers at Tyre, there was a warm, loving response to his ministry virtually everywhere he went.

21:7 Ptolemais was the only stop between Tyre and Caesarea, and there the stay was much shorter—**only one day**. Still, Paul and his companions **greeted the believers**. As with Tyre, there is no record of how or by whom the church had been planted in the area.

21:8-9 In Caesarea lived **Philip**, called here **the Evangelist**.

The last record of his activities is found in 8:26-40. Philip had been **one of the seven men chosen** to serve the tables in the early days of the church at Jerusalem (6:5). Philip **had four unmarried daughters**, and they all **had the gift of prophecy**. From this text, we learn that the gift of prophecy was given to both men and women. Several women are noted for their active participation in God’s work (2:17; Philippians 4:3).

Other women who are recorded in the Bible as prophesying include Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), Isaiah’s wife (Isaiah 8:3), and Anna (Luke 2:36-38).

21:10-11 Fifteen years earlier, **Agabus** had predicted the famine in Jerusalem (11:27-29). He arrived at Philip’s home **from Judea** and gave a graphic display of what lay ahead for Paul, giving more detail as to what the previous prophecies had

been a warning. Agabus gave the information of Paul's impending arrest— naming **the Jewish leaders** as the cause and adding that he would be **turned over to the Romans**.

21:12-14 Spurred along by a graphic and foreboding prophecy of Agabus, the believers in Caesarea **begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem**.

Even Paul's traveling companions (**we**) added their voices to the crowd. Why would he go to certain imprisonment in Jerusalem? The answer was that Paul knew God wanted him to go.

No one enjoys pain, but a faithful disciple wants above all else to please God. Paul was not ignoring the warnings. He was not suicidal. Paul simply disagreed with his brothers and sisters in Christ as to whether the prophesied difficulties outweighed the potential progress that could be made for the gospel. And the ultimate issue—the will of God—was the one to which Paul's friends finally resigned themselves: **“The will of the Lord be done.”**

PAUL ARRIVES AT JERUSALEM / 21:15-25

At long last, Paul reached his destination—Jerusalem. He was warmly welcomed by Paul; James and the elders encouraged the apostle to participate in a public Jewish ceremony of purification at the Temple. Such an act, they felt, would quell the false rumors circulating about Paul—that he was actively undermining the Mosaic Law.

21:15-17 The trip from **Caesarea** to **Jerusalem** was about sixty-five miles—a two-day journey on horseback. **The home of Mnason** may have been in Jerusalem or at some point along the journey there. Mnason was **from Cyprus** and was **one of the early** missionary journey (13:4-12), or he may have been a convert from even earlier than that—one of the original Jerusalem disciples from the few weeks following that miraculous Pentecost (chapter 2).

Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, Paul and his friends were **welcomed cordially**, a testimony to the growing reputation of the apostle and gratitude for the generous gift he was bringing from the churches (see 24:17; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:13-14; 9:12-13).

Paul had not forgotten the charge of the Jerusalem church from years ago to remember the poor (Galatians 2:10).

The Jerusalem elders had never thought that they would be the beneficiaries of Paul's obedience to their charge; much less had they imagined that the support would come from Gentile churches. How that must have bonded the Jewish and Gentile segments of the church!

21:18-19 James, Jesus' brother, was the leader of the **Jerusalem church** (15:13-21; Galatians 1:19; 2:9).

It was not only an influential church, but it had also been a horribly persecuted church (since Stephen's day), and at this time, it faced famine and poverty. This was obviously an important gathering since **all the elders were present**.

They listened to Paul's **account of the things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his ministry**.

21:20-22 There were great tensions in Jerusalem during this period. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus described this time (A.D. 56 or 57) as being filled with political unrest and strong Jewish nationalism. There were several uprisings by Jews against their Roman leaders—all of which had been brutally put down by Felix, the Roman procurator. This caused even more anger from the Jews and intensified their hatred for Gentiles. Paul, missionary to the Gentiles, entered the city with news of vast Gentile conversions.

The elders informed Paul of the large contingency of **Jews** who had **believed**. The problem, however, was that **all** those Jews took **the Law of Moses very seriously** (15:5), meaning that they would not be rejoicing in the success of Paul's ministry among the Gentiles. The Jewish Christian "zealots" had **been told**, through rumors, that Paul was **teaching all the Jews** he had contacted who lived **in the Gentile world to turn their backs on the laws of Moses**

Not only that, but they had heard that Paul was minimizing the rite of circumcision and allowing the Jews to stop following **Jewish customs**.

The Jerusalem council (chapter 15) had settled the issue of circumcision of Gentile believers. There was a rumor that Paul had gone far beyond the council's decision, even **forbidding** Jews to circumcise their children. It was true that Paul was downplaying the importance of circumcision and did not require keeping the Jewish customs, but that was for the Gentiles, not for the Jews.

Paul had Timothy circumcised because his mother was Jewish (see

commentary on 16:2-3). Paul taught both Jews and Gentiles that salvation did not depend on keeping the law (Galatians 3:24-29; 5:1; Colossians 2:11-17). He taught Gentiles not to get circumcised (1 Corinthians 7:18-19), but there is no evidence that he taught Jews to abandon the practice.

21:23-24 The rumors about Paul, of course, were not true, but Paul willingly submitted to this Jewish custom to show that he was not working against the council's decision and that he was still Jewish in his lifestyle. (Sometimes believers must submit to authorities to avoid offending others, especially when such offense would hinder God's work.)

The Jerusalem elders suggested that Paul join **four men** among their number who had **taken a vow**. The details are unknown, but they seem to have taken the Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:13-21). Paul was to join them in the **purification ceremony** and **pay** their expenses. Often a Jew who had been in the Gentile territory for a long time would undergo ritual purification upon returning to his homeland. The time for this purification was seven days. This may have been what the elders were asking Paul to do.

There seems to have been a definite lack of resolve in this decision by the Jerusalem elders as they tried to appease the Jews. A far more appropriate response by the leaders would have been to tell them that the Jerusalem council had made an authoritative decision (probably at least eight years ago by this time) and communicated it in written form.

Paul agreed to abide by the ruling and had been doing so. It seems absurd that this hardworking apostle, who had just brought to Jerusalem a generous offering from his Gentile ministry, should be asked for some of his hard-earned money to placate that group. But when asked, Paul graciously gave the money and went along with the leaders' suggestion.

Those who think Paul was wrong for going along with this request by the elders forget one of the marks of Paul's ministry: "When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with those who follow the Jewish laws, I do the same, even though I am not subject to the law, so that I can bring them to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:20). This was one of those times when it was not worth offending the Jews, so Paul wisely chose to comply.

21:25 Here, quoting word for word, the elders stated the past ruling of the Jerusalem council (see 15:19-21). One wonders if any of these individuals had seen a copy of Paul's letter to the Romans or the Galatians. It is not clear who this

restatement of the council ruling was for—themselves, Paul, or those among them who may have been wavering. This statement is best understood as given to assure Paul that they were not changing the ruling or adding anything to what had been decided years earlier.

PAUL IS ARRESTED / 21:26-36

Paul's attempt to placate his enemies was an utter failure. A group of Jews from Asia spotted him in the Temple and incited a crowd to seize him. Dead set in their determination to reject the message of salvation in Christ, these opponents of Paul refused to look objectively at the facts. Instead, they whipped the mob into a frenzy by making a series of false and highly inflammatory accusations against the apostle. Only the quick action of a detachment of Roman soldiers saved Paul from being beaten to death.

21:26-29 Paul's agreement **to their request** was a sign of his greatness. In a submission to their political sensitivity, he paid for a ceremony to appease the religious zealots. He **went through the purification ritual** with the four others and proceeded to the **Temple**. But Paul's gracious action appeased none of his detractors.

The opposition appears to have come from unbelieving (that is, non-Christian) **Jews from Asia**, who recognized him **in the Temple** during the time of his completion of the purification ritual. These Jews, present for Pentecost, must have recognized Paul from his ministry in their area. Since they recognized **Trophimus**, they were from **Ephesus** and may have even been a part of the riot there (19:28-41).

These Jews **roused a mob** that began to shout against Paul. Contrary to their emotional accusation, Paul had not been teaching against the Jews or telling **everybody to disobey the Jewish laws**, nor had he spoke **against the Temple**.

The pinnacle of this argument was the accusation that Paul had brought **Gentiles** into the Temple. Luke explained that the Jewish accusers **had seen** Paul in the city with Trophimus, whom they knew to be **a Gentile**.

Then, without any investigation whatsoever, **they assumed Paul had taken him into the Temple**, reporting this as if it had happened (21:28)!

21:30-31 the city was thrown into **an uproar**, and **a great riot followed**. In moonlike fashion, Paul was **dragged out of the Temple**, and **the gates were closed behind him**.

These were the gates between the inner court and the Court of the Gentiles. The Temple guards (Levites) shut the gates to prevent the mob from coming inside.

How ironic that the final scene at the Temple in the book of Acts is the gates slamming shut to keep Paul out. The mob was going to try to beat him or stone him to death. Because Jerusalem was under Roman control, an uproar in the city would quickly be investigated by Roman authorities. The commander of the Roman regiment at this time was Claudius Lysias (see 23:26).

21:32-33 Lysias **called out his soldiers and officers.** The quick action of Lysias and the proximity of the garrison (the Antonia Fortress was adjacent to the Temple area) were all that saved Paul's life. The seizing of Paul by the crowd was superseded by the seizing of Paul by the Roman soldiers.

Paul was fortunate to be **arrested** and **bound.** Luke, ever the one for details, wrote that Paul was bound with **two chains.** The chains handcuffed him to a Roman soldier on each side. This would be a normal treatment for a criminal. After seizing Paul, the **commander** asked the crowd who the chained man was and what crime he had committed.

21:34-36 The commander could not get a direct answer because the crowd could not agree on what the issues were—of course, that had not stopped them in their murderous course a few moments earlier. Because the commander **couldn't find out the truth,** he **ordered Paul to be taken to the fortress,** the safest place for the apostle in all Jerusalem! This was the Fortress of Antonia, built by Herod the Great to defend the Temple area. It was located northwest of the Temple and connected by stairs to the Court of the Gentiles. The fortress housed nearly one thousand soldiers.

In the process of moving their prisoner, the mob, seeing the object of their anger being safely whisked away, **grew so violent** that Paul had to be carried by the soldiers! The murderous mob pursued, all the while shouting, **“Kill him, kill him!”**

These were almost identical to the words another murderous crowd had shouted to Pontius Pilate concerning Jesus of Nazareth just a few decades earlier (Luke 23:18; John 19:15).

