

ACTS

CHRIST CONTINUED

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Zack Flipse



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Bibliography

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Setting the Stage

The Author

*“In my first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.”
(Acts 1:1)*

- The author of Acts does not identify himself, though he does note the work to be the second in a series. The book is addressed to “Theophilus” (Acts 1:1), as the Gospel of Luke is likewise addressed (Luke 1:3). Because of the similarities in grammar and theme, it seems clear the Gospel of Luke is intended as the “first book” (Acts 1:1).
- The author of the Gospel of Luke is *also* not identified. But tradition, as well as literary evidence, supports reading Luke as the author of *both* the Gospel and Acts.

“This tradition, to my knowledge, is unanimous that this Luke penned our text, and it has usually drawn attention to the notorious ‘we’ passages in Acts, which, on their surface, seem to indicate the author of Acts was an eyewitness traveling companion of the Apostle Paul...while Lukan authorship of our text is not certain, it remains the most likely and plausible suggestion.”

(Jipp, 2)

- In three different sections, the author uses first person pronouns (“we,” “us”). It is assumed that in these places, Luke is personally present for these events.
- As early as the 2nd century, the prologue to the *Muratorian Canon* maintains Lukan authorship.

“Moreover the Acts of all the Apostles are included in one book. Luke addressed them to the most excellent Theophilus, because the several events took place when he was present; and he makes this plain by the omission of the passion of Peter and of the journey of Paul when he left Rome for Spain.”

(The Muratorian Canon in Bettenson, 30)

- Paul calls Luke “the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14). He writes in excellent Greek. Most conclude that Luke was a well-educated Greek man.
- Luke is thought to be the only Gentile author in the New Testament. Some early traditions claim that Luke was from Syrian Antioch—a place that becomes something of Paul’s home church for part of Acts.
- What Luke has preserved for us is incredible history. It seems that the care with which he wrote the Gospel—“having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you” (Luke 1:3)—applies also to the book of Acts. Luke accurately describes people, places, and cultures from an enormous geographical area—from Rome to Cyrene and nearly everywhere in between.

“The titles given to the rulers of the cities to which the apostle Paul goes are accurate. The flavors of the cities are what we know them to have been from other sources. Antioch, where Paul ministered, was not at all like Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not like Rome. Ephesus also had its own flavor. Luke knew what those cities were like.”

(Boice, 14)

“In regard to the style and content of Acts, the speeches of St. Peter are Petrine in thought and in diction (Acts 15). That of James and the apostolic circular letter, those of James. Those of St. Paul, especially the farewell address to the Ephesian elders which most resembles the epistles of that period (Cor; Gal;

Rom), are Pauline.”

(Lightfoot, 61)

- Luke accurately tells us what these people and places were like.
- “Theophilus,” to whom the text is written, means “lover of God.” It is possible that this is the name of an individual recipient of the letter.

- However, considering the size of both the Gospel of Luke and Acts, it is more likely that Luke uses “Theophilus” as a synonym for “all those who love God.” Acts is written for us.

The Theology

- While Acts recounts reliable history, we should remember that historical methods and goals in the first century were different than the modern day. Historians were *not* interested in being unbiased, but rather wrote about how *they* perceived and interpreted events.

“A biographer (and indeed, a historian as well) understood his or her task not merely as a ‘just the facts, ma’am’ description but as selective, interpretive and intentional. Ancient writers exercised greater freedom of composition than their modern counterparts when reporting real, historical events, something their readers generally expected.”

(Pennington, 67)

- We must read Acts as more than history—as Luke intended. Acts is *Scripture*, and it communicates something about God.
- So what does Luke intend us to learn? Luke wants us to see how the ministry of the risen and reigning Christ *continues* even after His ascension. Christ’s ascension from earth to Heaven does not *end* His work, but extends it.

“‘Acts’ is a short name for ‘The Acts of the Apostles.’ It might more properly be called ‘The Acts of Jesus Christ’ or, to be even more accurate, ‘The Acts of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Jesus Christ through God’s People.’”

(Boice, 15)

“The two narratives then which we call the Gospel and the Acts are two parts of one great history, the one giving an account of the life and work of Jesus in the flesh, the other an account of the life and work of Jesus in the church for he is still living, though he was dead. He is still present among us.”

(Lightfoot, 71)

- Throughout the narrative, Jesus is consistently portrayed as *ahead* of the Church, leading them from Heaven. God is accomplishing things that the Apostles only discover later.
- A central emphasis of Acts is the nature of the Church.
 - The Church is made up of disciples of Christ—those who learn and follow Him.
 - The preached message of the Church is rooted in the Word of God.
 - The Church offers worship in the Spirit.
 - The Church establishes new communities. These are genuine, fleshed out *communities*, not simply Sunday worship groups.
 - The Church is governed by a plurality of capable and qualified leaders.
 - The Church is international and multi-ethnic, not beholden to one specific expression of worship.
- We will use “Church” to apply to the universal Church of which we are a part. The lower-case “church” will designate activity in a specific local church.
- Luke also uses the theme of hospitality to communicate Gospel transformation. Those who show hospitality are portrayed as open to the Gospel, and hospitality often shows that someone has received the Gospel.
- Persecution plays a major role in Acts. As the message of Christ grows, so does the persecution. The early church gives us beautiful examples of how to bear up under trials and live counter-culturally.
- Luke’s thorough and accurate account of the movements and developments of the early church also strengthens the accuracy and apostolic authorship of the rest of the New Testament. We will do our best to make these connections where possible.

Establishing the Church

Acts 1:1-2:12

“In my first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will baptize with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’”
 (Acts 1:1-5)

- As we’ve seen, Acts and Luke are both written to “Theophilus”—the “first book” certainly referring to Luke. Luke does describe “the day when he was taken up” briefly in Luke 24:50-53.
- Luke now describes the ascension in greater detail, connecting Acts to the end of Luke and continuing the story. If Luke’s gospel is “all that Jesus *began* to do and teach...through the Holy Spirit to the apostles” (Acts 1:1-2) we should understand Acts as *all that Jesus continued to do and teach through the Holy Spirit to the apostles*.

“So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’”
 (Acts 1:6-8)

- The disciples ask about restoring the kingdom to Israel. We might initially wonder if the disciples are *still* thinking of an earthly kingdom.

- However, they are not rebuked for this question as we see at times in the Gospels. Jesus' answer is essentially, "Yes, and..."
- The kingdom *is* coming to Israel, but not Israel alone. It comes to "Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This sentence functions as an outline for the rest of Acts.
 - Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)
 - Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12)
 - To the ends of the earth (Acts 13-28)
- While Jesus answers "Yes, and" to their question about location ("Israel"), he does correct them on their sense of time ("at this time"). There are two *errors of evangelism* we should avoid: 1) Inactivity, and 2) Forcing the kingdom of God.

"Believers in Christ have always been faced with two great temptations where this assignment is concerned. One is the temptation to idleness...Jesus says to such an inactive church that they are to be filled with the Holy Spirit and when they are filled they are to go out and witness to him in all the earth. The church that is not witnessing is not obeying its Lord. The second temptation is the one the disciples were already caught up in. It is the temptation to think that we are to do the Lord's work in the world's way...Christians should seek proper public expression of their beliefs, but they must not suppose that they can bring in the kingdom of God by imposing their views on others. Moral reform will not come by political power or power tactics. Only the Holy Spirit can take the gospel to the hearts and minds of men and women and change them into disciples of the Lord."

(Boice, 19)

- The believers are called to be witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, but their effectiveness here requires first that they receive the power of the Holy Spirit. The theme of "witnesses" will come up frequently in Acts.

"And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of

Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”
(Acts 1:9-11)

- The disciples return to the upper room, where Jesus had celebrated Passover with them and instituted the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:14-23). Evidently, this place has become something of a *home base* for the disciples. Because of their frequent use of this home, some speculate that it is the same home from Acts 12:12 described as the home of Mark’s mother.

“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying. Peter and John and James and Andrew, Phillip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”
(Acts 1:12-14)

- Consider how the Apostles responded to grand, miraculous events throughout the gospels. When Peter witnesses the transfiguration, he moves quickly to build tents (Luke 9:28-36). When the men come to arrest Jesus, Peter draws a sword (Luke 22:50). In stark contrast, after witnessing the ascension they “devote themselves to prayer.”
- It seems the Apostles have learned a valuable lesson about God’s timing that we could learn today.
- The order of names highlights an important thing. Usually, the older brother is listed first. We see this in the way the gospels describe “Andrew and Peter” and “James and John.” Now, however, the younger brothers Peter and John are taken first. We will find that in many ways Peter and John take the lead in the book of Acts.
- A group of believers has gathered. They are described as united and worshipping.

“In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ‘Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the

Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.’ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ‘For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it”; and “Let another take his office.”’
 (Acts 1:15-20)

- Settling the discrepancies between Luke and Matthew’s accounts of Judas’ death is not the problem many make it out to be. If the chief priests purchased the field with Judas’ money (Matt. 27:7), Peter is right to recount this though Judas himself had purchased it. Judas hanged himself (Matt. 24:5), and because Jews could not touch a dead body he was left there until he burst open.
- While Peter’s representation of Judas is undoubtedly *negative*, he does affirm Judas’ previous ministry: ‘He was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.’ Jesus numbered the disciples (Luke 6:13-16). Judas, too, took the Gospel out and performed miracles (Luke 9:1-6).
- Jesus certainly didn’t make a mistake here. We should remember, especially in a day where pastors’ failings are plastered online for all to see, that God can use broken and even non-believing people to accomplish His purposes and spread His gospel.

“So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.’ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, ‘You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”
 (Acts 1:21-26)

- Already in the first chapter of Acts, we find the importance of a governing body. The Apostles elect a twelfth leader who must meet certain characteristics:
 - Must have accompanied us during Jesus ministry;
 - Must have an awareness of Jesus *entire* ministry—from His baptism to His ascension;
 - Must become a witness to His resurrection; that is, must testify accurately about who Christ is.
- We are right to expect a certain knowledge and character among our pastors and elders. The qualities listed here match closely to the qualities of elders and deacons given in 1 Timothy 3:1-13:
 - “He must not be a recent convert” (1 Tim. 3:6-7);
 - “They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9);
 - “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).
- Renewing the number of Apostles to 12 symbolizes that this new community in Christ is whole.

“In Luke 9:1-6, the Twelve were sent to Israel. Jesus promised that these Twelve would sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes. The twelve tribes must have twelve witnesses, thus the concern within this section to find a replacement for the traitor, Judas. The number one hundred and twenty also figures prominently in the mission to Israel. According to Jewish law one hundred and twenty males were required to form a synagogue with its own council—already the disciples have enough people to form a legitimate community.”

(Willimon, 23)

- Matthias is chosen by casting lots. Is this a legitimate way to make decisions? We ought to point out that this is used together with rational wisdom and prayer for the Lord’s direction.

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them

utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.' And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'"
(Acts 2:1-12)

- 49 days after the resurrection they are *again* “all together in one place.” This unity and desire to worship together will be a theme throughout the book.
- The Holy Spirit descends, as promised, and for the first time *indwells* the people of God. The Spirit is no longer *near* the people in a temple, but the Spirit is *in* the people—the people *are* the temple.
- The miracle of tongues here is not like what we find in 1 Corinthians 12. 1 Corinthians describes a miracle of *speaking* that requires spiritual translation in order to be understood. Pentecost is a miracle of *hearing*, enabling the hearer to understand known human language in their own tongue.
- The comprehension of languages is a reversal of Babel in Genesis 11—a confusion of languages. It marks that restoration has begun in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. At Babel, the confusion of languages was intended to disperse the people. In the same way, Pentecost begins the expansion of the Kingdom of God to “Jerusalem...Judea and Samaria...and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“Importantly, the Spirit impels the Christian mission in Acts. With the Pentecostal outpouring comes boldness to proclaim the gospel in the face of hostility (Acts 4:23-31). The Spirit directs Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch and Peter to the house of Cornelius (Acts 8:29 and 10:19-20, respectively). It is the Spirit who commands the setting apart of Barnabas and Paul for outreach to the Gentiles (13:1-3).”

(Cole, 213)

Early Church Worship

Acts 2:13-47

“But others mocking said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.’”

(Acts 2:13-15)

- Not everyone present receives the Holy Spirit, and we find that some are unable to hear and understand. Instead, the whole ordeal looks to them as though the people are drunk. This reminds us of the words of Paul to the Corinthians.

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

(1 Corinthians 2:14)

- Peter stands to address the people, giving what many consider the first sermon of the church age. He explains that the people are unlikely to be drunk at the third hour of the day—9:00am.

“But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon

to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”””

(Acts 2:16-21)

- Peter then uses a quotation from Joel 2:28-32 that prophesies of a day of great blessing. Peter sees this day, Pentecost, as bringing fulfillment to this passage from Joel.
 - People receive the Spirit; this has certainly taken place, represented by tongues of fire.
 - People will prophesy, which we could define as “speak forth the message of God.”
 - Interestingly, Peter—quoting Joel—specifically mentions that male and female will speak forth this message. In a similar way, Paul expects not only men but also women to be prophesying in public worship (1 Cor. 11:5)
 - Miracles and signs will function to *establish* the teaching. The miracles and signs are not the ends, but another means—together with teaching—to the end.
 - This will go on “before the day of the Lord.”
 - People will call upon Christ and be saved.
 - Peter likely does not fully grasp what it means that “all flesh” would receive this outpouring of the Spirit. In Acts, Peter will be confronted with the reality that even Gentiles, non-Jews, are experiencing conversion and receiving the Spirit! This is a way in which Christ is *ahead* of the Apostles, leading them into His Kingdom.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David said concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness

with your presence.” Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”
(Acts 2:22-36)

- We can learn a lot about worship in the early church from Peter’s sermon:
 - Preaching is from Scripture. Not only does Peter begin with the quotation from Joel 2, but he also cites from Psalm 16 and Psalm 110.
 - The message is about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.
 - The church *immediately* has a developed doctrine.
 - All three persons of the Trinity are not only mentioned, but are described as uniquely active in the life of believers.
 - The sovereignty of God is emphasized—this redemption was the “definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (2:23). “Foreknowledge” is a verbal noun that implies activity, not just passive knowledge.
 - Jesus lived, was crucified and died, he was raised, he ascended to heaven. Much of what we consider *The Apostles’ Creed* can be found in these few verses.
 - Jesus is called “man” but also described as “Lord.”
 - Scripture is true and authoritative. David can be described as a “prophet.” He has already quoted from Joel, and now also from the Psalms to make authoritative claims about who God is and what Christ has accomplished.
- The audience of this sermon are Israelites (“Men of Israel”, “the house of Israel”). Remember that the advancement of the Kingdom of God will begin in Jerusalem before expanding to Judea and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized everyone one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.’ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”
(Acts 2:37-41)

- This preaching from Scripture about Jesus convicts the people, who respond with faith. It is not the miracle of tongues or any other sign that convicts the people, it’s the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul, too, expects Scriptural preaching in the church to have the same effect.

“If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.”
(1 Corinthians 14:23-25)

- The people, convicted of their sin by the Gospel, respond in repentance and faith. Because of this faith, they receive the sign of baptism for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church today continues to give the sign of baptism to those who profess faith.
- Peter adds that the promise is for “you and for your children and for all who are far off” (2:39). Put differently, the promise of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to believers, their children, and to the Gentiles.
- Many churches have traditionally understood this to mean that the sign of baptism should be given to the children of believers. They see a strong connection between baptism—the New Testament sign of faith—and circumcision—the Old Testament sign of faith. The same pattern as “for you

and for your children and for all who are far off” (2:39) is found in the giving of the sign of circumcision to Abraham.

“This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised.

Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.”

(Genesis 17:10-13)

“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

(Colossians 2:11-12)

- Peter’s message also mentions that faith is dependent on the call of God: “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (2:39). As we follow the mission work throughout Acts, we’ll see how people stumble over the Gospel until God opens their hearts to receive His message.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

(Acts 2:42-47)

- It is God who “added to their number” (Acts 2:47).

- Acts 2 not only gives us a picture of the *preaching* in the early church, but also the *community*.
- This community is marked by several characteristics:
 - *Devoted to apostolic teaching*: This is a community interested in the truth of Scripture. We've already seen the emphasis Peter placed on the authority of the Old Testament. Luke, our author, as well as both Peter and Paul state that the apostles' teaching has the same kind of authority as the Old Testament prophets (Eph. 2:20; 2 Pet. 3:2). We could interpret "devoted to apostolic teaching" as "devoted to the New Testament."
 - *Devoted to the fellowship*: These people were devoted to one another more than just one hour on a Sunday. They were devoted to maintaining the kind of unity and rich hospitality they experienced.
 - *Devoted to communal meals*: Some claim "breaking of bread" implies the Lord's Supper, a sacrament that the early church celebrated every week with a meal rather than a small wafer and cup. Whether or not this is right, it is true that Jesus and His disciples often gathered around a table for a meal. This demonstrates a deep relational unity within the church.
 - *Devoted to prayer*: They prayed for one another with sincerity and regularity.
 - *Generosity*: It was their intent that peoples' needs would be met.
 - *Attending the temple together*: These people went to church. While the ministry of the home is certainly an important theme throughout Acts, it would be wrong to conclude that the early Christians never gathered for public worship in a public place.
 - *Hospitality in the home*: Luke specifically mentioned that they were in one another's homes. Today, we protect our homes and rarely let others in.
 - *Praising God*: This was a worshiping community. Public worship is an important part of what it means to be a church.
 - *Evangelism*: They were witnesses to the resurrected Christ. When the Church bears witness to the resurrected Christ, the Lord adds to their number.

"As one views modern congregations, many with their hectic round of activities—yoga, ceramics, basketweaving, daycare—one suspects that socialization is being substituted for the gospel, warm-hearted busyness is being offered in lieu of Spirit-empowered community."

(Willimon, 42)

"In Jerusalem..."

Acts 3-4

*"Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong."
(Acts 3:1-7)*

- We noted how the early Christian community was dedicated to attending temple together. Aside from weekly worship, there were daily hours of prayer in the morning, afternoon, and evening.
- In "the ninth hour," which is 3:00pm or the evening hour of prayer, Peter and John are headed back to the temple to pray. In John's Gospel, he suggests that he and Peter had a close relationship (John 21:20-24).
- These Apostles meet a lame man begging outside the temple.
 - Child abandonment in the Roman world was all too common, some estimating that between 20-40% of children were abandoned in trash heaps or forests. Because disabled people were considered an economic strain on families and societies, babies born with disabilities were likely to be abandoned. In John 5, a similarly disabled man says, "I have no one to put me into the pool" (John 5:7).
 - Christians became known for rescuing abandoned children and caring for the disabled. Of course Jesus models this in a radical way, but others did as well. We see men lowering a disabled man through the roof (Mark

2:3-4), and here some caretaker—friends, family, or otherwise—brings the man to the temple “daily.”

- Disability was not only considered an economic strain, but also a sign of moral failure. Jewish rabbis reasoned that disabled children were the result of either the child’s sin in the womb, or the sin of the parents during pregnancy.
 - Jesus rejects such an idea when the disciples ask of the man born blind, “Who sinned, this man, or his parents?” (John 9:2). Jesus answers, “It was not that this man who sinned, or his parents” (John 9:3).
- What’s more, the Greeks had reasoned that giving money to beggars was wrong. Jews insisted on supporting beggars in this way, but the social stigma was strong.
- The lowly social position of this disabled beggar is juxtaposed by his presence beneath “the Beautiful Gate.”

“All the doors and gates within the temple complex were huge and beautiful, but this particular gate was called the Beautiful Gate or the Gate Beautiful because, though made of bronze in its interior, it was covered completely with silver and gold. It was a portico of magnificent opulence. Next to that symbol of wealth they laid this poor beggar so that people who walked past him, entering through the Gate Beautiful into the inner courtyard of the Jews, would be moved to compassion by his pitiable condition and give him alms.”

(Sproul, 53)

- That Peter and John “have no silver and gold” is interesting for two reasons:
 - They are standing at Herod’s Temple, a wonder of the ancient world, trimmed out with silver and gold. Peter and John are leaders of a different kind of Kingdom. Standing in stark contrast to the wealth and decadence of the world is the simplicity and contentment of the Christian.
 - We have just read that “they were distributing the proceeds to all...with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:45-46). And yet, Peter and John “have no silver and gold.” We are reminded that the radical hospitality of the early church is not an example of profit sharing and excess but one, again, of simplicity and contentment.
- Peter and John’s, following the example of Christ, offer the man compassion and healing. The ministry of Christ has not ended, it continues.

“And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s.”
(Acts 3:8-11)

- In the aftermath of the miracle, we find more of what we’ve come to expect:
 - Peter and John “entered the temple.” They are *devoted* to public worship.
 - Not only do Peter and John continue into the temple to worship, but they take the man with them! The man “clung to Peter and John.” They are *devoted* to a deep and diverse fellowship.
 - The lives of the Christians witness to the power of God, to the amazement of the people.
- The Apostles witness in deed (by the works they do), but are careful not to neglect the witness of the Word. Peter again delivers a message to the onlookers.
- He addresses the “Men of Israel,” and we are reminded that the witness—to this point—is to Jerusalem. This is why Peter can say, “[you] asked for a murderer...and you killed the Author of life.” These are the very people who cried, “release to us Barabbas,” and “Crucify him!” (Luke 23:18-21).

“And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: ‘Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted

out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with you fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed." God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.'" (Acts 3:11-26)

- This has all the markings of the last sermon.
 - Preaching is from Scripture. Peter here quotes Deuteronomy 18 and Genesis 22.
 - The message is about Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension. This is what Peter is a witness to. He deflects the praise of the people away from himself and toward God. The formerly-lame man understood this and praised God!
 - The church has a developed doctrine. This time, Peter's sermon comments on the eschatology of the early church. They expected Christ would come again after "these days," "the time for restoring all the things." Those who do not listen to His message "shall be destroyed."
 - All of Scripture is authoritative. Not only does Peter cite "Moses'" writings in Deuteronomy and Genesis, but includes Samuel and the "holy prophets." Peter's continual citations from Moses (the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible), David (the Psalms), and the prophets tells us that the Apostles understood the *whole* of the Old Testament to be authoritative and to be about Jesus.

"Then [Jesus] said to [the disciples], 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that

repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

(Luke 24:44-48)

- It is interesting that Peter has now 3 times inferred that the Gospel would be going to all nations. This time, he quotes the promise to Abraham that “the families of the earth be blessed.” The Apostles have yet to fully understand this promise.

“And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”

(Acts 4:1-4)

- Another incredible conversion results! After Peter’s previous sermon, three thousand repented of their sin and put their faith in the name of Jesus. This time, that number is *five thousand!*
- Peter’s sermon was blunt. Jesus, too, had taught “in the colonnade of Solomon” (John 10:23), the very place Peter is now standing. Jesus’ teaching resulted in his near stoning (John 10:31). Despite the success of the sermon, Peter meets similar opposition.
- Opposition comes specifically from the Sadducees. Perhaps this is because Peter witnesses to the resurrection, a concept the Sadducees would flatly deny (Acts 23:8).