PAUL SPEAKS TO THE CROWD / 21:37–22:23

Paul's defense before the Jewish mob in the Temple courts commander by speaking to him in Greek.

Then he established common ground with the Jews gathered below him by speaking to them in their own language. Presenting his credentials as a devout Jew trained under the highly respected rabbi Gamaliel, Paul then described his unlikely

encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road. The crowd listened attentively until Paul mentioned “Gentiles.” At that word, the mob erupted in anger.

Although Paul knew his statement would cause controversy, he refused to dilute the truth.

21:37-38 By speaking in **Greek**, Paul showed that he was a cultured, educated man and not just a common rebel starting riots in the streets. The language grabbed the commander’s attention and gave Paul protection and the opportunity to give his defense.

The historian Josephus wrote of an **Egyptian** who had led a revolt of thousands of Jews in Jerusalem in A.D. 54 (just three years previous). This self-proclaimed prophet had convinced his fanatical followers to accompany him to the nearby Mount of Olives.

He said that, at his word, the walls of Jerusalem would collapse, and this miraculous event would precipitate the destruction of the Roman Empire. Governor Felix had dispatched troops to deal with this insurrection. Hundreds of Jews were either killed or captured, and the Egyptian ringleader of this sect had disappeared **into the desert**.

Lysias assumed that Paul was this rebel, returning to make more trouble.

21:39-40 All these events took place outside the Fortress of Antonia, the Roman garrison that adjoined the Temple area on the northwest side. From the headquarters of Claudius Lysias, two flights of stairs led down into the outer court of the Temple. The staircase would prove to be an excellent platform from which Paul could **talk to these people**.

The commander agreed to Paul’s request. The text does not tell us why. He was convinced that Paul was not some insurrectionist or rabble-rouser. He was a Jew and a proper citizen. The commander may have thought that Paul could explain to the crowd what had happened, and hopefully, they would disperse peacefully. So, he **agreed** to let Paul speak.

Paul looked out on an enraged mob, and his heart broke. He ached for his people to understand the truth about Christ. He had been just like them—spiritually blind—and he wanted his Jewish brothers to experience this same salvation. When Paul began speaking to the assembled crowd, he **addressed them in their own language, Aramaic**, the common language among Palestinian Jews. He spoke in Aramaic not only to communicate in the language of his listeners but also to show

that he was a devout Jew and had respect for the Jewish laws and customs.

Acts 22

22:1-2 With this courteous salutation, Paul began the first of five defenses recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. He commanded the mob's attention by

speaking Aramaic, **their own language** because many Jews of the Dispersion (that is, Hebrews who were born or reared outside of Palestine) could not speak Greek or Hebrew. The mob would have assumed that Paul, an outsider, could speak only Greek. Paul's ability to speak Aramaic gave his Jewish credentials even more weight and helped win him a hearing.

22:3 Paul began his defense with a brief personal history. The statement, **I am a Jew**, declared Paul's brotherhood with the crowd. Though **born in Tarsus**, Paul had been **educated in Jerusalem**. Not only that but **under Gamaliel**, the most honored rabbi of law and as a voice for moderation (5:34). At Gamaliel's feet, Paul had **learned to follow our Jewish** rigorous keeping of the most minute details of the law (see Matthew 23). This statement by Paul was intended to refute the allegation in 21:28 that he had been telling everyone to disobey the Jewish laws.

In saying he was **zealous to honor God in everything**, Paul was alluding to his former prominent role in the persecution of Christians.

22:4-5 Having commended his Jewish audience for their zeal, Paul described how his passion for Judaism and against Christianity had been even more intense. Beyond merely Christians on the Temple grounds, Paul had sought their **death** (see 7:54-60; 26:10). Furthermore, he had been authorized **to bring Christians** all the way from **Damascus** back to **Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished**. These were widely known, indisputable facts, making Paul's testimony extremely powerful.

22:6-9 Paul's conversion is recorded in chapter 9. Here Paul told the story himself, making it clear that his conversion was not an issue of defection but a matter of divine! Paul had been about his business, intent on his mission (rounding up the followers of Jesus)—and very content and settled in his pro-Jewish, anti-Christian state of mind. Suddenly **Jesus** himself intervened and spoke to Paul. Without referring to a single Old Testament prophecy or launching into a theological discourse, Paul used his personal experience to press the points that Jesus was both alive and glorified.

22:10-13 Blinded, confused, shocked, scared—Paul's mind must have been reeling as he lay in the dust. He had responded with a humble question, **“What shall I do, Lord?”**

Paul related to his audience the physical effects of this divine revelation. He

had been unable to see and had to be **led into Damascus** by others. There Jesus had told him that he would receive further instructions.

To give further credence to his testimony before such a zealous Jewish mob, Paul described the role **Ananias** had played in his conversion, mentioning Ananias's stellar reputation among the **Jews of Damascus**.

22:14-16 Paul reported that he had heard through the lips of this respected, devout Jew his unexpected, unsought commission. **Ananias** had made it clear that the supernatural events being experienced by Paul were the sovereign work of none other than **the God of our ancestors**. In zealously opposing Jesus and his followers, Paul had assumed that he had been serving and honoring the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

Through the announcement of Ananias, he had learned the truth. The God of the Hebrews—far from leading Paul to fight Christianity—was selecting him to become the leading spokesman for this new faith! Paul would **take his message everywhere**. So, Paul was **baptized** right then—a powerful outward sign of Paul's inward cleansing from sin and his embracing of the truth.

22:17-18 Paul continued to answer the mob's accusations. He stated, in effect, that he was not anti-Temple (see 21:28). By praying and worshiping there, he demonstrated his continued respect for the Temple—even as a follower of Jesus.

While he was **praying in the Temple**, Paul received a heavenly **vision**. The Greek word for **trance** is the same root used to describe Peter's dreamlike encounter on the rooftop in Joppa (10:10; 11:5). In this vision, Jesus appeared and warned Paul to promptly **leave Jerusalem** because the Jews would not accept his **testimony**.

In 9:29-30, Luke reported that Paul departed Jerusalem upon the advice of his Christian brothers. This apparent discrepancy is easily resolved by viewing Paul as led by both human counsel and divine revelation. The advice from worried believers came first, later being confirmed by that other, stronger, more irresistible voice (20:22).

22:19-20 Never one to run from controversy or trouble, Paul protested mildly. He obviously felt convinced that his conversion from a notorious persecutor of Christians into an ardent evangelist for the Way would impress his Jewish accusers. Surely, they would marvel at the change in his life. He could not and would not have

done such a complete about-face without compelling reasons. Implicit in Paul's rejoinder was the thought that preaching to such a volatile audience might in some way make up for the damage he had done to the church—especially assisting in and approving of the killing of **Stephen**.

22:21 Paul's appeal to the Lord was unsuccessful. For Paul's own safety and for the fulfillment of God's eternal plan, Paul needed to **leave Jerusalem**. A plot on his life was in the works (see 9:22-23). Specifically, the Lord was commissioning Paul to take the message of salvation **to the Gentiles**.

22:22-23 these people had **listened** intently to Paul, but the word "Gentiles" brought out all their anger and exposed their pride. They were supposed to be a light to the Gentiles, telling them about the one true God, but they had renounced that mission by becoming separatist and exclusive. Did the Jews hate the Gentiles? No. Continual efforts were made by the Jews to try to convert the Gentiles.

The implications of Paul's testimony and Christian gospel were clear, however. He was suggesting that the Gentiles could be saved and made right with God without first subscribing to the law and submitting to Jewish circumcision. In effect, Paul was claiming divine approval for the idea that Jews and Gentiles could have equal standing before God. This message collided head-on with the blindness, pride, and prejudice of the Jews. The results were explosive.

PAUL REVEALS HIS ROMAN CITIZENSHIP / 22:24-29

Irritated at Paul for having created such a ruckus, and eager to force some sort of confession, the Roman commander ordered the apostle flogged. Paul barely escaped this sentence by mentioning his Roman citizenship. Here is yet another instance of God's sovereign control over lives and events. Who knows how the spread of the gospel might have been hindered had Paul not been a Roman citizen? **22:24-25** The **commander**, who only minutes before had been impressed enough with Paul to give him the opportunity to speak to the crowd, suddenly became annoyed. Weary of the continual upheaval surrounding Paul, he ordered the apostle to be **lashed with whips**. He believed this examination by torture would **make him confess his crime** or at least an explanation about what was really going on.

Paul, ever the shrewd servant of the Lord, resorted to his civic privilege. By

law, a **Roman citizen** could not be punished without first having a trial, nor could a Roman citizen be interrogated by beating or torture. Paul knew the law. He knew the answer to that question. It was most certainly not legal. There had been no trial, hearing, or formal charges presented.

22:26-28 Paul's question stunned and scared his captors. They had come dangerously close to violating strict Roman laws. In quizzing Paul, the commander learned that Paul was **a citizen by birth** (his father had somehow achieved this status).

The commander admitted that he had been forced to purchase his citizenship. Buying one's citizenship (bribing the right people in power) was a frequent practice and a source of income for the Roman government. Bought citizenship was considered inferior to citizenship by birth.

22:29 Paul's revelation about himself effectively ended the proceedings. The text does not state so explicitly, but Roman laws prohibited even the fettering of Roman citizens. The commander realized how close he had come to breaking the law himself. Paul was freed from his chains immediately but still detained for the night at the Fortress of Antonia (for his own protection, given the volatile nature of the crowd) disobeyed the Jewish laws.

Chapter 5

Acts 23

23:1 With clear, solid eye contact, the first words Paul said to the assembled Jewish religious leaders were, “**I have always lived before God in all good conscience!**” Two times in Acts (here and in 24:16) and twenty-one times in his letters (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 1:3), Paul referred to his clear conscience.

He wanted his audience to know that he was committed to his spiritual and moral choices that had resulted in his trial before them. He was ready to stand before God and be accountable for his choices and actions. Inherent in Paul’s statement, of course, was the challenge: were **they** ready?

23:2-3 As soon as Paul began speaking, he was slapped **on the mouth**. Obviously, Paul had already offended **Ananias the high priest**, his accuser! Ananias became the high priest in A.D. 48, and he reigned through A.D. 58 or 59. Josephus, a respected first-century historian, described Ananias as profane, greedy, and hot-tempered. He was hated by many of his Jewish contemporaries because of his pro-Roman policies.