“On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’”

(Acts 4:5-7)

- The religious rulers put Peter and John on trial. Several of these leaders are mentioned by name, most of whom are part of Annas’ “high priestly family.”

“Next morning the Sanhedrin met (probably in a building immediately to the west of the temple precincts), and the chief-priestly, Sadducean, element in its membership was specially well represented. Annas, the senior ex-high priest, was present, and so was his son-in-law Caiaphas, the reigning high priest, who by virtue of his office was president of the Sanhedrin. Only a few weeks had passed since they had both taken a hand in the condemnation of Jesus.”

(Bruce, 97-98)

“Caiaphas was appointed high priest by Valerius Gratus, procurator of Judaea, in A.D. 18, and held the office for the remarkably long term of eighteen years, including the ten years of Pilate’s procuratorship, A.D. 26-36. He was deposed from the high priesthood by Vitellius...and was replaced by Jonathan, son of Annas.”

(Bruce, 98)

- Annas was high priest from 6-15 AD. His son-in-law Caiaphas served the same role from 18-36 AD and was replaced by Annas’ son Johnathan (perhaps the same called “John” here).
- Standing before such powerful men from powerful families does not deter Peter’s boldness. He speaks to this group with the same bluntness as he had previously.

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.”

(Acts 4:8-14)

- Perhaps these powerful men are surprised to find that the crucifixion hadn't ended the ministry of Christ. Here, they find the same kind of healing, the same kind of bold Scriptural witness, and the same zeal for the Lord. The ministry of Christ is not dead, it continues.
- Peter delivers the same message to the religious rulers as we've seen in his other two speeches: from Scripture, about Jesus, doctrinally sound, and with authority. He quotes from Psalm 118, which may be a favorite analogy of Peter's (he also uses it in 1 Peter 2).

“For it stands in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.’”

(1 Peter 2:6-7)

- The religious leaders consider Peter and John “uneducated, common men.” Their judgment is as wrong as our churches when we suggest the same.
 - Both men lived in Capernaum, a bustling city on a major trade route. They were likely fluent in Aramaic and Greek.
 - They worked together in a fishing business, well-off enough to hire employees.
 - They were disciples of John the Baptist, then spent three years with Jesus who they called “Rabbi” even if the religious leaders disagreed. These men were called, equipped, and effective witnesses for Christ.
- The religious leaders can tell, seemingly by their boldness, that “they had been with Jesus.” What would it mean for others to recognize that you spend time with Jesus?
- The testimony of the healed man shielded the Apostles from further penalty. We are reminded that practiced Christianity *benefits* society in undeniable ways.

“But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, ‘What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.’ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.' And when they had further threatened them, they let them go finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old."
(Acts 4:15-22)

- The apostles must wrestle with their allegiance, whether they can “listen to you rather than to God.” The two errors of evangelism (see p. 10) apply here:
 - The Kingdom of God does not advance by *force*. Christians cannot *deny* the authority of secular rulers. We are called to submit to authority (Rom. 13:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:13-15) and be model citizens whenever possible.
 - However, the Kingdom of God does not advance through *inactivity*. Christians cannot be silenced by secular authorities.

“The principle is this: we are always to obey those in authority over us, unless that authority commands us to do something that God forbids, or forbids us from doing something that God commands...The general principle is that we bend over backwards to be submissive, but we stand with ramrod defiance when the magistrate commands disobedience to God.”
(Sproul, 76-77)

- True followers of Jesus are, at their core, testifiers to Jesus; the apostles “cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

“When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed”— for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to

your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”
(Acts 4:23-31)

- This beautiful *prayer* by the early church also contains the same elements we’ve come to expect from the *preaching* in the early church: It is from Scripture, concerned with Jesus, from sound doctrine (now including an appeal to Sovereign God’s predestining), and for authority.
- It is important to note that David’s Psalm (Psalm 2) is said to be “by the Holy Spirit.” It has always been the Church’s conviction that the Scriptures are written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit. Peter says the same in his second epistle.

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
(2 Peter 1:21)

- We ought to note what the prayer here is for. It is not *for* signs, wonders, and healings. The believers ask “to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” The miracles serve the message, not the other way around.
- Their prayer for boldness is asked and answered. We’ll see greater and greater evidence of this as the book unfolds.

Ananias & Sapphira

Acts 4:32-5:11

- The closing sections of Acts 2 (2:42-47) and Acts 4 (4:32-37) closely parallel one another. In both places, Luke breaks from the narrative story to describe the young Christian community.

“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”
(Acts 4:32-37)

- Here we meet Barnabas, who, in a radical display of generosity, gave the money from the sale of his property to be used in the church. He “brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:37).
- Barnabas’ generosity is directly contrasted by a couple named Ananias and Sapphira.

“But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”
(Acts 5:1-2)

- Barnabas “brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”
- Ananias “brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”
- The deep fellowship of this new-forming community will be threatened by imposters.
- Ananias and Sapphira mean to deceive the church to believe they have given the full amount when they haven’t. Somehow, Peter knows this. We are not told if he comes by this knowledge naturally or spiritually.

“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.’”

(Acts 5:3-4)

- That the community had “everything held in common” is not some ancient form of socialism. Private property exists here, and the couple was entitled to keep their property and keep their wealth had they determined to do so.
- Giving what we assume to be a rather large donation would otherwise be commendable generosity. “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).
- The issue is that they *lied*. What looks on the surface to be generosity is actually fraud. They intended to deceive the people, probably for the praise they would have received.
- We are not told that Barnabas was praised for his generous gift, but we could imagine a scenario where he received some notoriety—Luke knows enough to record it here. It is easy to imagine Ananias and Sapphira longing for the same kind of acknowledgment. They donate for the praise of man, but their greed will not allow them to give it all.

“They thought, I wish people were praising us like that. Look at the attention Barnabas is getting. He sold his field and gave them money. They named him ‘Son of Encouragement.’ How marvelous it would be to be thought of like that by our friends.”

(Boice, 96)

- We can relate to selfish motivations like these. How many of us worry less about bringing praise to God and more about how our singing sounded to

the church? Even the best of our intentions are clouded by the sin that so easily entangles; our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.

“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”
(Isaiah 64:6)

- Peter replies, “You have not lied to man but to God.” Ultimately, any sin is against *God*, the giver of the law.

“When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.”
(Acts 5:5-6)

- Why does Ananias receive such a serious fate? Throughout Scripture, when the people of God are establishing a new community, glory and judgment are often heightened. We find similar stories in Leviticus 10 and Joshua 7.
 - Leviticus is a book that establishes the law and practices of the new Israelite community freshly exiled from slavery in Egypt. In Leviticus 10, the priests Nadab and Abihu “offered unauthorized fire before the Lord” (Leviticus 10:1), choosing to disobey God’s prescribed ordinances for the newly formed community. “And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died...” (Leviticus 10:2).
 - Joshua is a book that chronicles the establishment of a new community in the Promised Land. In Joshua 7, a story with much overlap to Ananias and Sapphira, we find that Achan “took some of the devoted things” after the fall of Jericho (Joshua 7:1). For this greed, “all Israel stoned him with stones” (Joshua 7:25).
- Satan understands the importance of this developing new community in Acts. Peter had deduced that “Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit.”

“It is probably unlikely that Satan has ever tempted you personally, because he is only a creature and therefore can only be in one place at any one time. If you did wrong, you probably just did it on your own...In these early days Satan was outraged by what was happening in this Christian fellowship. Satan, the one

who wants everything for himself—who makes people as selfish as he possibly can make them—must have hated the spirit of generosity and unity among the early Christians.”

(Boice, 98)

- Spiritual warfare is a real and present challenge—we’ll certainly discover that in the Book of Acts. But that Satan should be directly involved in this situation tells us the importance of the unity of this community. If Satan seeks to destroy it, God is right to protect it.

“After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.’ And she said, ‘Yes for so much.’ But Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agree together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry your out.’ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.”

(Acts 5:7-11)

- The Holy Spirit will protect Christ’s Church.
- Luke could have chosen to omit this story. It doesn’t paint the community in the best light. But it is the truth: the church is a mixed community of both true and false believers. It is a community of imperfect people. It has flaws. The Church today does well to remember that our hope for security, stability, and salvation is not found in the Christians, but in the Christ.

“Luke does not present pure propaganda about an ideal church. There were needs in the church and although those needs were met through the sharing of the community, even this sharing was not without problems.”

(Gempf, 1075)

- We find these internal issues in the community not only here, but also when we come to Acts 6.

"...and in all Judea..."

Acts 5:12-42

- The apostles return to Solomon's Portico (Acts 3:11), where Peter and John had been arrested (Acts 4:3). Undeterred by the threats from the religious leaders, they continue to teach and heal.

"Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed."

(Acts 5:12-16)

- People are now coming "from the towns around Jerusalem." The movement is beginning to spread beyond Jerusalem into all Judea (Acts 1:8).
- Understandably, some of the believers are nervous about preaching in the very place that got Peter and John arrested and threatened.
- The boldness of the Apostles results in:
 - A multitude of new converts added to the community;
 - Signs and wonders done through the Apostles;
 - Healings: like the lame man in Acts 3, there are miraculous healings taking place.
 - Exorcisms: they are able to cast out evil spirits.
- Different Christian traditions have drawn different conclusions about the signs and wonders described in Acts. Perhaps we can toss out both extremes: the liberal theologian finds these to be fanciful myths, the hyper-charismatics find them to be the necessary activity of saved people.

- Generalizing, we could summarize the other positions in two:
 - Cessation: Some Christian traditions understand these miraculous signs and wonders as God’s means of establishing His Church through the Apostles *only*. Signs and wonders are done by and through the Apostles and those they lay hands on as extensions of Christ. The Church today no longer sees signs and wonders.
 - Continuation: Other Christian traditions expect these miraculous signs and wonders as God’s means of establishing His Church through His people still today. Signs and wonders may not be *normative* or *expected*, but Christians are right to pray for these gifts and administer them today.

“But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.”
 (Acts 5:17-21)

- Compare “none of the rest dared join them” to “when they heard this, they entered the temple...and began to teach.” We are often motivated by fear of man to keep silent, the Apostles are motivated by fear of God to keep preaching.
- The message of “this Life” is certainly Jesus, who has identified Himself as “the Life” in the Gospels. We are reminded, yet again, that the content of our message is not signs, wonders, fellowship, or good food—it’s Jesus.

“Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ‘We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.’ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them,

wondering what this would come to. And someone came and told them, ‘Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.’”
(Acts 5:21-25)

“Yet something about the gospel renders prisons ineffective. With the comic speed of an old ‘Keystone Cops’ movie, an angel sets the apostles free, and by daybreak they are back making trouble at the temple. Then follows an even more comic shuttling back and forth from council to jail, back to council, with the discovery of the apostles busy at the temple teaching.”
(Willimon, 56)

- As this new movement grows beyond Jerusalem, so does the opposition. In Acts 4, the opposition seems to be the Sadducees. Here, the governing body grows to “the council, all the senate of the people of Israel.” Luke is probably referring here to the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin, which means council, was made up of *both* Sadducees and Pharisees.

“‘The council [and] all the senate of the people of Israel’ most likely refers to the Sanhedrin, the body that ruled over Israel. The fact that the Sanhedrin was involved, and not just the Sadducees or the high priest, shows that the apostles were no longer considered just a threat to the temple or the religious authority, but were also seen as a threat to national security.”
(Mohler, 83)

- Despite their issues—both internally and externally—the movement grows.

“Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.’ But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’”
(Acts 5:26-29)

- There is definite repetition between our earlier story from Acts 3:11-4:22.
 - Both stories describe instances of healing—the lame man (Acts 3:7) and the multiple healings here (Acts 5:12).
 - In both instances, the Apostles teach at Solomon’s Portico—Peter and John (Acts 3:11) and now all the Apostles (Acts 5:12).
 - The teaching, in both cases, attracts the awe of the people (Acts 3:10), even resulting in conversion (Acts 5:14).
 - For this, the Apostles are arrested by the religious rulers (Acts 4:3, 5:18).
 - The religious rulers warned them not to speak of Jesus (Acts 4:18, 5:40).
 - The Apostles respond with bold civil disobedience (4:19-20, 5:29).
 - The community responds with joy and worship (Acts 4:24, 5:41).
- More importantly, there are several places in this passage where our author, Luke, portrays the Apostles ministering like Jesus. We are reminded that Jesus’ ministry is not over and gone; these leaders are *continuing* “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). The power and success they experience as they minister reminds us that Triune God is directing this ministry.
 - “The people held them in high esteem.”
 - “People also gathered from the towns...”
 - “...bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits”
 - They hope that “at least his shadow” would fall on them, like the woman who hoped to just get a *touch* of Jesus’ cloak.
 - “They were all healed.”
- Peter continues with his brief message before the council.

“The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”
(Acts 5:30-32)

- Even in this brief statement, we find what we’ve come to expect from the Apostles’ teaching. This is about Jesus, it reflects well developed doctrine—notice all Three Persons of the Trinity—as observed by eye-witness testimony.

“When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. And he said to them, ‘Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!’”
(Acts 5:33-39)

- A Pharisee named Gamaliel, gives the Sanhedrin wise advice. We will come to learn that Paul was a student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).
- During this time in history, there were many false teachers who claimed to be the Messiah. Gamaliel names two such leaders. Theudas had 400 followers, and Judas the Galilean led a band of people. Both of them were killed, and their movements came to a swift end.
- The Jewish historian Josephus records the story of this Judas the Galilean. Judas had followers who died for his cause, but no teaching of his was lasting.

“And besides this, the sons of Judas of Galilee were so slain; I mean of that Judas who caused the people to revolt, when [Quirinius] came to take an account of the estates of the Jews, as we have shown in a foregoing book. The names of those sons were James and Simon, whom Alexander commanded to be crucified.”
(Antiquities of the Jews, XX.V.II)

- This Judas, a false teacher, so convinced his followers that they were willing to die for what they believed. But what they believed did not save them. The movement amounted to nothing.
- The Sanhedrin put the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the test: if this lasts, it's of God. Praise God, it has lasted!

- Jesus' followers were willing to die for him, too. But for followers of Jesus, in dying there is life! These Apostles have seen the resurrection, and hope for eternal life with their exalted "Leader and Savior."

"So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus."

(Acts 5:39-42)

On Deacons & Elders

Acts 6:1-7

- The church has external opposition, but also internal disfunction. Despite the radical “house to house” hospitality that we continue to find littered throughout Acts, we do encounter internal strife. Acts 6:1-7 records another such internal issue.

“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.”

(Acts 6:1)

- This issue is different than that of Ananias and Sapphira. Rather than a congregant hurting the *church*, the *church* is hurting congregants by overlooking some of those who have needs.
- Today, the church might be charged with racism or xenophobia. The foreigners were not being treated fairly.

“Thus, there seems to have been some discrimination, or at least perceived discrimination, in the way the early church was caring for its widows. The ‘Hellenists’ (that is, the Greek-speaking Jews) were not receiving the same level of care as were the native Jerusalem widows.”

(Mohler, 89)

- There was a tendency to this error. We saw in Acts 1:6 that the disciples may still think about the kingdom of God in strictly Jewish terms, asking Jesus if He will “restore the kingdom to *Israel*.” It took some time for the church to understand the international nature of the Kingdom of God.
- The Church is imperfect, and it hurts people. Even the church governed by the Apostles themselves had failures.

“But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.”

(Galatians 2:11-13)

- We are reminded that the Church is made up of a diverse people of “every tribe and nation and people and language” (Revelation 5:9)—Hellenists and Hebrews included.
- Care for widows is an important aspect of formal church ministry. The Apostles make this clear in their epistles.

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

(James 1:27)

“Honor widows who are truly widows.”

(1 Timothy 5:3)

- Unfortunately, in our day and age our elderly and widows are often sent to retirement facilities to be forgotten. This was not an acceptable solution for the Apostles.

“And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’”

(Acts 6:2-4)

- The Apostles decide that a division of labor is in order. Yes, widows need to be cared for. Yes, people in our churches today need care and attention. However, the ministry of the Word needs attention as well. So that both preaching and service can rightly take place in the church, they create the office of deacon so no need might be overlooked.

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

(1 Timothy 3:1-13)

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

(Titus 1:5-9)

- When we consider the qualifications for choosing Matthias in Acts 1:21-23, we get a rather full picture of the qualifications for teaching ministry (often called *elders*) and servant ministry (often called *deacons*, which in the Greek means “servant”).

“And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochurus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.”
(Acts 6:5-6)

- They choose seven men. From this list, we only hear from Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60) and Philip (8:4-8, 8:26-40, 21:8-9) again.
- Note that the deacons come before the Apostles. The Apostles oversee the ministry of the deacons. In the same way, elders today oversee the ministry of the deacons.

“Some scholars refer to these seven men as the first diaconate. While these men are never specifically referred to as deacons, their task within the church certainly resembles the task given to deacons later in the New Testament (1 Timothy 3:8-13). Further, the fact that the apostles ‘laid hands’ on these men shows that they were probably appointing them to the office of deacon.”
(Mohler, 90)

- However, there is great overlap in the two ministries. Though we might often think of the elders as “teachers” or “leaders,” we’ll see Stephen and Philip both performing signs and wonders and successfully preaching the Gospel in both hostile and hospitable contexts.
- In the same way, though the deacons are called “servants,” we find the Apostles laying down their lives in service of their brothers and sisters.
- The offices of elder and deacon are distinct, but all believers are called to follow the example of Jesus in service and in preaching. Elders and deacons may lead the way in this, but they do not remove from us our responsibility to minister as the Spirit has equipped each one of us.

“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”
(Acts 6:7)

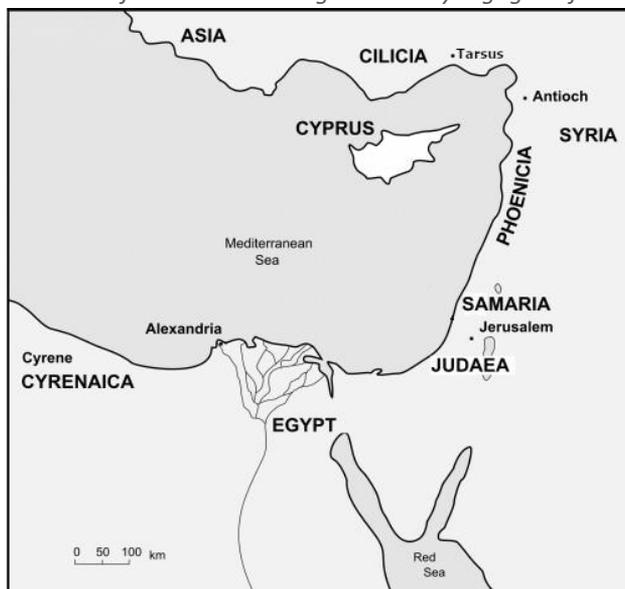
- The Church is blessed when it is rightly structured and rightly governed.

Stephen Stoned

Acts 6:8-8:3

- The story continues with Stephen, “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). Stephen is a deacon, a “servant,” but much more.

“And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.”
(Acts 6:8-10)



- We’ve seen the opposition to the Church grow. In Acts 4, it was the Sadducees. In Acts 5, it was the full Sanhedrin. Now in Acts 6, it extends beyond the religious rulers.
- Jews from around the known world have come to worship in Jerusalem. The opposition is made up of Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. As will soon become important, Tarsus is a city in Cyrene.
- These Jews, like those who considered Peter to be drunk in Acts 2, could not reason with Stephen and became frustrated by him.

“Then they secretly instigated men who said, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’ And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.’”
(Acts 6:11-14)

- They hold a sham trial and bring false testimony against Stephen. We are right to be reminded of Jesus here, in whose footsteps Stephen follows.
- The Jews charge Stephen with two blasphemies:
 - He speaks against “this place,” or the temple. They claim Stephen has said, “Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place.”
 - He speaks against “the law,” or the books of Moses. They claim Stephen has said, “Jesus...will change the customs that Moses delivered.”

“And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. And the high priest said, ‘Are these things so?’”
(Acts 6:15-7:1)

- The following is Stephen’s lengthy response:

“And Stephen said: ‘Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, “Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.” Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. And God spoke to this effect— that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. “But I will judge the nation that they serve,” said God, “and after that they shall come out and worship me

in this place.” And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.”
(Acts 7:1-8)

- Beginning with the call of Abraham, he narrates the story of the Old Testament.
- To these Jews traveling many miles to worship in Jerusalem, it was a rude reminder that God spoke to people *outside* the Promised Land—in Mesopotamia, Haran, even Egypt.

“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.”
(Acts 7:9-16)

- He continues with the story of the Old Testament, concerning Joseph and the captivity in Egypt.
- Stephen has now argued that 1) God speaks *outside* of Israel, and also that 2) the Israelites have often rejected those whom God favors—in this case, Joseph.

“But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was

exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son.

And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, "Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?" But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob." And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, "Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt." This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge?"—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, "God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.""

(Acts 7:17-37)

- He recounts the story of Exodus, where God calls Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, through the wilderness, to the land promised to Abraham.
- Once again, God speaks to the people outside of Israel—in Egypt and Midian.
- Like Joseph, Moses is rejected by the people and flees into exile.
- Stephen knows his Scriptures, and catches an important verse from Deuteronomy 18:15. Moses speaks of a future prophet of Israel, and Stephen recognizes that prophet to be Jesus.

- Jesus Himself had explained how “Moses and all the prophets” were “concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). Stephen’s mind has been opened to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45).

“This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, “Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: “Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.””
 (Acts 7:38-43)

- Stephen reminds the people of the call of the prophets, here citing Amos 5:25-27, and of their exile into Babylon. Stephen, charged with changing the customs Moses delivered, shows them how far short their ancestors have come for keeping the law.

“Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?””
 (Acts 7:44-50)

- Stephen moves quickly through the history of Joshua and also the kings.

- He quotes from Isaiah 66:1-2, belittling their adoration of the earthly temple. Charged with blaspheming the temple, Stephen shows how their ancestors have turned it into an idol.
- Stephen has made three important claims in this speech: 1) He has not blasphemed the temple, rather the opponents have turned it into an idol; 2) He has not changed the law of Moses, rather the opponents have misunderstood it; 3) All these things have been pointing to Christ, the fulfillment of the law and the very embodiment of the glory of God.

“Stephen thus turns the tables on his listeners. He, not they, has remained faithful to Scripture’s teaching on Moses, the law, and the temple. Stephen becomes the prosecutor in this court scene and charges his audience with the ultimate crime: ‘You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.’”

(Mohler, 100)

- Finally, Stephen concludes with a scathing indictment of these unbelievers.

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

(Acts 7:51-53)

- Jesus had issued a similar indictment of the Pharisees and the city of Jerusalem in Matthew 23:29-39, charging the Pharisees with continuing the practice of killing and persecuting the prophets and calling Jerusalem “city that kills the prophets.”
- Even as Jesus inspired hatred in these idolators, so does Stephen.

“Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid

down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."
(Acts 7:54-60)

- Stephen is the first martyr of the church.