Paul’s outburst came because of the illegal command that Ananias had given. Ananias had violated Jewish law by assuming that Paul was guilty without a trial and by ordering his punishment (see Deuteronomy 19:15). Paul had not yet been charged with a crime, much less tried, or found guilty.

Paul’s use of the term **whitewashed wall** also recalls Jesus’ similar description of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:27. This amounted to calling Ananias a hypocrite. “Whitewashed wall” may refer to the practice of whitewashing gravestones. This created a clean and positive appearance for what contained death and corruption.

23:4-5 When Paul was given the information that he did not know, that the one whom he had rebuked was the **high priest**, he apologized—not to the individual but to the office. Paul was submitting to the word as he quoted the appropriate passage from Exodus 22:28, a verse that prohibits speaking **evil of anyone who rules over you**. Paul’s ministry and his life had been marked by his obedience to

God. Here he exhibited again, even in a demanding situation, that God's word mattered.

Paul may not have recognized Ananias as the high priest because of poor eyesight. Or his words were ironic, expressing his amazement that one who would behave so badly (and illegally!) toward him could be the high priest.

Paul simply did not know who the high priest was or even that he was present at the trial. Because Paul had been in Jerusalem only sporadically for about twenty years, he may have never seen Ananias, only knowing him by name or, more likely, by reputation. This meeting had been called by the Roman commander, not the council members, so the members may not have been in their official robes, which would have identified the high priest (22:30).

23:6 The **Sadducees** and **Pharisees** were two groups of religious leaders but with strikingly different beliefs. The Pharisees believed in a bodily resurrection, but the Sadducees did not. The Sadducees adhered only to Genesis through Deuteronomy, which contains no explicit teaching on the resurrection. Paul's statement about his **hope** moved the debate away from himself and toward the religious leaders' festering controversy about **the resurrection of the dead**.

By identifying himself as a **Pharisee** and the descendant of Pharisees, Paul utilized three tactics: (1) he opened the door for inserting the Good News of the resurrected Christ, at least with the part of the council who believed in the Resurrection; (2) he got some sympathy and support from a part of the council; (3) he surfaced an ongoing controversy that would embroil the council in hopeless debate.

Paul's sudden insight that the council was a mixture of Sadducees and Pharisees is an example of the power that Jesus promised to believers (Mark 13:9-11). God will help his people when they are under fire for their faith. Like Paul, believers should always be ready to present their testimony. The Holy Spirit will give them the power to speak boldly.

23:7-8 Paul's tactic worked. The council was **divided**. Their historic argument about **resurrection, angels, and spirits** came to the surface. This was the same issue over which the Sadducees had tried to trap Christ (Matthew 22:23-33), but without success. It is not likely that Paul was simply causing a distraction, though that was the result. Rather, he was utilizing this opportunity, his last with his Pharisee

“brothers,” to tell them the truth, to introduce them to his Savior. His primary motive was to tell them the truth: “I know you believe in the resurrection, and I have a resurrection that you have to investigate!”

23:9 the dispute caused **a great clamor**. As expected, the Pharisees came to the vigorous defense of one who spoke so positively about one of their valued positions—resurrection. Paul had, in fact, stated that resurrection was the reason that he was on trial at all (23:6)! The Pharisees alluded to another area of their differences between them and the Sadducees by speculating on the fact that **a spirit or an angel** may have spoken **to him**.

They may have drawn this conclusion based on some of Paul’s remarks to the crowd at the Temple court the day before (22:17-18). The Sadducees would have argued strongly that such communication was not possible because they didn’t believe in the existence of spirits and angels.

23:10 Finally the disagreement became so heated that the Roman **commander** had to step in. Paul was in the middle of it all and had to be removed by the Roman troops. From there he was safely brought **back to the fortress**. Just as had been Paul’s experience for the last decade of ministry, he was once again attacked by the Jews and treated kindly by the Gentiles—locked in a Roman prison to protect him from the high court of the Jews!

23:11 When **night** came, **the Lord appeared to Paul**, telling him to **be encouraged**. He praised Paul for faithfully telling **the people about me here in Jerusalem**. Then he gave Paul a word of promise—**you must preach the Good News in Rome**. God promised Paul safe passage to another field of ministry.

THE PLAN TO KILL PAUL / 23:12-22

The morning after God had pledged to deliver Paul safely to Rome, a group of Jews gathered to plot the murder of the apostle. Paul’s nephew learned of the plot and revealed it to the Roman commander in Jerusalem.

23:12-13 The Lord himself had come to Paul in prison and had promised him safe passage to Rome. Meanwhile, these zealous Jews **bound themselves with an**

oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. They put themselves under a solemn vow, like a curse, if they did not fulfill what they said.

Paul had already been granted safe passage to Rome by God himself. Luke must have chuckled as he was writing these words, knowing that these sincere but misguided **Jews (more than forty of them)** would have to go without food for a long time. It would be ten years or so before Paul's death in Rome!

23:14-15 This group of over forty men announced their oath to **the leading priests and other leaders.** Their plan was to get the **high council** to have Paul returned to a meeting with them under the guise of examining **his case more fully.** And, exposing their contemptible character, they planned to **kill him on the way.** The Jewish leaders thought this was a promising idea and went along with it!

To these leaders, politics, and position had become more important than God. They were ready to plan another murder, just as they had done with Jesus. This also revealed the flimsiness of their case against Paul. They knew they had no case, but they so desperately wanted to get rid of him that they were willing to stoop to any means to do so. As always, however, God, not the council, was in control.

23:16-19 This is the only biblical reference to Paul's family. Some scholars believe that Paul's family disowned him when he became a Christian. Paul wrote of having suffered the loss of everything for Christ (Philippians 3:8). **Paul's nephew,** who is never named, was able to visit Paul, even though Paul was in protective custody. Roman prisoners were often accessible to their relatives and friends who could bring them food and other amenities. How the nephew heard of the plan, is not stated.

Once Paul received the information, he immediately sent his nephew to the **commander.** Although God had told Paul that he would go to Rome, God did not explain how he would be kept safe. There is a healthy balance here of Paul trusting in God's sovereignty and yet wisely utilizing the God-sent provisions that would come his way—his Roman citizenship, the Roman soldiers, the Roman prison, and now, a piece of vital information from a relative. Paul trusted God, but he kept his eyes open to see just how the Father would deliver him.

23:20-22 **Paul's nephew** gave a detailed report of the plot (23:12-15). The lad even knew about the oath. How he obtained the information is unknown, but there is no doubt about its accuracy. The ambush was already in place, simply waiting for the commander's order to send the prisoner to the council chambers.

The commander wisely told Paul's nephew to keep his silence on the report he had given. After this, the only member of Paul's family mentioned anywhere in the New Testament disappeared into the silence of unrecorded history.

PAUL IS SENT TO CAESAREA / 23:23-35

Guarded by an armed escort of almost five hundred Roman soldiers, Paul was transferred to Caesarea and the jurisdiction of Governor Felix. He would be safe there until it was time for him to leave for Rome. God's sovereignty is visible in both the actions of these secular authorities and in the resulting spread of the Good News.

23:23-24 There were 470 men dispatched to guard one prisoner—**two hundred soldiers, two hundred spearmen, and seventy horsemen.**

The commander knew that the forty assassins would fight to the death, and he did not want to have to explain the assassination of a Roman citizen under his protection. The zealous desire to kill Paul on the part of the Jews in an ambush was more than matched by the extent to which the Romans went to protect him.

Instead of returning Paul to the Jewish council, the commander sent him to **Caesarea**, sixty miles to the northwest. Jerusalem was the seat of Jewish government, but Caesarea was the Roman headquarters for the area. There the judicial process would be continued before the Roman court (**Governor Felix**), a process that was begun when Paul had exercised his rights as a Roman citizen (22:25).

23:25-26 Felix was the Roman governor or procurator of Judea from A.D. 52 to 59. This was the same position that Pontius Pilate had held. While the Jews had been given much freedom to govern themselves, the governor ran the army, kept the peace, and gathered the taxes.

How did Luke know what was written in the letter from **Claudius Lysias**? In his concern for historical accuracy, Luke used many sources to make sure that his writings were correct (see Luke 1:1-4). This letter was read aloud in court when Paul came before Felix to answer the Jews' accusations. Also, because Paul was a Roman citizen, a copy may have been given to him as a courtesy.

23:27-30 This letter is a formal description of the events as well as the careful wording of a subordinate commander (Claudius Lysias) to his superior (Governor Felix). It must be noted that in his first sentence, the commander carefully rearranged

the order of events, leaving out the fact that he had chained Paul and had been in the process of having him flogged when the information about his Roman citizenship was brought to light—a careful cover-up to protect himself (see 22:23-28).

Claudius stated that Paul was charged with **nothing worthy of imprisonment or death**. For the early readers of Acts, these would be encouraging precedents and may have helped them in their own struggles with the Jews or with Roman law.

23:31-32 The **soldiers took Paul as far as Antipatris**—more than thirty-five miles. At that distance from Jerusalem (and at that speed), the prisoner would certainly be safe from pursuers, so the soldiers had been released to return to Jerusalem, leaving Paul with the seventy **horsemen** to accompany him the final twenty-five miles to **Caesarea**.

The last few miles into Antipatris provided excellent terrain for an ambush, so that was part of the reason that the larger contingent went so far before turning back.

23:33-35 And so Paul and his Roman escort **arrived in Caesarea** and were **presented** to Governor Felix. The governor ascertained Paul's province— **Cilicia**—and agreed to hear the case when his **accusers** arrived.

Felix was the governor (procurator) of Judea from about A.D. 52 to 59, holding the position that Pontius Pilate had held during Jesus' day.

Felix had married Drusilla (24:24), a sister of Herod Agrippa II, the Agrippa mentioned in chapter 25. A man of low birth, Felix rose to power through the influence of his well-connected brother Pallas and his politically expedient marriages. He also married the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. The historian Tacitus, however, described Felix's career with a stinging epigram: "He exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave." He was regarded as a poor governor. He dispensed justice arbitrarily and served his own ends. Jewish revolts increased under his administration.

Chapter 6

Acts 24

PAUL APPEARS BEFORE FELIX / 24:1-27

The next three chapters provide a look at an interesting trio of politicians—Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. All three were at the top of their profession, holding significant offices in the Roman regime that dominated their world. All three were known as intelligent, effective leaders.

All three came face-to-face with the gospel of Jesus Christ through the testimony of none other than the apostle Paul. As determined from the text, all three rejected Christ. The reasons were different, but the results were the same.

24:1 The accusers arrived (24:35)—**Ananias, the high priest, and the lawyer Tertullus**, along with several **Jewish leaders**. They had traveled sixty miles to Caesarea, the Roman center of government, to bring their false accusations against Paul. Their murder plot had failed (23:12-15), but they were persisting in trying to kill him.

24:2-4 **Tertullus** began the religious leaders' case against Paul before the Roman governor **Felix** (see commentary at 23:33-35). The case, which surely is only summarized here, began with gushing flattery, which seems to have taken up as much time as the case itself! The flattery is even more sickening, given the historical record of Governor Felix, who is remembered as a violent and corrupt ruler and was hated by the Jews.

24:5-9 Finally, Tertullus got to the case. He made three accusations against Paul:

- (1) he was a **troublemaker, inciting riots, and rebellions**;
- (2) he was the **ringleader** of an unrecognized **sect**, which was against the Roman law;
- (3) he had tried to **defile the Temple**. The religious leaders hoped that these accusations would persuade Felix to execute Paul to keep the peace in Palestine.

If Felix would not prosecute Paul based on his disruption of the peace, he would do so if Paul were a leader of a religious sect or cult that was not sanctioned

by the state. This designation of Christians as **Nazarenes** was used by Jewish Christians from the earliest days of the church, but it is unknown what Felix may have known about them or what opinion he may have had. Surely Tertullus was using the term to put the church in its most controversial light.

The charge of defiling the Temple was designed to push Felix toward allowing the Jews to put Paul to death. It was one of the few offenses for which the Jews could still exact the death penalty. There seems to be a slight modification of the charge against Paul in this area (see 21:28). Originally, Paul had been charged with bringing a Gentile (Trophimus) into the temple area, thus desecrating it.

Here the charge was modified to read that Paul “tried” to desecrate the temple—an attempted desecration rather than an actual one.

The accusers knew they had no proof of the actual desecration (and they did have solid proof of the exact opposite), so they had to shift their strategy to say that they had **arrested him** to prevent the desecration.

When Tertullus finished his remarks, **the other Jews chimed in**, affirming the truthfulness of their legal counsel’s case.

24:10 The **governor** gave the apostle permission to speak, so **Paul** began his defense. Tertullus and the religious leaders seemed to have made a convincing argument against Paul, but Paul would refute their accusations point by point.

Paul’s introductory remarks were much more cursory and to the point, in contrast to Tertullus’s flowing flattery. Paul simply alluded to the fact that Felix had **been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years**, thus making him a good person before whom to make his **defense**. This is the only accomplishment on which Paul could compliment him—that he had been around long enough and had tried enough cases involving Jewish affairs to be familiar with the nature of what was before him.

24:11-13 Paul answered the first charge (stirring up riots) by stating the easily verifiable trip he had made to **Jerusalem no more than twelve days** previously. The implication here was that he had not been in Jerusalem long enough to stir up trouble. Also, he stated that he had come to Jerusalem for **worship**. Paul’s statement of easily provable or not provable evidence made a persuasive case. His accusers could not **prove the things** they had accused him of doing. He knew his accusers could not present a shred of evidence that he had defiled the Temple. **24:14** In this verse, Paul began to answer the second accusation—that of being a ringleader of a

Nazarene sect. His answer to this accusation continues through 24:16 and provides the opening for the gospel. Paul affirmed that he followed **the Way**, which his accusers called a **sect**.

“The Way” was the earliest name for the Christian church. It came from Isaiah 40:3, 10-11, referring to God’s people led on God’s way. It also had analogies to Matthew 7:14, “the way of salvation,” and to John 14:6, where Jesus referred to himself as “the way.”

Paul took this opportunity to tie the roots of the Christian movement to the God of the Jewish people—**the God of our ancestors**—and particularly to the Old Testament Scriptures. He affirmed before Felix his firm belief in **the Jewish law and everything written in the books of prophecy**.

It would be hard to make the “heretic” or “sectarian” label stick with an argument as strong as this one. Paul was still worshiping the same God and holding to the same moral code as his accusers. He would soon get more specific.

24:15-16 Paul went straight to the issue of resurrection and judgment. He stated, first, his **hope** of a resurrection of **both the righteous and the ungodly** (see Daniel 12:2). This is, of course, the proclamation he had made in his case before the Jewish council that had won him support from the Pharisees and attack from the Sadducees (see 23:6-9).

Because of this resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, Paul sought to **maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else** (see comments at 23:1). Here is the strong personal testimony of one who expected to stand before his Maker and give account for his life. In stating it this way, Paul not only bore witness to the fact that he was ready to meet God but also—by implication—that all people must get ready for such a meeting of their own.

24:17 Paul finally moved to the last accusation, that he had tried to defile the Temple. Paul stated the main purpose of his Jerusalem trip—to bring **money to aid his people and to offer sacrifices to God**. This is the only mention, at least in the book of Acts, of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. Paul’s letters refer to it several times (Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:13-14; 9:12-13; Galatians 2:10), but it is left out of the Acts record.

24:18-19 As to the charge of defilement—Paul had been **completing a purification ritual** when he was discovered in the Temple courts. As to the charge

of causing an uproar, he stated that there had been **no crowd** and **no rioting**. The problem came when **some Jews from the province of Asia** showed up. They, in fact, had caused the uproar, not Paul. This was a strong point in Paul's defense, one that his accusers simply could not refute.

24:20-21 Paul suggested that Felix ask those members of the **Jewish high council** who were present what **wrongdoing** they found in him. Paul explained that he had made a controversial remark by claiming to **believe in the resurrection of the dead** (23:6). Paul knew it was unlikely that any of his accusers would attack that statement in Felix's presence, and they kept their silence. This, of course, gave Paul a chance to present the Resurrection again, this time before Felix and his court, as well as to those Pharisees (accusers) who had been present at Paul's meeting with the Jewish Council in Jerusalem. Thus, the charges verbalized by Tertullus had been answered, and all that remained was for Felix to respond.

24:22-23 Felix had been governor for six years and was **quite familiar with the Way**. The Christian movement, which had involved thousands of people from the first day on (2:41, 47; 4:4), would have been a topic of conversation among the Roman leadership. Hopefully, too, the Christians' peaceful lifestyles had already proven to the Romans that Christians didn't go around starting riots. Felix's knowledge of an exoneration of the church seemed especially important to Luke, and for good reason. Luke wanted the original readers of his book to have a solid record (and one of precedence) that found Christians innocent, even as they experienced ongoing persecution all over the Roman Empire. That is why Luke went to such lengths to record Roman court decisions from Gallio (18:14-15), Felix, Festus, and Agrippa (chapters 24-26).

Felix decided to delay the hearing until the **commander, Lysias**, could get there to give his testimony as to what had transpired. It is not recorded whether Lysias came to Caesarea or not. He did, but as the next few verses indicate, for various political and fiscal reasons, Felix did not want to complete Paul's trial. This postponement became indefinite.

Paul was kept **in custody**, but he was given a great deal of **freedom** by Governor Felix. Paul had several Christian brothers and sisters in Caesarea who loved him dearly and would readily visit him and take care of him (21:8-14). Such

freedom was the result of Paul's being a Roman citizen against whom no crime had yet been proven.

24:24 after an unnamed period, **Felix and his wife Drusilla** sent for Paul and **listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus**. Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (see chapter 12) and the sister of Herod Agrippa II, making her part **Jewish**. At this time, she was only twenty years old. She had left a previous husband to marry Felix, which she did contrary to Jewish law since Felix was a Gentile.

24:25-26 Paul's discourse with Felix and Drusilla included an interesting trio of topics—**righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come**. Like Paul's remarks earlier in the trial (see 24:15-16), these three areas track with Jesus' description of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8) and would likewise be areas of great conviction for Felix. As stated earlier, Felix's career was marked by brutality and injustice; thus, the subject of righteousness and judgment would be more than a little uncomfortable. History also records that Drusilla was Felix's third wife, and he had to break up her previous marriage to free her for himself. Thus, a discourse on self-control would not have been something he would have enjoyed hearing.

Felix responded like an individual under conviction: **“Go away for now.”** Felix was **terrified**. Paul confronted Felix, forcing him to deal with its full convicting message. And Felix wanted no part of it. Notice, too, another example of Felix's poor character. He frequently sent for Paul, hoping the apostle **would bribe him**, to buy his freedom. He **talked** to Paul **often** and, so, was regularly exposed to the truth. Felix is a sorry example of one who “went to church” with regularity, listening to a personalized message from none other than the apostle Paul. Yet there is no record of Felix's ever coming to faith.

24:27 **Two years went by in this way** as Felix toyed with the apostle Paul. For two years this apostle to the Gentiles was out of commission, out of the pulpit, and serving as Felix's personal spiritual conversationalist.

By keeping Paul in prison, Felix could **gain favor with the Jewish leaders**. Eventually, **Porcius Festus** took over as governor of the region. He was a welcome successor. After Felix mishandled a political situation between the Jews and Greeks at Caesarea in A.D. 60, where he took unnecessarily harsh military action against

the Jews, he was called back to Rome. Josephus wrote that things would have gone badly for him there, had not his brother, Pallas, interceded for him.

Festus is recorded in history as a more just ruler than Felix, although he was not on the scene for an exceedingly long time. When Festus came into office, he inherited the imprisoned apostle and the Jewish leaders with a definite agenda.

Chapter 7

Acts 25

PAUL APPEARS BEFORE FESTUS / 25:1-22

When Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus, the Jews once again made their case against Paul. During this trial before the new governor, Festus, Paul, using his rights as a Roman citizen, asked for and received the promise of a hearing before Caesar. This legal decision thwarted the last action of Paul's Jewish enemies.

25:1-2 The new governor, **Festus**, wasted no time; after just **three days** on the job, he went to Jerusalem. Festus was procurator or governor of Judea A.D. 58–62. Little is known about Festus, though most of it is favorable, particularly in contrast with Felix whom he succeeded. In Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders **met with him and made their accusations against Paul**.

God had allowed his most effective instrument for Gentile evangelism and church planting to sit in custody for two years, the apparent victim of Roman bureaucracy. But this was not God's perspective. The gospel would not be stopped simply by imprisoning Paul. Paul was leading those around him to Christ, even in his chained condition.

25:3 Although two years had passed, the Jewish leaders still were looking for a way to kill Paul. The plot had expanded from the original forty-plus leaders (23:12-13) to all the Jewish leaders. They tried to convince **Festus to transfer Paul to Jerusalem** (so they could prepare an ambush). The ruthless Jews had obviously abandoned all hope of a conviction of Paul by the Romans, so they decided to take matters into their own hands.