"It has been said so many times that it is now almost trite: the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. This was the first seed sown in the apostolic community, and it was watched over by the Lord Jesus."
(Sproul, 108)

- Yet again, Stephen reminds us of Christ. Both of Stephen's statements closely resemble the words of Christ on the cross:
 - Stephen: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59).
 - Jesus: "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit" (Luke 23:46).
 - Stephen: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60).
 - Jesus: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:36).
- That he "fell asleep" is a euphemism for death. See also I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 4.
- At the end of this narrative, we are introduced to "a young man named Saul." This is "Saul of Tarsus," who will play a prominent role in the rest of the story.
- Tarsus, as we said, is a city in Cyrene. This explains why Saul is present for this trial.

"And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."
(Acts 8:1-3)

- Because of persecution, the church begins to scatter into "Judea and Samaria" Remember Acts 1:8!

- Saul going “house after house” contrasts the Apostles preaching “house to house” (Acts 5:42). As the Church grows, so too the opposition grows with it. This Saul is a problem for this young church community.

“Stephen’s overview of Israelite history, with its attention to the themes of the locale of worship and the leaders appointed by God, provides a theological transition in the narrative of Acts to the dispersion of the church among the Gentile nations...The tongues of fire, miniature glory-clouds, resting on each disciple of Jesus at Pentecost, sealed the presence of the Spirit of glory and of God wherever believers might be scattered. The God who was with Abraham in Mesopotamia, with Joseph in Egypt, and with Moses in the Sinai goes with his scattered messengers.”

(Johnson, 95)

"...and Samaria..."

Acts 8:4-40

- Despite the persecution, the scattered believers continue witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus, preaching with boldness wherever they go.
- The persecution, led by Saul, had driven them into "the regions of Judea and Samaria." The story continues here.

"Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city."

(Acts 8:4-8)

- Philip is one of the newly elected deacons. He, like Stephen, is "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Philip is a deacon, a "servant," but much more.
- Philip's decision to proclaim the Gospel in Samaria is radical obedience.

"Philip began his ministry in Samaria...It was bold of him to do it, because there was a long-standing and very deep-seated hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans, going back to ancient times. When the Assyrian army had overthrown Samaria and carried the Jews of the northern kingdom away to Assyria, some Jews were inevitably left behind. These soon intermarried with the foreigners who had been settled in Samaria in their place, which made the Samaritans both ethnic and religious half-breeds...The Jews looked down on the Samaritans and had no dealings with them. So it was a very novel thing for Philip to lead in the evangelism of this area."

(Boice, 133-134)

- Philip, though, was not off doing his own new thing. He was obeying the command of Christ, who directs this church, in Acts 1:8: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria...” Because of the historical ethnic tensions, this was *not* any easy command. Yet Philip faithfully, and radically, obeys.

“But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the power of God that is called Great.’ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.”
(Acts 8:9-11)

- In this Samaritan town lives an entertainer sometimes called *Simon Magus*, in other words, “Simon the Magnificent.” Twice this passage says Simon had the peoples’ attention. The reason was “because...he had amazed them.”

“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”
(Acts 8:12)

- Because he is following the command of Christ to preach the Gospel in Samaria, we are unsurprised to find Philip experiencing such success.
- “The name of Jesus Christ” contrasts “a man named Simon.” The people turn their attention to Jesus. They believe and are baptized!

“Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.”
(Acts 8:13)

- Simon also believes and is baptized.
- Here we should note how Luke is using the word “amazed” in this story. What does it mean that Simon the Magnificent “amazed” the Samaritans? Certainly, it means that they were entertained and impressed by his magic act. He captured their attention.

- That Simon is still “amazed” by the signs and wonders presents a problem. Yes, we should be amazed at the wonder of God, but Luke intends this to mean that Simon is *entertained* and *impressed*—they’ve caught his *attention*.

“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.”

(Acts 8:14-17)

- This odd story has been badly misunderstood in some Christian circles. In Acts 2:38, Peter declared that with repentance and baptism comes the Holy Spirit. So why is there a delay in the coming of the Holy Spirit?
- First, let us say what it is not. It is *not* a special ceremony that manifests the Holy Spirit in a unique way—it is not a “second blessing.”

“Why was the reception of the Spirit delayed in Samaria? The answer does not lie in viewing the Samaritans’ abnormal experience as a precedent for a ‘second blessing’ theology of Christian experience: first trusting in Jesus as Savior, and later receiving the Spirit’s power to serve him as Lord.”

(Johnson, 97)

“We should not attempt to infer a disjuncture between the Spirit and baptism here as if the Spirit is optional equipment for Christians, an exotic ‘second blessing’ for some but not for all in the church.”

(Willimon, 70)

- The Holy Spirit comes when we repent and believe (Acts 2:38). Commentators interpret the problem in this passage two ways:
 - Perhaps the people had not genuinely repented and believed. They received baptism *claiming* faith, but didn’t *truly* submit to Christ until this later presentation of the Gospel by Peter and John. We are certainly familiar with baptisms like this today, where the baptized don’t truly come to know Christ until a later time.
 - Many commentators see Peter and John’s laying on of hands as a symbol of the unity of the Church. In other words, the same Spirit that came in

Jerusalem is the same Spirit that came in Samaria. The Samaritans, then, are part of the same Church.

“In the present instance, some special evidence may have been necessary to assure these Samaritans, so accustomed to being despised as outsiders by the people of Jerusalem, that they were fully incorporated into the new community of the people of God. Not until they had been acknowledged and welcomed by the leaders of the Jerusalem church did they experience the signs which confirmed and attested their membership of the Spirit-possessed company.”
(Bruce, 182-183)

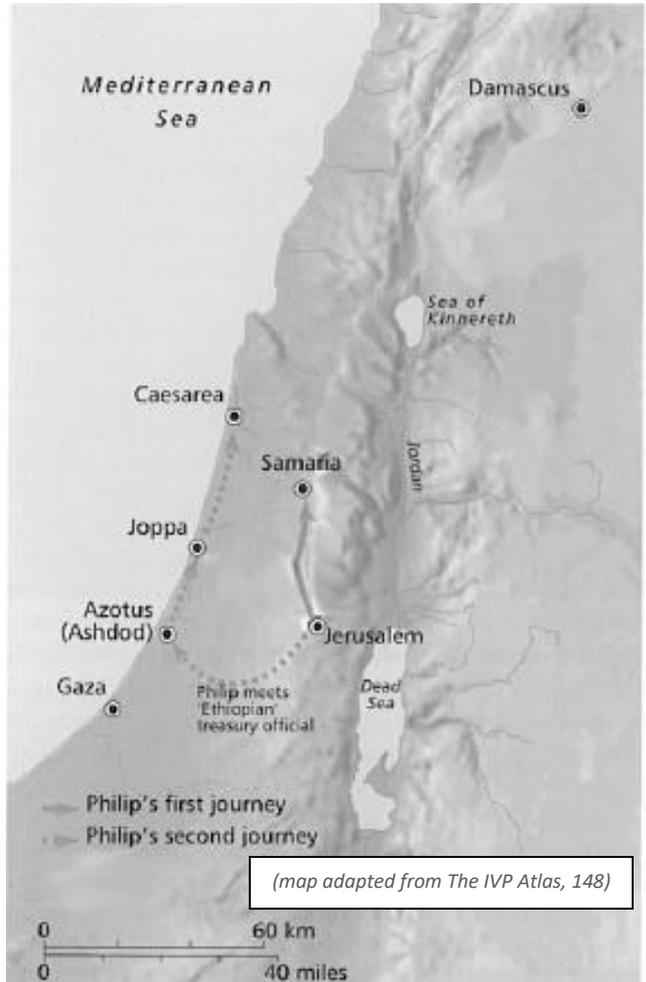
“The apostles’ presence and their role as mediators of the gift of the Spirit demonstrates that the church of Samaria had apostolic endorsement. In other words, they were truly an apostolic church. In fact, the church at Jerusalem and the church at Samaria constituted one people of God.”
(Mohler, 109-110)

“The Spirit was abnormally delayed in Samaria in order to allow for the arrival of prominent apostles, Peter and John, from the Jerusalem church. Apostolic witnesses were needed to confirm that God had signified his reception of the Samaritans by giving them his Spirit. Therefore, the Spirit did not come in eschatological power until Peter and John were present, and until they placed their hands on the Samaritan believers to symbolize these believers’ solidarity with the mother church in Jerusalem...The coming of the Spirit on Samaritan believers was a second installment of the enthroned Jesus’ outpouring of the Spirit of promise.”
(Johnson, 98)

- Because the laying on of hands by an Apostle is again used to further extend the Church to the Gentiles in Acts 10, the latter is probably a more correct reading.
- There is, however, at least one in Samaria who has believed and baptized *without* a genuine confession: Simon the Magificent.

“Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. And Simon answered, ‘Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.’”

(Acts 8:18-24)



- Simon has not moved past amazement. While the others receive the Holy Spirit—implying they have repented and believed—Simon does not. Peter implores him to repent. The Holy Spirit does not come for money or material things, but with faith.
- The Church today should consider how and why we are amazed by God. There is very real concern that much of the Church is simply *entertained* and

impressed by the act. Bands sound good and graphics look good. If this is why we stand amazed, we ought to repent of this wickedness and be forgiven.

- The idea of *buying* the Holy Spirit may seem ridiculous, but we also try and persuade God to favor us other ways. We see this in works-righteousness, especially, where we expect God to bless us for good behavior.

*“Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.”
(Acts 8:25)*

- As usually, Peter and John take the opportunity to preach the gospel to the people and to many others in Samaria. Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8 continue to be fulfilled: “And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria...”
- Philip, too, continues to witness to Jesus outside of Jerusalem.

*“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How Can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”
(Acts 8:26-31)*

- Philip, who had taken the gospel north to Samaria, now initiates its movement south into Ethiopia—modern Sudan.
- Twice, Philip is given divine spiritual communication. First by an angel, then by the Spirit. In both instances, Philip responded immediately with radical obedience.
- Today, we often complain that the Spirit doesn’t speak to us as clearly. We might learn from Philip, who has demonstrated radical obedience to the Word of God before these more esoteric encounters. Jesus said go to Samaria and witness, and Philip did. We have every opportunity as Philip to be obedient to the Word of God.

- There are several significant things about the man Philip meets.
- First, he is an Ethiopian. Ethiopia was the edge of the known world. In Luke’s day, “Ethiopian” was a near-synonym for “black.” We have met Jews from around the world in Acts, we’ve even seen “half-blood” Samaritans receive the Gospel. It is possible that this man is a Jew, but we get no explicit indication. If he is not a Jew, he was barred from worship in the temple.
- Second, he is a eunuch. Eunuchs were celibate males in service of nobility. In this case, a powerful official to the Queen of Ethiopia. While they term “eunuch” is most often associated with castration, it could be used a synonym for “celibate.” If this man was castrated, he would have been barred (again) from worship in the temple.

“The disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.’ But [Jesus] said to them, ‘Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.’”

(Matthew 19:10-12)

- Churches today that affirm LGBTQ behavior might claim the Ethiopian eunuch as a biblical example of a marginalized, powerless, androgenous believer accepted into the life of the church. This is an incredibly slanted reading of the text. It would be just as easy to discern that he is a powerful man practicing celibacy.
- In either instance, LGBTQ behavior is nowhere condoned. On the contrary, we should infer that he repented and put his faith in Christ. All people from all walks of life are open to this call of the Gospel.
- Third, he worshiped in Jerusalem. As the Gospel continues to extend “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), we will encounter “God-fearers” from around the world. Though he was likely barred from worshiping in the temple, the Spirit was at work in this man such that he desired to worship God in Jerusalem—according to the Law! He is reading his Scriptures!
- We are reminded that God is directing these evangelism efforts. It is God who called Philip here and God who is at work in the Ethiopian man. We, too, should faithfully obey the call to spread the Gospel *anywhere* and to *anyone* God calls.