This request was a clever political move, and we can only imagine how these politically savvy Jewish leaders tried to explain how such a favor early on in Festus's administration would do wonders for their working relationship in the future.

25:4-5 By God's intervention, Festus decided to leave Paul in **Caesarea**. The trial would not be moved, so Festus informed the Jewish leadership that those **in authority** could **return with** him. In Caesarea, in his courtroom, they would be allowed to make their **accusations**.

25:6-7 After a few days, Festus **returned to Caesarea**, where on the very next day, the case of this Roman citizen, alleged troublemaker for the Jews, began

again. As before, the **Jewish leaders from Jerusalem gathered around and made many serious accusations they couldn't prove**—all the same, baseless accusations from two years before.

25:8 Paul succinctly denied all the charges that had just been blasted at him again. He applied his denial to the three principal areas of accusation: the **Jewish laws, the Temple, and the Roman government** (see 21:28; 24:5-6).

25:9-11 Only about two weeks into this new procuratorship, Festus wanted to get off to a politically healthy start with the people he was governing. The Jews were known as a difficult people to govern, and many Roman political careers had been dashed at this Judean outpost (including that of Festus's immediate predecessor, Felix). It is not surprising that Festus would wish **to please the Jews**. Catering to what he knew they desperately wanted, he asked Paul if he would be **willing to go to Jerusalem to stand trial** before him (Festus) there. Festus knew that the Jews had no case against Paul, but either he wasn't willing to aggravate and enrage them further or he simply didn't know how to investigate such religious matters (see 25:20).

Whatever Festus's motive behind this offer to switch the location of the trial, it became irrelevant in Paul's next words: **"I appeal to Caesar!"** Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar. This didn't mean that Caesar himself would hear the case but that the citizen's case would be tried by the highest courts in the Empire—it is much like appealing to the Supreme Court. This right of appeal to the emperor provided Roman citizens protection in capital offense trials carried out by local judges in the provinces.

It was normal for a Roman judge to set up a group of advisors in a case. Festus might have proposed to have members of the council serve. Thus, there would be no fair trial in Jerusalem. Paul insisted on a court made up of a jury of all Roman citizens. He appealed to Emperor Nero, who in A.D. 60 had not yet started the persecution of Christians. To go to Rome as a prisoner was better than not to go there at all.

25:12 Festus felt enormous relief at having a way out of this inconvenient situation. Paul's request led Festus into a conference **with his advisers** (these were his legal experts and higher officials), giving what seems to be a quick reply: **"To Caesar, you shall go!"**

Humanly speaking, it is better that it happened this way. If Festus had ruled

on the case, he would have set Paul free—free to make his own way (without an armed escort) back to Antioch or on to Rome.

The bloodthirsty group of Jewish leaders would have done their best to make sure that Paul didn't live to see another day. Instead, Paul would have an armed guard all the way to his next preaching stop. Though he would have a few more audiences with whom to share the gospel between there and Rome, few were more prestigious than the one he was about to meet.

25:13-15 King Agrippa was Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I, and a descendant of Herod the Great, the last of the Herod dynasty that ruled parts of Palestine from 40 B.C. to A.D. 100. Like great-grandfather, like a grandfather, like father, like son—Agrippa inherited the effects of generations of powerful men with flawed personalities. Each son followed his father in weaknesses, mistakes, and missed opportunities. Each generation had a confrontation with God, and each failed to realize the importance of his decision.

At this time (A.D. 60) Agrippa II was a young man of about thirty-three. He ruled the territories northeast of Palestine, bearing the title of “king.” With power over the Temple, he controlled the Temple treasury and could appoint and remove the high priest. **Bernice** was his sister. When she was thirteen (A.D. 41), she had married her uncle,

Herod Chalcis, who died in A.D. 48. Then she became a mistress to her brother, Agrippa II. In A.D. 63, she married King Polemon of Cilicia, but in the early 70s, she became mistress to Emperor Vespasian's son, Titus. Here Agrippa and Bernice were making an official visit to Festus, **to pay their respects.**

Agrippa and Festus were anxious to cooperate in governing their neighboring territories. The relationship between the Herodian dynasty and the Roman governors had always been sticky (remember Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate, for example, sending Jesus back and forth—Luke 23:1-12). This state visit was an extended one, giving Festus an opportunity to discuss **Paul's case with the king.**

Agrippa, of Jewish descent, could help clarify Paul's case for the Roman governor.

25:16-17 Festus described the details of the case with some embellishment. He included at the outset, for example, a statement about how he **quickly pointed out** to the Jewish leaders that **Roman law does not convict people without a trial**

and how the accused **is given an opportunity to** face their accusers and **defend themselves**. Festus was accurate, however, when he reported that he saw **the case the very next day** after the arrival of the Jewish leaders (the ones who would have Agrippa's interest).

25:18-22 Quickly reviewing the facts, Festus explained that he had **expected** a separate set of **accusations**. He did not anticipate that it would concern **something about their religion and about someone called Jesus who died, but whom Paul** was insisting was **alive**. Festus admitted that he didn't know **how to investigate**. Particularly confusing seems to have been the part about the "dead man" being alive. But because Paul had **appealed to the emperor**, so he was kept in custody until arrangements could be made to get him to Rome.

Festus's quick review of the facts had its desired result: **Agrippa** wanted to **hear the man** himself. Paul's audience with Agrippa was set for the following day. It would be a golden opportunity for all those present—Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, the royal entourage, the high-ranking officials (see 25:23)—to hear more from this ex-Pharisee about the "dead man named Jesus" who he claimed had come back to life!

King Agrippa, in Caesarea with his sister Bernice for a political visit with the new governor, Festus, became embroiled in the controversy over Paul. Festus, mindful of Agrippa's familiarity with Jewish law and practice and needing to prepare legal paperwork for Caesar, arranged a special audience with Paul. Festus found Paul's testimony absurd; Agrippa found it pointed and a bit too personal. Nevertheless, Paul took advantage of this situation to tell about his encounter with Christ and his fervent belief in the truth of the gospel.

25:23 Into the **auditorium** came **Festus, Agrippa and Bernice**, and a controversial prisoner. While they arrived **with great pomp**, the real royalty in the room was the prisoner, the born-again child of the King of kings.

25:24-25 **Festus**, as the Roman governor in charge of the court at Caesarea, opened the proceedings. Luke certainly wanted to include this concise exoneration of Christianity by an esteemed representative of the Roman Empire. Festus explained that the **local** Jewish leaders and **those in Jerusalem** were demanding Paul's **death**. In his judgment of the case, however, Paul had **done nothing worthy of death**. That

would be a significant check to those who were chasing, imprisoning, and prosecuting Christians around the Roman world. Because Paul had **appealed his case to the emperor**, he would be sent to Rome.

25:26-27 Festus went on to explain how he was at a loss for what to **write** in his report to **the emperor**. He was required to prepare a legal brief, detailing the charges that had to be sent along with the appeal to Emperor Nero. Explaining his reason for the gathering, Festus explained that he wanted **King Agrippa** to help him put into words **the charges against** Paul.

Chapter 8

Acts 26

After hearing Festus's opening remarks, Agrippa ordered Paul to **speak** in his own **defense**. What follows is an excellent example of Paul's powerful oratory skills and the most complete statement of his defense. The thoroughness of the record of this speech and details like this hand motion indicate that Luke must have been present.

The accusing Jewish leaders, however, were not present, so Paul would not be responding to specific charges. The absence of a strict prosecutorial air allowed the apostle to freely express his thoughts. Paul aimed his remarks most directly at Agrippa (26:1-28), though other important people were in the audience.

Agrippa's verdict, though not a formal judicial one in Paul's case, would be important for Paul and, thus, for all of Christianity. Agrippa not only was an **expert on Jewish customs and controversies**, he was also a very influential government figure for Israel.

26:4-5 Paul began with his early life, which had been spent in **thorough Jewish training**. Paul's contemporaries, including some on the Jewish council who were attacking him, knew of his solid Jewish heritage and the fact that he had **been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect**. By saying this, Paul established that there could be no doubt about the thoroughness, seriousness, or excellence with which he pursued his Judaism.

Being a Pharisee meant that Paul was already committed to the importance of the resurrection from the dead—a major tenet of the Pharisees, one that prompted their ongoing debate with the Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection (see 23:6-9). Of course, this issue would take on much more significance as Paul's message unfolded.

26:6-7 Paul used the rich heritage of **God's promise** to his and Agrippa's common **ancestors** as a connection to Agrippa and to the Jews (**the twelve tribes of Israel**). They all shared **the same hope that** God would keep the promise he had made to his people, a hope that was inextricably tied up with the resurrection of the dead (see 23:6; 24:15). If any Jew—from Abraham forward—had any hope for the

fulfillment of any promise that God had made, it must be tied to a belief that he would be resurrected in some form at some time, or the whole concept of God's promises would be ludicrous. That was Paul's point. The absurdity was that Paul was being attacked for holding to this hope that was shared so adamantly by his Jewish brothers.

26:8 While he was addressing the king singularly concerning their ancestral "hope" in 26:7, Paul addressed his question to the whole audience, which was mostly Gentile. He asked them why it was so **incredible** (literally, "unbelievable") to any of them **that God can raise the dead.**

Since so much of the Jewish hope was tied to a belief that God raises people to continued life beyond this one, why were the Jews arguing with Paul about the resurrection? The reason, of course, was one well-documented case of a certain resurrection that had been confirmed by hundreds of eyewitnesses. This had become the life work of those who had been closest to the scene of this resurrection. In addition, many had already given their very lives for the cause—a cause whose whole credibility rested on the veracity of the resurrection of this one whom Paul was about to name.

26:9 Paul named himself as one who theoretically believed in the resurrection of the dead as a solidly educated Pharisee but who vigorously opposed the movement that believed in the resurrection of Jesus. He not only refused to believe that **Jesus of Nazareth** had been resurrected, he also thought he should **do everything he could to oppose** the movement.

26:10-12 With the authorization of the **leading priests**, Paul had captured the **believers in Jerusalem** and sent them to **prison**. He even went so far as to **cast his vote against** Christians **when they were condemned to death**. Much of Paul's work was done through **the synagogues**, where Paul found most of the Christians in the early days of the movement. This would remind Agrippa that the Christian movement had Jewish roots. In the synagogues, Paul would have believers **whipped** to try to force them to **curse Christ**. Paul was so passionate, **so violently opposed** to those who knew Christ, that he **hounded them in distant cities of foreign lands**. He took his campaign of terror on the road, headed **to Damascus**.