- Acts is a story of incredible witness and boldness by incredible leaders and teachers. We should remember that we are not all called to the same kinds of ministry. This man realized that, at this point in his faith journey, he needed someone to guide him. Some of us are at the point in our journey of faith where we ought to seek out a Philip who can explain the Word to us.

“Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: ‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.’ And the eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.”

(Acts 8:32-35)

- The man is reading from Isaiah 53, a text clearly foreshadowing Christ.
- Philip teaches the man with the method we’ve seen throughout Acts: from Scripture, about Jesus, with good doctrine, and with boldness.

“And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”

(Acts 8:36-40)

- Praise God! The eunuch has repented and receive Christ!
- Notice that there is no Acts 8:37. This verse was likely inserted at a later date as part of a baptismal liturgy, but is not present in the earliest manuscripts.
- Miraculously, Philip is in Azotus. He preaches from Gaza, to Azotus, all the way up the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Caesarea. The Gospel continues to spread.

Paul's Conversion

Acts 9:1-31

“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

(Acts 9:1-2)

- Even while the Gospel spreads beyond Jerusalem, so does the persecution. We have observed the persecution growing with the growth of the Church.
- Saul, who witnessed and gave approval to the murder of Stephen (Acts 7:58-8:1), has gotten permission to *follow* the church into other areas and bring them back to Jerusalem to persecute them.
- Saul is a pharisee (Phil. 3:5) who studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). His anger at the church stems from their identification of Jesus as Messiah, and perhaps also at their repeated accusations that the religious leaders are to blame for the death of the Messiah.

“Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”

(Acts 9:3-9)

- Jesus reveals Himself to an enemy like Saul!

- Saul sees the risen Lord Jesus. Because of this, he will qualify to be an Apostle—“a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:2). He asks the Corinthian church, “Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1). He recognizes that his right to apostleship is *different* from the other 12.

“...[Christ] appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”
(1 Corinthians 15:5-9)

- Still God, in His grace, chose Saul to be His instrument.

“Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ And the Lord said to him, ‘Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.’ But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’”
(Acts 9:10-17)

- The Lord speaks to both Saul and Ananias, but the responses are very different.
 - He says, “Saul, Saul...” and Saul responds, “Who are you, Lord?”
 - He says, “Ananias,” and Ananias replies, “Here I am, Lord.”
- Compare these responses to the young Samuel and aged Eli in 1 Samuel 3. When God calls, “Samuel, Samuel,” the young disciple does not understand but Eli, the mature follower of God, knows that it is the voice of the Lord.
- Ananias, like Philip in the last chapter and others we’ll see in the rest of Acts, is familiar with the voice of the Lord. He is called “a disciple.” Mature disciples know the voice of the Lord and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- It’s not enough, however, to *hear* the Word—we must also *do* the Word.

“I once heard a preacher say, ‘Everybody loves to hear Jesus when He says, “Come to Me, all you who are burdened and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” But once we get there, He says, “Now go...,” and that is where the Christian life becomes difficult.’”

(Sproul, 133)

- Even though it takes some extra prompting, Ananias repeats the kind of radical obedience we’ve come to expect from disciples of Jesus Christ. He trusts God to approach the very man tasked to arrest and imprison him.

“So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.”

(Acs 9:18-19)

- Saul receives the Holy Spirit and is baptized—implying he has repented of his former ways. He explains this to Timothy.

“I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”

(1 Timothy 1:12-15)

- Saul’s transformation is immediate. The fruit of his life demonstrates a true and powerful change: He came to persecute the Gospel, now he preaches it.

“For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’ And all who heard him were amazed and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for

this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?’ But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. When many days had passed, the Jews’ plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”

(Acts 9:19-25)

- Saul, who has now joined his thorough knowledge of the Scriptures with the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, becomes a bold witness to the risen Jesus.
- In an ironic twist, the *persecutor* is now *persecuted* for the Gospel. This is the beginning of “how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:17).
- When Saul flees Damascus, he heads for Jerusalem. The disciples there are understandably afraid and suspicious of this transformation.
- In Galatians 1:18, Paul says that he “went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.” That is likely a reference to this visit.
- Barnabas, who we met in Acts 4:36, defends Saul’s transformation. Barnabas has earned the Apostles’ trust, and they allow Saul to preach also in Jerusalem—until he is threatened again and returns home to Tarsus.
- Saul’s testimony is unique and inspiring. We should remember that *all* believers have been chosen as God’s instruments, have the same Holy Spirit, and have the same calling to witness to the resurrection despite persecution. May we follow Saul as he follows the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”

(Acts 9:31)

"...to the ends of the Earth"

Acts 9:32-11:18

- The early church has now added the greatest evangelist of all time to their stable of preachers. The Gospel will continue to explode not only in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria but to the ends of the earth.
- Peter, like Philip and others, is preaching outside of Jerusalem, "here and there." We have seen Philip go north (to Samaria) and south (to Gaza). Here, Peter takes the Gospel west to Lydda and then Joppa.
- The text doesn't give us exact time stamps as to when these scenes take place. Perhaps the best understanding is that Philip, Paul, and Peter's evangelism is happening at roughly the same time (Acts 8:1).

"Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.' And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, 'Please come to us without delay.' So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner."

(Acts 9:36-43)

- Peter performs two miracles. In both, Luke describes Peter’s ministry very similarly to Jesus’ ministry (Luke 8:49-55). The ministry of Christ continues through His Church.
- As we saw in the quotation from Joel 3 in Peter’s Acts 2 sermon, God had ordained “wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below” (Acts 2:19, Joel 2:30). Christ directs His Church by His Word and by “visions and...dreams” (Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28) The Apostles are only discovering what God is already doing.



“At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, ‘Cornelius.’ And he stared at him in terror and said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he said to him, ‘Your prayers and your alms have

ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.’ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.”

(Acts 10:1-8)

- We cut to Caesarea, a Gentile town. There we meet a man name Cornelius, a Roman centurion. He is truly Roman, because he’s a member of the Italian Cohort. It’s likely he is highly positioned in the Roman army.
- Cornelius is no ordinary Roman centurion.
 - He is a God-fearer, “a devout man who feared God,” perhaps impacted by the preaching of Philip in Caesarea (Acts 8:40). Acts introduces us to many God-fearers—those who are drawn to God, worshiping in synagogues. This does *not* imply that he has believed in Christ and received the Spirit yet.
 - He is generous and worshipping. He is favorably disposed to the church.
 - Like Philip and Ananias (and Peter shortly), he answers the call. The angel says, “Cornelius,” and he replies, “What is it, Lord?”

“That Cornelius was a ‘God-fearer’ meant that although he worshiped Jehovah he had nevertheless not become a Jew by circumcision. God-fearers were Gentiles who expressed interest in Judaism and attend worship in the synagogue but who, because they had not yet fully converted to Judaism by circumcision, had to sit in the back as observers rather than as full participants in the community...Nevertheless, because they were not yet Jews, it was improper for Jews to associate with them socially.”

(Boice, 174)

- God, through His angel, sends these God-fearing Romans to Peter in Joppa.

“The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.’ And the voice came to him again a second time, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.”

(Acts 10:9-16)

- Peter, meanwhile, has his own vision from the Lord. He sees *both* clean and unclean animals and is commanded to eat. Thinking this to be a test—and

Peter has become familiar with thrice-repeated tests (Luke 22:54-52, John 21:15-17)—Peter assures the Lord that he would never eat anything unclean.

- Perhaps this test is amplified for Peter who is currently staying at the home of an unclean tanner in Joppa—someone who works with dead animals (also prohibited in Jewish law).

“Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon’s house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.’ And Peter went down to the men and said, ‘I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?’ And they said, ‘Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to this house and to hear what you have to say.’ So he invited them in to be his guests.”
(Acts 10:17-23)

- There is an interesting tension here. Peter invites these presumably Gentile men “to be his guests.” He invites them into the home—but not any home! This is the home of the unclean tanner Simon.
- Already, there is a willingness to associate with the “unclean,” or “Gentiles.” Samaritans and Ethiopians have received baptism. Philip is preaching in Caesarea. But this inclusion reaches further back. Jesus spoke favorably of centurions (Luke 7:2), and Moabites and Canaanites have long been added to the covenant people of God.

“By the time readers get to Acts 10:1-11:18, they have been waiting patiently for the fulfillment of a promise that they have long anticipated. We saw in Luke’s [first] narrative, Simeon had forecasted that Jesus would be a light for the nations. The Gospel concluded with Jesus’s promise that repentance would be proclaimed ‘to all the nations’ (Luke 24:47). In Acts 1:8 Jesus said that the apostles would be his witnesses to ‘the ends of the earth’—language that is used throughout Isaiah to refer to non-Jews. At Pentecost Peter drew upon Joel [2] to indicate that God’s Spirit would be poured out on ‘all flesh’ and declared that God was in the process of fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant, promises

which declared that ‘all the peoples of the earth’ would be blessed by the seed of Abraham. God told Ananias that Saul was his chosen instrument that he would use to bring his name before ‘Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel.’ There is, then, no surprise that Luke provides an account of how Gentiles are included within God’s people.”

(Jipp, 78)

- What Peter and the rest of the church must come to recognize is *not* that Cornelius could be saved. That was always a possibility. Rather, they must come to recognize that Cornelius—and any Gentile—can be saved simply by coming to Jesus, *without* becoming a Jew.

“The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am a man.’”

(Acts 10:23-26)

- What is it that God is calling “clean”? It is food, yes. Jesus Himself had called all food clean in Mark 7:19. By calling *food* clean, God was breaking down the barriers that distinguished His people Israel from the nations. God is not simply *God of Israel*, but rather *God of Nations*.
- Many have abused the interpretation of Peter’s vision. God is not here destroying the moral law or calling *all Gentile behavior* clean. Cornelius bows to Peter, an appropriate posture for a Roman before a messenger of God. Peter calls Cornelius to put an end to this pagan behavior. The call to repent and follow Christ remains.

“And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.’ And Cornelius said, ‘Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, “Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to

Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea." So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.'"
(Acts 10:26-33)

- Peter notes "how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation." But Peter has already overcome this on several occasions. Remember that Peter still needs to learn that Gentiles can come to Christ *without becoming a Jew*.

"Let me emphasize again that the problem was not that God did not save Gentiles. He did. The Old Testament has a number of examples. But when these Gentiles were saved, they were saved not as Gentiles but through their becoming Jews."
(Boice, 175)

- Peter preaches the Gospel to a room full of gentile Romans.

"So Peter opened his mouth and said: 'Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.' While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they

were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 'Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days."
(Acts 10:34-48)

- Peter preaches from Scripture, about Jesus, with good doctrine, and with boldness before a community of strangers.
- The Holy Spirit falls on these God-fearers as they respond to the Gospel.
- Notice that the relationship of baptism and the coming of the Holy Spirit is not fixed.
 - At Pentecost, Peter implores the people to “repent and be baptized...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).
 - In Samaria, the believers are baptized and the coming of the Spirit is delayed (Acts 8:17).
 - Here, the Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit *first*, and then are given the sign of baptism.
- Baptism is not a magic ritual whereby humans pass the Holy Spirit to one another. Rather, baptism is the New Covenant symbol of faith. In every case, the Holy Spirit comes to those who have been convicted by the hearing of the Gospel.
- It is important to note that these Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit *without* observing the rites and rituals of Jewishness. *This* is the seismic shift in redemptive history.
- Peter calls Jesus, “Lord of All,” and that is what He is. The Apostles had asked Jesus if he would restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus replied, “Yes, and...to the ends of the earth.” As we proclaim His Lordship to the nations, the Kingdom of God increasingly invades earth.

“If Greek-speaking Jews, Samaritans, Ethiopian Eunuchs, and now Gentiles are part of God’s people then there are no limitations in terms of peoples or geographical locales to which God’s gospel can move. Perhaps some of the most important words of Acts are Peter’s—‘Jesus is Lord of all.’”