26:13-14 About noon, Paul saw **a light from heaven brighter than the sun,**

blazing around him and his traveling companions. The presence of this bright light from heaven is mentioned in all three accounts—in chapter 9 (the actual event), in chapter 22, and here. The voice from heaven is also central to all three accounts.

The revealed word of the risen Christ to the apostle Paul is the centerpiece of the story. **In Aramaic**, Paul had been addressed and asked, **“Why are you persecuting me?”** Notice, as has been the case in every account, Jesus made it clear that Paul had not been persecuting heretics but, rather, Christ himself.

One important addition to Christ’s words here is not included in either chapter 9 or 22. Paul added that Christ had said, **“It is hard for you to fight against my will.”** Paul’s passion and his conviction were commendable, but he was not headed in the direction that God wanted him to go.

26:15-16 Upon Paul’s inquiry as to the identity of the speaker, the voice answered: **“I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.”** The information to follow is also unique to this recounting of the Damascus road experience. From his prostrate position, Paul was commissioned by Christ himself. He was to be Christ’s **servant** (1 Corinthians 4:1) and Christ’s **witness** (the ongoing theme of Acts predicted in Christ’s words in 1:8). Paul would **tell the world** about not only **this experience** at Damascus but also about the other times that Christ would **appear** to him. Paul was to be the recipient of a great deal of God’s “light” to both Jews and Gentiles.

26:17-18 When Jesus said, **“I will protect you,”** inherent in this statement was the promise of danger from which Paul would need protection. The two sources of the danger would be his **own people** (the Jews) **and the Gentiles**, in whose court he stood. Christ’s words of the commission to Paul sound like the work predicted of the Messiah in places like Isaiah 35:5; 42:7, 16; 61:1. Paul was to **turn** many people **from darkness to light**, which he did (see 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:18; 5:8; Colossians 1:12-13). Paul was to be God’s instrument of turning Gentiles **from the power of Satan to God**, inviting them to **receive forgiveness for their sins**, which he did (13:38; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Paul was also to offer Gentiles **a place among God’s people** (Romans 8:17; Colossians 1:12). Paul took every opportunity to remind his audience that the Gentiles had an equal share in God’s inheritance. This inheritance is the promise and blessing of the covenant that God made with Abraham (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Peter 1:3-4).

26:19-20 From that point, Paul had been obedient to the **vision from heaven**

(1 Corinthians 9:1, 16). He had begun **in Damascus**, then went to **Jerusalem, Judea**, and beyond. His field of endeavor, under the sovereign leadership of God, was **the Gentiles**. Though the locations changed, and the nationalities changed, the message was the same at every stop. This message, of course, tied Paul to John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2, 8), Jesus (Matthew 4:17), and Peter (Acts 2:38). They all called for personal conversion—a change of heart and mind that showed itself in a change of direction.

26:21-23 For his simple obedience to this incredibly powerful calling, for his faithful presentation of this gospel message, Paul had been **arrested**. Attempts had even been made on his life. But God had been true to his promise to protect him (26:17) so that he could **tell these facts to everyone**, including those before whom he was standing. Then Paul summarized what he had said in front of every Jewish audience so far in his ministry: **I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen** concerning the suffering Messiah and the promise of his resurrection (see 13:27-41 for a sample). This resurrection, which followed the rejection and murder of the Messiah, would serve as a beacon, **a light to Jews and Gentiles alike**.

26:24 Festus could not stand it anymore, and he erupted. The message of this suffering Messiah was one thing, but to believe that he had been killed by his own people and then had been raised from the dead as a light to the world was too much for the humanistic mind of the Roman governor. He decided that Paul must be **insane**.

26:25-27 Paul affirmed to the governor that he was **not insane but** was instead **speaking the sober truth** that had the most important of implications for all those within its hearing. Paul turned to Agrippa for confirmation of what he had just presented, stating his certainty that **these events** were **all familiar**. Agrippa's responsibilities for the Temple activities at Jerusalem would surely have caused him to cross paths with the activities of the church. He would have been familiar with not only the Old Testament Scriptures but also the basics of Jesus' life and the start of the church in the wake of Jesus' crucifixion and claimed resurrection.

Paul's statement that this was **not done in a corner** is simply an idiomatic way of reminding his audience that Christianity had been a very public movement

from the moment of the inception of the church on that first Pentecost, when three thousand people had been converted in the temple courts at Jerusalem in one day (chapter 2).

Next, Paul got very personal and direct with King Agrippa, asking, and then answering his own question about Agrippa's knowledge of and belief in the prophets. Agrippa could provide, if he were so inclined, plenty of information to Festus about Judaism, the Messiah, Jesus, and the Way. He could corroborate what Paul had said so far and confirm that his message was not far removed from mainstream Judaist theology. But Agrippa did not.

26:28 Paul's direct question embarrassed Agrippa in front of this powerful crowd. His response, in what is a condescending fashion, was to shoot back. It is difficult to tell whether Agrippa's tone of voice was harsh or joking, though the desired effect was to brush Paul off.

If Agrippa were to say that he did not believe the prophets, he would have lost influence with his Jewish constituency. If he were to say that he did believe the prophets, then he would have played into the hands of Paul the evangelist, who then would say that Agrippa would have no reason not to believe in Christ. So, Agrippa just retaliated quickly, reminding the apostle who was the prisoner and who was the potentate: **"Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly?"** The question may have been a jab at Paul and his message, saying that he would not be as easily persuaded as Paul's other converts had been. **26:29** The passion of the apostle and the universal need for the gospel message comes through in Paul's response to Agrippa's brusque statement. Notice how Paul changed the tone of the exchange.

This was not Paul the debater; this was Paul the evangelist with a tender heart for the lost souls in need of finding the Savior. Paul explained that it didn't matter to him whether Agrippa believed **quickly or not**; he simply prayed that Agrippa, along with the entire **audience**, would become just like him, **except** for the **chains**. That is, Paul wanted them to find the Messiah who had found him that day on the road to Damascus.

26:30-31 Agrippa may have been getting uncomfortable with the way the conversation had turned. He was moving toward conviction. He had simply heard all he needed to hear to know what he thought of it all. In any case, Agrippa decided that the meeting was over.

Festus and Agrippa discussed the case and agreed that Paul was innocent. King

Agrippa, a Jewish sympathizer, and well versed in Jewish issues, added his legal vindication of the Christian movement. This word would be of great comfort and usefulness to believers around the Empire who were experiencing increasingly intense pressure from those who wanted to prosecute the Christian movement as being anti-Jewish and anti-Roman.

26:32 Paul's appeal **to Caesar**, of course, had taken the matter out of the jurisdiction of Festus and Agrippa. Paul had to go to Rome. Though he could have been **set free**, Paul was instead free from the murderous Jews and setting out on an all-expense-paid trip to Rome.

Chapter 9

Acts 27

PAUL SAILS FOR ROME / 27:1-12

At long last, Paul boarded a boat for Rome, in October (A.D. 59). He was accompanied, at the very least, by Luke and Aristarchus. This was too late in the fall to be on the open seas. And, sure enough, severe weather made for rough sailing. Paul sensed real danger ahead and encouraged the crew to find a safe harbor for the winter. Nevertheless, the leaders of the voyage pressed on.

27:1-2 The first person plural pronoun we indicate that Luke had again joined Paul (for the first time since chapter 21). Luke accompanied the apostle to Rome to serve as his personal physician. **Aristarchus** may have been acting as Paul's personal attendant or servant. Aristarchus was the man who had been dragged into the theater at the beginning of the riot in Ephesus (19:29; 20:4; Philemon 1:24). It is not stated whether the centurion **Julius** was a believer, but he took diligent care of Paul (see 27:3). Later, Julius would single-handedly protect Paul and the other prisoners from being executed during the shipwreck. He is one of several Roman centurions in the New Testament who are portrayed favorably (Luke 7:1-10; Luke 23:47; Acts 10:1-48).

27:3 Sidon was about seventy miles north of Caesarea, where this journey had begun. A brief stop in Sidon permitted the Christians there to provide food and supplies for Paul's needs. The Christian community there probably originated with the dispersion of believers from Jerusalem after the death of Stephen (see 11:19). The Roman officer allowed Paul to **go ashore to visit with friends**. Julius may have been advised by Festus to give preferential treatment to Paul.

27:4 The most direct route from Sidon to Myra would have directed the ship south and west of Cyprus (the same route Paul had traveled when he had returned from his third missionary journey). The summer and early autumn winds, blowing from the west and northwest, however, required the ship to remain close to the coast, sailing **north of Cyprus between the island and the mainland**.

27:5-6 Rounding the northeast peninsula of Cyprus, Paul's vessel would have once again faced the strong headwinds from the west and northwest. But by hugging the coastline and taking advantage of the gentler night breezes, the ship was able to dock at **Myra**.

In this port city on the southern coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), Julius located an **Egyptian ship sailing for Italy**. This was a large grain ship (big enough to carry 276 passengers—see 27:37-38). Egyptian grain was a Roman staple at this time in history, and Myra was a key hub of the imperial grain service.

27:7-8 With the favorable travel period quickly ending, the captain of the Alexandrian ship pushed westward to reach Italy before winter. But the elements were already beginning to make sailing west difficult.

Cnidus, with its two harbors and ample accommodations, would have made an excellent stopping point from which to wait for favorable winds. But the weather conditions made it difficult to put in there. Thus, the ship's captain chose to head south toward **Crete**, which is the largest island in the Aegean Sea. In better weather, captains would sail to the north of Crete. With winter fast approaching, however, the northern route was suspect. The northern coast had few suitable harbors and left ships unprotected against the often dangerous winds; therefore, Paul's ship journeyed to the eastern tip of Crete and then west along the southern coast, where harbors were more available.

The small harbor at **Fair Havens** (modern-day Limeonas Kalous) did not afford much protection. Nevertheless, since the coastline just beyond Fair Havens veers sharply northward and exposes vessels to the full force of the northwesterly winds, the ship put in there to wait for the wind to shift.

27:9-10 Waiting for favorable weather at Fair Havens, the ship's anxious commanders had a decision to make: Should they stay put and find winter quarters in Fair Havens (or nearby Lasea)? Or should they push on westward to complete their journey to Italy before winter? A guiding principle of sailing was that it was **dangerous** from mid-September to mid-November and disastrous from mid-November to mid-February.

Luke did not record whether this decision was the subject of a public discussion.

Nevertheless, Paul made his prediction known to the **ship's officers** that to

continue the trip would result in **trouble** and **danger**. Paul's warning may have been stimulated by his own experience. Prior to this voyage, he had written, in 2 Corinthians 11:25, that he had already survived three shipwrecks. Paul was exhibiting common sense from the weather/sailing calendar. In ancient times ships had no compasses and navigated by the stars, so Paul understood that overcast skies and strong northwesterly winds made sailing west all but impossible and extremely dangerous.

27:11-12 By this time the worsening weather conditions had eliminated any remaining hopes of reaching Italy. Although the weather was not ideal for sailing, the **captain** and the **owner** of the ship didn't want to spend the winter in **an exposed harbor** like **Fair Havens**. The ship departed for **Phoenix**, only a few miles west along the southern **coast of Crete**.

THE STORM AT SEA / 27:13-26

Leaving the relative safety of Fair Havens, Paul's vessel encountered a violent storm. The crew tried valiantly to weather the storm but eventually gave up all hope of saving their lives, much less the battered ship. Paul gathered the ship's crew and encouraged them with two promises of God: (1) that he (Paul) had been guaranteed safe arrival in Rome; and (2) that everyone sailing with him would be protected from harm. One truth stands clear in the middle of this nerve-racking voyage: Life may get messy, complicated, or even frightening, but God's will cannot be thwarted!

27:13-15 Favorable winds and weather at that moment caused the captain to proceed with the journey. Had these conditions continued, the ship would have brought the passengers and crew to their destination within hours, certainly less than one day. But the air currents suddenly **changed** (a common occurrence in these waters), and the resulting "**northeaster**" coming down off the mountains of southern Crete was deadly! In describing this wind, Luke used the Greek word from which we get our English word **typhoon**.

The opposing currents of air created a whirling motion of both clouds and sea, but then the wind began to blow steadily in one direction.

Ancient ships lacked much ability to tack (i.e., follow a charted zigzag movement to make optimal use of unfavorable winds). When contrary winds arose,

ships were mostly at their mercy and were left to **run before the gale**.

27:16-17 The tiny island of **Cauda** (some twenty-three miles south) provided a temporary cover from the storm as the ship moved behind (south of) it. The sailors used this brief respite to tie everything down and prepare for the worst. The **lifeboat** they managed to hoist aboard was a useful tool in ancient sailing. It was typically used for landings and to maneuver the ship for primitive attempts attacking.

No doubt it was filled with water and was on the verge of breaking loose or crashing into the mother ship; the lifeboat had to be brought on board. Anyone who has ever attempted to right an overturned canoe filled with water can appreciate the difficulty of such a task. Another emergency measure was “banding” **the ship with ropes**. This involved passing ropes (or chains) under the ship to hold it together.

Pulled tightly in a transverse fashion, such cables would hopefully help hold the timbers against the tremendous force of stormy waves.

Even though **Syrtis**, on the northern coast of Africa (Libya), was some four hundred miles away, the sailors began to fear the prospect of being driven there. The legendary quicksand and shoals in the southern Mediterranean were treacherous even in normal weather—so much so that Alexandrian ships would sail northward to Asia and then west to Italy to avoid this area.

To combat this drift, the sailors **lowered the sea anchor**. This had the effect of giving the ship a dragging resistance to the wind and waves. By putting the ship on a starboard tack (her right side to the wind) and by utilizing storm sails, the ship would have been able to drift slowly in a westerly direction.

27:18-20 Despite all the emergency measures taken, the ship was being battered, even beginning to take on water. Crew members began **throwing the cargo overboard** (the grain) to make the ship lighter. When this proved inadequate, the sailors **threw out the ship’s equipment**. Such actions indicate the crew’s absolute desperation. The severity of the storm obscured the **sun** and **stars** (by which sailors navigated). The ship was being driven and tossed by the winds. It was leaking. A bleak sense of doom and despair permeated the passengers and crew.

27:21-24 The passengers and crew had not **eaten** due to fear, busyness, depression, or seasickness. They may have been fasting, or supplies may have been depleted (and were being rationed) due to the extra length of the journey. Paul reminded the crew that, with God’s guidance, he had prophesied this very problem

(27:10). Because he had been right in the past, they should listen to him now and have hope. Paul told them, “**None of you will lose your lives.**” For no one to die in a shipwreck would be considered a great miracle in the ancient world.

Standing under dark skies on the deck of a ship that was bobbing like a cork, Paul stated the reason for his unlikely confidence. The previous night he had been visited by **an angel** of his God, who told him that he would get safely to Rome, along with **everyone sailing with him**.

27:25-26 After relating this encouraging vision to his despairing shipmates, Paul admonished them to **take courage**. Having faith means taking God at his word. It means relying wholeheartedly on the clear-cut promises of God. The issue isn't whether a person has great faith but whether he or she has faith in a great God.

This was true of Paul. A shipwreck would not normally be considered good. Knowing about it in advance, however, would make the experience less terrifying for the passengers and crew.

THE SHIPWRECK / 27:27-44

God had revealed to Paul that a shipwreck was inevitable (27:26). Sure enough, the ship ran aground and began to break apart just off the coast of Malta. Though the experience proved to be harrowing, all 276 people on board were able to swim safely ashore. Repeatedly during this grim experience, Paul had proclaimed his faith in God. Now, during this end of Paul's two-week-long nightmare at sea, God demonstrated his faithfulness and mercy.

27:27-28 In the two weeks that had passed since departing Fair Havens, the Alexandrian ship found itself adrift in the **Sea of Adria** (here a reference to the central part of the Mediterranean Sea between Italy, Crete, and the northern coast of Africa). The **sailors' sensed land was near** because they heard breakers in the night. **Soundings** were made by throwing a weighted, marked line into the water.

When the lead hit the bottom, sailors could tell the depth of the water from the marks on the rope.

Calculating a conservatively estimated rate of drift of some thirty-six miles per day (given the inclement weather conditions), a ship would, in two weeks' time, be close to what is known as St. Paul's Bay at Malta. This calculation corresponds to the recorded soundings both cited by Luke and demonstrated by modern oceanographic research.

27:29 If breakers were being heard in the distance, to continue to push toward land in the dark would have been foolhardy. Anchors acted as a primitive braking device; ships had many anchors (from five to fifteen). Therefore, the crew **threw out four anchors** to keep the ship off the rocks and to keep the bow pointed toward the beach. They **prayed for daylight**, so they could see where they were going.

27:30-32 In the night, a group of sailors, not convinced by Paul's earlier assurances that all aboard would be saved, **tried to abandon the ship**. Under the guise of going out in the ship's dinghy to drop additional **anchors** and stabilize the vessel, the men intended to head for shore. Somehow Paul discerned their real intentions.

He may have been divinely warned or merely suspicious because of his own sailing experience. He alerted the **commanding officer**, Julius, and the Roman **soldiers** of the plot, implying that their own safety would be in jeopardy if these sailors could carry out their plan. Unlike the situation at the beginning of the voyage, Paul had the officer's attention and was functioning as the commander of the ship. Paul's words were followed completely, even when they went against common sense. The soldiers derailed the sailors' plan by cutting the lifeboat free. Without this smaller boat to ferry passengers to shore, everyone aboard was forced to depend on the Lord.

27:33-35 With a voice-of-experience and sense of the arduous task just ahead (making it to shore in cold, choppy waters), Paul encouraged his fellow travelers to gain strength and sustenance by eating. They had barely eaten for **two weeks** (due to a combination of fear, forced rationing, fasting, seasickness, and preoccupation with just surviving the storm). Again, Paul assured every one of God's promise of safety. There, amid dire circumstances, Paul presided over a traditional Jewish meal.

27:36-38 The passengers and crew were **encouraged** and **began eating**. There was no need to ration what was left or save it for later, for they knew they would soon be on land. Had they not eaten, they might not have had the strength to swim to shore. In the first instance of jettisoning (see 27:18), some of the cargo had to be kept for ballast, lest the ship become completely non-maneuverable. Now, by lightening the load, even more, the ship would ride higher in the water and be able to get closer to shore before running aground.

27:39-41 The disoriented sailors had no idea where they were. The geography and topography of what is now known as St. Paul's Bay on the northeast shore of modern Malta fits this description. They prepared to run the ship ashore. The sailors **cut off the anchors**, thus eliminating any kind of "braking action." Before reaching land, however, the ship **hit a shoal and ran aground** (modern research has confirmed between St. Paul's Bay and the island of Salmonetta the existence of a shallow channel only one to three hundred yards wide). Striking this underwater barrier between the two seas, the ship could go no further. Fierce waves began to strike the exposed rear of the vessel. Already weakened from a two-week pounding on the open seas, the ship quickly **began to break apart**.

27:42 Roman soldiers were charged with the safekeeping and safe delivery of any prisoners in their care. The law required them to pay with their own lives if any of their prisoners escaped (see 12:19; 16:27). In the certain chaos of a shipwreck, it would be easy for prisoners to slip away. The soldiers' instinctive reaction was to **kill the prisoners** to prevent this from happening.

27:43-44 Despite the potential for risk, the **commanding officer** was impressed enough with Paul to keep the soldiers from carrying out their plan. As the highest ranking official, he had the full authority to make this decision. Some swam; others floated ashore on pieces of the collapsing ship. The evacuation plan worked because **everyone escaped safely ashore**.

No prisoners are recorded as having escaped. This sequence of events preserved Paul for his later ministry in Rome and fulfilled his prophetic utterance that everyone on the ship would be saved (27:22). In the minds of both Greeks and Romans, surviving a disaster at sea was evidence of a person's innocence. The powerful sea gods were not believed to spare the guilty.

Chapter 10

Acts 28

PAUL ON THE ISLAND OF MALTA / 28:1-10

Detailed plots on his life, angry mobs, storms at sea, shipwrecks—all the forces of hell seemed to have been intensifying their efforts to keep Paul from reaching Rome. Now, on the island of Malta, the attack continued—Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake. Paul not only survived the snake attack unharmed, but he turned around and healed several sick people on the island. During the three-month stay in Malta (see 28:11), Paul was showered with hospitality. What the Devil intended for evil God turned into good.

28:1-2 In about two weeks, the storm had pushed Paul’s ship some 470 miles west of Fair Havens, Crete. Only when the crew and passengers came ashore did they realize that they had reached Malta, an island 60 miles south of Sicily and 320 miles from Rome. The islanders there were of Phoenician ancestry and had given the island its name (taken from the Canaanite word for “refuge”). Malta had excellent harbors and was ideally located for trade. Many Roman soldiers retired there.