(Jipp, 81)

“Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ‘You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.’ But Peter began and explained it to them in order: ‘I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But I said, “By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.” But the voice answered a second time from heaven, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, “Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.” As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?’ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’”

(Acts 11:1-18)

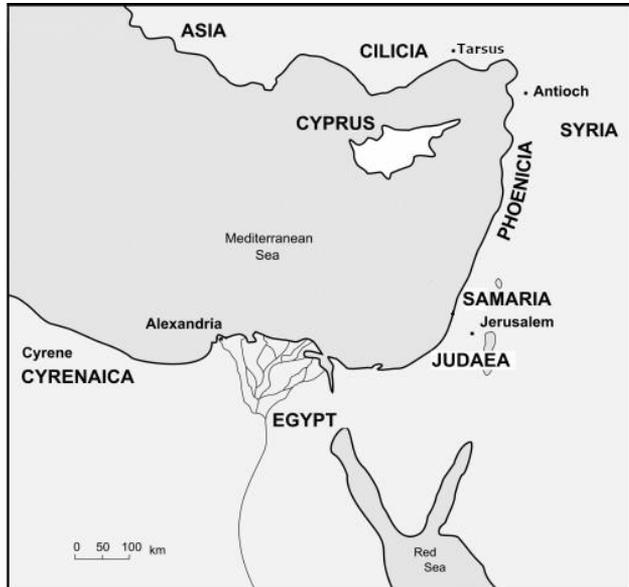
- The other Jewish believers need time to process this news. They express the same concerns as Peter had—“you went...and ate with them.”
- Upon hearing about Peter’s vision and, more importantly, that “the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning,” the believers finally understand what God has been saying for 11 chapters: Gentiles are “granted repentance that leads to life.” The miracle of Pentecost has been extended to Samaritans and even to Gentiles.

More Ministry

Acts 11:19-12:25

- The Gospel has gone to the nations. Gentiles are repenting, putting their faith in Jesus, and receiving life. Peter testified of this fact before the disciples in Jerusalem. Still, this is a radical change in approach for Jews, many of whom are finding it difficult to put into practice.

“Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to



the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.”

(Acts 11:19-21)

- The Gospel continues to spread further and further from Jerusalem. The message goes further north to Antioch (possibly Luke’s hometown) and the island of Cyprus. There are believers as far west as Cyrene!

“The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.”
(Acts 11:22-26)

- We met Barnabas in Acts 4:36-37 where he gives money from the sale of his field to the church. He is described as “a native of Cyprus” and “son of encouragement.” It’s no wonder, then, when the church needs to encourage new believers they send the son of encouragement.
- When Saul’s life was threatened in Jerusalem, the believers sent him home to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). Tarsus is in Cilicia, near Antioch.

“Antioch prospered tremendously in a short period of time because of the caravan routes that facilitated its becoming a commercial center. Not only did it become a commercial center, but it also became a religious center for pagan religions that practiced temple prostitution. It was a city of moral laxity; it was also very sophisticated. Antioch was much like modern New York City...Antioch was the third largest city in the ancient world.”
(Sproul, 171)

- Having seen Saul’s fervor for Christ and gift for evangelism during his brief ministry in Jerusalem, Barnabas must have identified him as a teacher. Barnabas sets a beautiful example of intentional discipleship.
 - He identifies the gifts in a new believer;
 - He opens up his home and his schedule to spend time with him;
 - He provides opportunity for Saul to practice his gift of teaching.
- Notice that discipleship isn’t passive learning. Saul is teaching *with* Barnabas. The Church would be blessed to follow Barnabas’ example here. Not only is he discipling Saul, he spends a year discipling these new believers in Antioch.
- Until now, these believers have been Jews. They are ethnically Jewish people following Jewish customs and proclaiming the Jewish Messiah. For the first time in history, these believers are called *Christians*—or, “people of Christ.”

“Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.”
(Acts 11:27-30)

- The church is not led and governed by only a select few. The Apostles lead, of course, but we’ve also seen the deacons Stephen and Philip accomplish wonderful ministries. Barnabas too, though he holds no *official* office, leads and disciples. We know nothing of this Agabus, and even he prophesies convincingly before the church.
- The church is a body with many parts—each performing important work in serving God and neighbor. We truly have a priesthood of all believers.
- Agabus, guided by the Holy Spirit, tells of a coming famine during the time of the emperor Claudius (41-54 AD). There was a famine in Judea from 46-47 AD. This is the first clear indication of time since the Ascension (Acts 1:9).
- Claudius is remembered for his ineptitude and oversized ego. If the Christians are going to withstand this famine, they’ll have to figure it out themselves.
- Barnabas and Saul are sent with money for Jerusalem. This is Saul’s second visit there, which he says was “after fourteen years” (Gal. 2:1). Titus is also with them (Gal. 2:3). This would mean Paul spent about 8-10 years in Tarsus (see timeline on p. 89).
- But why put this story here? Remember that *radical hospitality* in Acts often represents true faith and acceptance of the Gospel. It’s not a story about the function of prophesy, it’s a story about generosity.

“The story reminds us of the reports in 2:44-45 and 4:32-37 that the followers of Christ shared their material possessions and had all things in common...These gentiles really have been converted, for they evidence the time-honored Jewish practice of philanthropy. As the Jews in Jerusalem generously reached out to include even the gentiles in the gospel, so these gentiles reach out to share what they have with their less fortunate brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.”

(Willimon, 108)

- It should be no surprise that the church taught and disciplined by Barnabas—a man well-known for his radical generosity—should respond so generously. Pastors, teachers, and leaders of churches should pay attention to what kind of example they set for their flocks.
- This collection for the Christians in Jerusalem becomes an important emphasis of Saul’s future missionary work.

“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do... And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.”

(1 Corinthians 16:1-3)

- Unsurprisingly, as the church grows so does its persecution. We have seen the Gospel go out “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This growth has been mirrored by persecution coming from the Sadducees (Acts 4:1), Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27), Jews more globally (Acts 6:9), and now King Herod himself.

“About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.”

(Acts 12:1-5)

- James son of Zebedee becomes the first Apostle to be martyred. His brother John is the last Apostle to die.

“Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, ‘Dress yourself and put on your sandals.’ And he did so. And he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’ And he went out and followed

him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting. When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, 'You are out of your mind.' But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, 'It is his angel!' But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, 'Tell these things to James and to the brothers.' Then he departed and went to another place."

(Acts 12:6-17)

- The ways Peter leaves the jail closely resembles how Jesus leaves the tomb:
 - It occurs during the Passover;
 - He is struck on his side (John 20:27);
 - He is accompanied by an Angel (Luke 24:4);
 - He passes Roman guards (Matt. 27:66);
 - The gate opens without explanation (Mark 16:3);
 - He appears first to women, even to a "Mary" (Luke 24:10);
 - He possibly goes to the same house where Jesus appeared to the disciples.
- This beautifully pictures what it means to be "raised with Christ" (Col. 3:1).

"Peter's case was hopeless, humanly speaking. He was in prison, surrounded by guards. He was asleep. He was condemned to die. His case pictures us in our sin.

We are chained by sin and are unable to escape. We are even asleep in sin, insensitive to it until God sends his Holy Spirit to break our shackles and free us...This is a good picture of what God does with us in salvation. He sends his light to illuminate the spiritual darkness of our lives and strikes off the shackles of sin so that we might be set free to follow Jesus."

(Boice, 208)

- The “James” that Peter wants to notify is *another* James—the brother of Jesus—the one who writes the epistle in the New Testament. It is well recorded throughout church history that James served as the leader of the church in Jerusalem.
- Peter’s miraculous escape causes a stir, so Peter goes into hiding.

“Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there. Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king’s country for food. On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, ‘The voice of a god, and not of a man!’ Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.”
(Acts 12:18-23)

- This Herod (Herod Agrippa I) had dual citizenship—a Jew and a Roman. He served Jewish interests, which is why he antagonized the Apostles. Perhaps because of this embarrassment with Peter, Herod left Judea and instead resided in the distinctly Roman city of Caesarea. We will meet some of his children in Acts 26.
- According to Josephus (*Antiquities*, 19.8.2), his death occurred while giving an address in royal robes before a large crowd gathered for festival games in Caesarea. Secular history ascribes his death to poisoning.
- By including this story, Luke shows that the Gospel continues to triumph over greater and greater opposition. The Gospel will continue to go out, now following the missionary activity of Saul.

“But the word of God increased and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.”
(Acts 12:24-25)

1st Missionary Journey

Acts 13-14

- Acts 13-14 contain the events of what is considered Paul's 1st Missionary Journey (it is in this chapter that *Saul* will be called *Paul*). This journey takes them to the island of Cyprus and then to the towns of the region of Galatia.

"Estimates of the time necessary for this trip of about 1,400 miles vary from one year to five years. The best guess is about eighteen months, but we simply have no way of knowing for sure."

(Carson & Moo, 364)

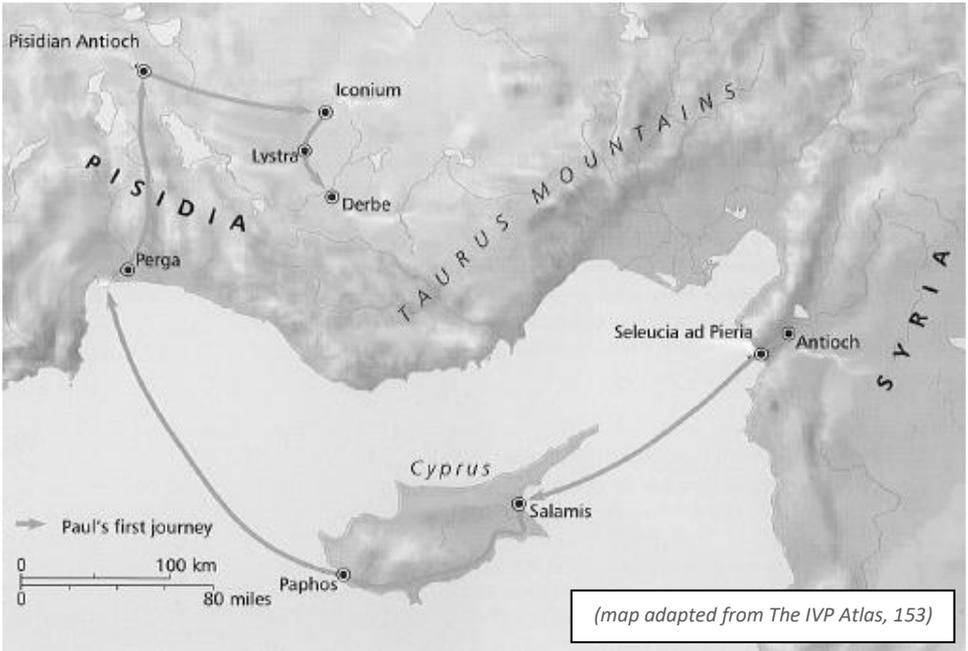
- Antioch seems to be Paul and Barnabas' home church at this time. They are sent out by the leaders of this church and will return here often.

"Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

(Acts 13:1-3)

- The church in Antioch is diverse. They are multi-ethnic and from various social classes. It is mentioned that Simeon is a black man and Manaen must have been of some importance to have friends in such high places. All of these people from their various backgrounds and ethnicities are united in Christ.
- They set west from Antioch to the port city of Seleucia in order to sail to the island of Cyprus. Remember that Barnabas is from Cyprus.

- The ministry group consists of at least Paul, Barnabas, and Barnabas’ nephew John Mark. This is the same John Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark and is frequently mentioned as a companion of both Peter and Paul in the later New Testament letters. Mark will play a brief but important role in Acts 15:37-40.