28:3-4 In chilly weather, reptiles become lethargic. Lying in a bundle of twigs and brush, a snake might easily go unnoticed. With the jostling of Paul’s walking arousing it, it struck Paul on the hand.

The Maltese people quickly tried to make sense of these events by using their pagan presuppositions. Steeped in Greek legends and stories of gods relentlessly bringing wrongdoers to justice, they concluded that Paul must have been guilty of murder. Though Paul had somehow escaped divine retribution in the shipwreck, Nemesis, the Greek goddess of retribution, must have orchestrated this additional means of punishing him.

28:5-6 To the amazement of the Maltese observers, Paul not only did not drop dead, he did not even exhibit any swelling or discomfort. God had promised safe passage to him (27:23-25), and nothing could prohibit his reaching Rome. When these superstitious pagans saw that Paul was unhurt by the poisonous snake, they did

a complete about-face in their assessment of him. They had assumed that Paul was a murderer (28:4); now they decided he was a **god**.

A similar appraisal is reported in 14:11-18 when Paul ministered at Lystra. It is reasonable to assume that Paul deflected any idolatrous comments in the same manner as he had done previously.

28:7 Apparently wealthy, this **chief official**, named **Publius**, had a large estate. Whether he invited all 276 people to his home or whether he invited only Paul (and Luke) is unclear.

In view of the miracle on the beach (the snakebite), Paul's "divine" reputation, and the illness afflicting Publius's father, it is likely that Publius entertained only Paul and his immediate entourage (also Julius and the ship's owner).

28:8-10 Malta **fever and dysentery** are now known to be caused by microbes in goats' milk. This illness seems to have been common on the island. A person could be ill for a few months to two or three years. When Paul learned that **Publius's father** was suffering from this disease, he visited him, laid hands on him, and prayed over him. The man's complete healing followed. The news of this miracle spread quickly, and soon everyone with any kind of disease or ailment came to Paul to be cured.

Three months passed (see 28:11) because the shipwreck survivors had to wait for the passing of winter and arrangements to complete their journey on another vessel. When the time came to leave the island, the grateful Maltese people inundated Paul and his friends with gifts and provisions for the remainder of their trip of 320 miles to Rome.

PAUL ARRIVES AT ROME / 28:11-16

The last leg of Paul's journey to Rome was almost anticlimactic—smooth sailing, a warm reception by some Italian believers, his own private lodging (house arrest rather than imprisonment in a Roman penal facility). The stage was now set for Paul to begin ministering in the most influential city in the world.

28:11-12 Ships began sailing again between mid-February and mid-March, depending on the weather. Sailing vessels often would be named in honor of certain deities. These deities were thought to serve as protectors and would be called upon

in times of trouble. The **twin gods** referred to the sons of Zeus, the patrons of navigation. Their constellation (Gemini) was considered by sailors to be a sign of good luck. This **Alexandrian ship** was also likely a grain ship. It promptly (in one day's time) arrived in **Syracuse**, the chief city of Sicily.

28:13-14 Rhegium is modern-day Reggio on the “toe” of Italy. **Puteoli** is now called Pozzuoli and is located some 150 miles south of Rome. Situated in the Bay of Naples, Puteoli was the preferred point of entry for Alexandrian wheat ships (prior to the building of larger port facilities at Portus, near Ostia, during the reign of Claudius).

At Puteoli, Paul and his colleagues **found some believers** and stayed with them for **seven days** (apparently while the ship was being unloaded or while the centurion, Julius, was conducting other official business).

28:15 The **believers in Rome** heard about Paul's imminent arrival, due to messengers sent by the believers in Puteoli.

Eager to meet and greet the great apostle, an entourage headed south and intercepted Paul's party **at the Forum on the Appian Way**, a town about forty-three miles from Rome. A second welcoming committee of Roman believers encountered Paul at **The Three Taverns**, thirty-five miles south of Rome.

Paul's entrance to Rome was more like a victor's triumphal entry than a prisoner's march. A “tavern” was a shop or a place that provided food and lodging for travelers. The Appian Way, the main thoroughfare to Rome from the south, featured many such inns. Paul was grateful for this warm Italian reception; he **thanked God and took courage**.

28:16 At last Paul **arrived in Rome**, the most influential city on earth. This was the fulfillment of a long-term desire (Romans 1:10-16). Paul's **private lodging** was a rented house (see 28:30). Though **guarded** around the clock (in four-hour shifts) **by a soldier** (members of the Praetorian—or palace—guard, see Philippians 1:13), Paul had much more freedom than a typical prisoner.

PAUL PREACHES AT ROME UNDER GUARD / 28:17-31

Paul's first act in Rome was to call together the Jewish leaders. He wanted to

declare his innocence of the charges brought against him in Jerusalem. But more than this, he wanted to proclaim the gospel to his Hebrew brothers.

28:17 The decree of Claudius expelling Jews from Rome (18:2) happened eleven years previously (A.D. 49–60), so by the time of Paul’s arrival, Jewish leaders were back in Rome.

These Jews were an unofficial gathering of the leaders of various synagogues, not an official ruling body.

After **three days**, Paul **called together the local Jewish leaders** because he did not have the freedom to visit them in their synagogues. Beginning his presentation, Paul stated his innocence in the charge of violating Jewish laws or customs.

28:18-19 Paul reiterated the Romans’ inability or unwillingness to execute him. On three separate occasions, statements had been made to the effect that Paul had done nothing to deserve a **death sentence** (Claudius Lysias in 23:29; Festus in 25:25 and 26:31).

Paul emphasized that he had appealed **to Caesar** (25:11) because the Jewish leaders had adamantly and unjustly continued to pressure the authorities for a conviction. He felt he had no other recourse. And he further assured the Jews of his own motives in appealing to Caesar—not because he was trying to harm his own countrymen but solely to be declared innocent and set free.

28:20 The phrase, **the hope of Israel**, has been mentioned several times by Paul (see 23:6; 24:15; 26:7; 28:20).

For Paul, the messianic hope meant the fulfillment of God’s messianic prophecies first given to the patriarch Abraham. For all its history, the nation looked forward to a time when God’s anointed one would rule over a heavenly Kingdom. Because of his conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was that long-awaited **Messiah** and because of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, Paul was adamant that his message and theology were consistent with Jewish hope through the ages. Paul wanted his countrymen to come to see (as he had) that this new entity known as the

The Christian church was not a dangerous sect or departure from traditional Orthodox Judaism but simply the next phase In the unfolding plan of God that had been first announced to Abraham. **28:21-22** The Jewish leaders had not heard

specific allegations about Paul and his case, but they had heard a steady stream of negative comments about the **Christians**. There was a growing group of these people right there in Rome. The people who **denounced** Christianity may have been Jews who kept up with events in Israel, together with skeptical Romans, because Christians believed in one God, whereas the Romans had many gods, including Caesar. The Christians were committed to an authority higher than Caesar.

28:23-24 A meeting was arranged, and when the time for that appointment came, **many** Roman Jews came to hear from Paul. It was an all-day affair, during which Paul used the Old Testament **Scriptures** to explain the gospel to the Jews. Paul reminded the Jews of the many Old Testament prophecies and references to the Messiah; then he skillfully demonstrated how Jesus, in his coming, living, dying and rising, exactly fulfilled every divine promise and every Jewish hope. The effect of this long discourse and discussion was simply that **some believed, and some didn't**.

28:25-27 in this interchange, Paul had the final word, and it was a strong rebuke. He compared the departing, arguing Jewish leaders to the long-ago audience of **Isaiah the prophet** (see Isaiah 6:9-10). Those Jews had heard the very word of God and had seen the spokesman of God, but because of stubbornness and pride, they had been unable to understand and perceive the deeper, life-changing implications of the divine revelation that was being extended to them.

Rather than submitting to judgment by the truth, they had sat in judgment of truth. The great irony is that these Jews viewed themselves as religiously successful and slated for divine commendation when in truth they were spiritually blind, deaf, and under divine condemnation!

28:28 As he had done on several prior occasions (see 13:46; 18:6; and 19:8-10), Paul announced a turning from the unresponsive, hard-hearted Jews to the receptive **Gentiles**. From that point on, the non-Jews would be given priority when it came to evangelical witness. At some future point, Paul expected a change of heart by his countrymen (see Romans 11:25-32), but for the immediate future, Paul would direct his ministry to those who were eager to embrace the truth about Christ.

Verse 29 is not included in most of the ancient manuscripts.

28:30-31 While Paul was under house arrest **for the next two years**, he did more than speak to the Jews. He wrote letters, called his Prison Epistles, to the

Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians. He also wrote personal letters, such as the one to Philemon. This ending shows the gospel going forward to Rome, as the great commission had directed. It had now reached the international capital of the Gentiles.

He **welcomed all who visited him**, and that list was surely long. Luke was with Paul in Rome (2 Timothy 4:11). Timothy often visited him (Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; Philemon 1:1), as did Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21), Epaphroditus (Philippians 4:18), and Mark (Colossians 4:10). Paul witnessed to the whole Roman guard (Philippians 1:13) and was involved with the Roman believers.

Tradition says that Paul was released after two years of house arrest in Rome and then set off on a fourth missionary journey. Five reasons for this tradition are as follows: (1) Luke does not give us an account of his trial before Caesar—and Luke was a detailed chronicler; (2) the prosecution had two years to bring the case to trial, any time may have run out; (3) in his letter to the Philippians, written during his imprisonment in Rome, Paul implied that he would soon be released and would do further traveling; (4) events and places mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles indicate that Paul’s journeys continued after those recorded in Acts 28; (5) early Christian literature talks plainly about other travels by Paul. During Paul’s time of freedom, he may have continued to travel extensively, even going to Spain (see Romans 15:24, 28) and back to the churches in Greece. The books of 1 Timothy and Titus were written during this time. Later, Paul was imprisoned again, in Rome, where he wrote his last letter (2 Timothy).

During this first Roman imprisonment, he spoke **with all boldness** and **no one tried to stop him**. The Greek word (“without hindrance”) is the last word of Acts, thus ending the book on a triumphal note.

Many readers, however, have thought that the book ends too abruptly, especially in that it doesn’t relate what happened to Paul. But it must be remembered that the book is not about the life of Paul but about the spread of the gospel, and that had been clearly presented by Luke.

God thought it was not necessary for someone to record the entire history of the early church. Now that the gospel had been preached and established at the center of trade and government, it would spread across the world.

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