“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, ‘You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a

time.’ Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.”
(Acts 13:4-12)

- The group of missionaries attracts the attention of Sergius Paulus. He is the proconsul (or Roman-appointed governor) of Cyprus, “a man of intelligence.” Sergius Paulus kept company with a Jewish false prophet who performed signs and wonders named Bar-Jesus (also known as Elymas).
- Paul condemns the man for his false teaching and deceit.
- Why does Paul’s name change? Pragmatically, it may be that he uses his Greek name (Paul) when among Greek-speaking Gentiles rather than the Hebrew version (Saul).

“This change to the Greek name from the Hebraic probably reflects the fact that Paul’s sphere of work was more specifically among Gentiles and in Gentile territories.”
(Gempf, 1086)

- However, name changes frequently occur in Scripture when the nature of the relationship between the individual and God changes. Consider Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:5, 15) or Jacob to Israel (Gen. 32:28), or even Simon to Peter (John 1:42). It’s possible that Paul sees himself as a new man in Christ and chooses to use this name to reflect that.

“Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia.”
(Acts 13:13-14)

- When the group reaches the mainland in Perga, John Mark leaves them and sails all the way back to Jerusalem while Paul and Barnabas press on north to Pisidian Antioch. The separation is only mentioned briefly here, but seems to have been a rather serious issue—at least in Paul’s mind.
- There are two cities named Antioch—one in the region of Pisidia (Pisidian Antioch) and one in the region of Syria (Syrian Antioch). We will try and distinguish between the two.

“And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, ‘Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.’ So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: ‘Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, “I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.” Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, “What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.” Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.” Therefore he says also in another psalm, “You will not let your Holy One see corruption.” For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this

man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: "Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you." As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God."
(Acts 13:14-43)

- Here is the first *recorded* sermon of the Apostle Paul. Notice it has all the markers we've grown used to from Peter and the other leaders: it is from Scripture, about Jesus, with good doctrine, and spoken boldly.
- It becomes Paul's custom to visit the synagogues in each city and preach there first. It was customary for synagogues to allow itinerant preachers to deliver messages on the Sabbath. Paul, as a well-studied Pharisee, would have been given ample opportunity to preach to a group that was well versed in the Scriptures.
- He uses the same passage from Psalm 16 and makes the same argument as Peter's first sermon (Acts 2:27). When David says, "You will not let your Holy One see corruption" (Ps. 16:10), he cannot be speaking of himself but is instead prophesying about Jesus.
- The people are hungry for more of this teaching and many put their faith in Jesus.

"The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."' And when the Gentiles heard this, they began

rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.”
(Acts 13:44-49)

- Unsurprisingly, as the church grows so does the opposition.
- We’re told that “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” While we’re certainly right to look up to Paul and see his ministry as an example of following Christ (1 Cor. 11:11), we should remember that even Paul does not accomplish success by his human ability but rather by God’s foreordaining.

“But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel.”
(Acts 13:50-14:7)

- It is persecution that continues to drive the spread of the Gospel. Because of a near stoning in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas complete the 1st Missionary Journey going south to Lystra and then Derbe.
- Unfortunately, they did not find a kinder greeting in Lystra. Opponents from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium follow Paul and Barnabas to raise trouble yet again. Paul is not able to escape this stoning.

“Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well,

said in a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet.’ And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!’ Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.’ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

(Acts 14:8-20)

- Like Simon Magus in Acts 8, the people of Lystra are attracted to the signs and wonders but *not* the message of the Gospel.
- They see Barnabas and Paul as Zeus and Hermes respectively. By this we might infer that while Paul is more vocal, Barnabas is seen as the leader.

“Zeus was the king of the gods; Hermes was the messenger of the gods...Later in history Ovid writes his *Metamorphoses*, a classic work about a change of form of deities and humans. In it he recalls a story in which Jupiter came with his companion Mercury to a particular place disguised as human beings. They were testing the friendliness and hospitality of the local inhabitants....Ovid said that took place in the very valley where Paul and Barnabas are now preaching.”

(Sproul, 218-219)

“In the ancient Mediterranean world—a world that was polytheistic and where the gods were often thought to be powerful and active in daily life—the intersection between the divine and the human was much more fluid than

what we probably imagine. So it's not surprising that those with the most power were deemed divine, such as kings, heroic military generals, and healers. We've actually already seen an example of this, when Herod's proclamation is received as 'the voice of a god, not a mortal!' (12:22). In antiquity, those who could perform miracles and wonders were often thought to be divine or agents of the divine. There are numerous stories in the ancient world of deities distinguishing themselves as humans, coming to test humans, and then either cursing them or rewarding them based on how the humans treated the disguised deities."

(Jipp, 94)

- Imagine the Lystrans surprise, then, when rather than blessing them Paul responds with rebuke! Paul tells them to "turn from these vain things to a living God," implying that Zeus and the Greek gods are dead.
- Hospitality is once again an important theme. Here we find that the Church is not characterized by any and all hospitality at all costs, but rather the kind of love and unity derived from true faith in Christ. Peter would not receive the worship of Cornelius (Acts 10:26), and Barnabas and Paul won't receive worship from the Lystrans.
- Herod *did* receive this kind of praise. Herod miraculously dies; Paul miraculously lives.
- Why isn't Barnabas also stoned? Scripture doesn't explain. Somehow he escapes this tribulation.

"When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples."

(Acts 14:21-28)

- There are good things, even in the trials. In fact, they teach that trials and tribulations are *normative* for those who participate in the kingdom of God while on earth.
- They double back to all the towns they had passed through on their way—Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, and Perga—before sailing back to Syrian Antioch to the church who sent them off.
- Apparently, despite the grave opposition they faced in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra in particular, the spread of the Gospel was successful and there are Christian disciples in these towns!
- Importantly, Paul and Barnabas establish elders at the local churches.

“Here for the first time in the Book of Acts we find the appointing of elders, which we learn later was to become Paul’s natural pattern of church organization...Paul had faith in what God was doing, and if there were to be churches in these cities, they obviously needed sound organization. So Paul appointed elders, more than one, and the churches thrived.”

(Boice, 257)

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you...”

(Titus 1:5)

- Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey begins and ends with godly, Spirit-led church governance. He was sent out by a group of leaders from the church in Antioch who sought Spirit’s leading, and establishes groups of Spirit-led leaders in all the churches along the way. Churches, from the beginning, are led by local elders and deacons who worship Jesus, follow the Spirit, and accomplish the work of God.
- They stayed in Antioch “no little time.” It’s believed that here in Antioch is where Paul writes *Galatians*—to the very churches he had just visited. If this is correct, Paul wrote *Galatians* from Antioch circa 48 A.D.

“...I believe that it is most likely that Galatians was sent to the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, that is, the southern Phrygian Galatian region, evangelized on Paul’s first missionary trip, soon after he visited them.”

(Porter, 53)

The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:1-35

- Acts 15 records the story of the Jerusalem Council. Scholars typically date this important meeting somewhere between 48-50 AD.

<i>Paul's Missionary Career</i>		
<i>Event</i>	<i>Probable Date</i>	<i>Text</i>
Conversion	34-35 AD	Acts 9:3-7; Gal. 1:15-16
Ministry in Damascus/Arabia	35-37	Acts 9:8-22; Gal. 1:17-18
1 st Jerusalem Visit	37	Acts 9:26-29; Gal. 1:18-20
Ministry in Tarsus	37-45	Acts 9:30; Gal. 1:21
Ministry in Antioch	46	Acts 11:25-26
2 nd Jerusalem Visit (famine relief)	47	Acts 11:27-30; Gal. 2:1-10
1 st Missionary Journey	47-48	Acts 13-14
Jerusalem Council	48 or 49	Acts 15:1-35
2 nd Missionary Journey	49-51	Acts 15:36-18:22
3 rd Missionary Journey	52-57	Acts 18:23-21:26
Caesarean Imprisonment	57-59	Acts 23:33-26:32
Voyage to Rome	59-60	Acts 27:1-28:15
Roman Imprisonment	60-62	Acts 28:16-31
Ministry in the East	62-64	
Death	64-65	

- Immediately following Paul's 1st Missionary Journey, he and Barnabas continue teaching in their "home church" in Antioch. Here, an issue arises.

chart adapted from Carson & Moo, 369 and Porter, 50-60

"But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'

*And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them,
Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to
Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.”*
(Acts 15:1-2)

- Apparently, some Jewish Christians continued to struggle with the inclusion of the nations into the people of God. They expected *the nations* to become *Jewish*. This is what Peter’s Vision in Acts 10 had done away with.
- Luke describes this issue as “no small dissension.” We can imagine what this was like by the way Paul describes a similar and earlier confrontation with Peter.

“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned...But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’”

(Galatians 2:11, 14)

- This confrontation probably occurred shortly *after* the famine relief visit (Acts 11:27-30) of 47 A.D. Paul and Barnabas had returned home to Antioch (Acts 12:25). Galatians had described two visits to Jerusalem before “Cephas came to Antioch” (Gal. 2:11). If this is right, Peter passed through Antioch while on the run from Herod (Acts 12:19).
- The directional notes “up” and “down” refer to elevation, not “north” and “south.” Judea is *south* of Antioch, but “up” in elevation.
- Importantly, the church in Antioch appeals to the greater church body—even though Paul is an Apostle and there is a local body of elders in Antioch.
- Paul and Barnabas can’t help but preach the Gospel as they travel.

“So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.’ The apostles and the elders were gathered

together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.'"
(Acts 15:3-11)

- The opposition arises from “some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees.” They are called “believers,” so we know that they are former Pharisees who have converted to Christianity.

“First, he calls them believers. Sometimes, believers in Christ will have disagreements...The fact that Pharisees repented and believed in Christ should give us cause to rejoice and praise God for his grace. The Judaizers’ identity as Pharisees also helps us understand their demand about the law. The Pharisees represented the most conservative faction of the Jews at that time.”
(Mohler, 31)

- As discussion continues, members stand and share testimony. Peter relates his vision and experience from Acts 10 (the third time Luke has explained this important moment). Barnabas and Paul, too, share testimony about the work of the Holy Spirit evident in the lives of Gentile Christians.

“And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, ‘Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, “After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.” Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,

but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”
(Acts 15:12-21)

- Many today take the appeals here to personal experiences and the frequent refrain “seemed good to [us]” to mean that God has left things up to human reason. We must not ignore that James makes the compelling case for the inclusion of the Gentile Christians *based on Scripture*. He appeals to Amos 9:11-12.
- It may be important for some that James seems to be in charge of this council. This is *not* James the brother of John, who was the first Apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2). This is James, the brother of Jesus, who history records was the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

“After they became silent, James answered. James was presiding at the first ecumenical council of the church. It is astonishing that James was officiating rather than Peter or Paul. James, the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, was the head of the church in Jerusalem.”
(Sproul, 233)

- Denominational churches often appeal to the decisions at the Jerusalem Council as an argument *against* the congregational structure of churches and in favor of denominations. Even the early church, they argue, appealed and submitted to a larger authoritative body.
- While denominations have their benefits, the Jerusalem Council is probably more representative of ecumenical councils throughout church history like the Council of Nicaea in 325 or the Chalcedonian Council of 451.

“Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: ‘The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no

instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”
(Acts 15:22-29)

- “Judas called Barsabbas” may be the man from Acts 1:23 that was *not* chosen as the Apostle to replace Judas Iscariot. If this is so, it is encouraging that he continued steadfastly in the faith—even in some leadership capacity—despite being passed over. Silas, who accompanied him, will become a more central figure as the narrative continues.
- The Jerusalem Council reinforces what we’ve already learned: *the nations* can come to Christ, not just *Jews*. Circumcision and distinctly Jewish rituals are not required.
- However, participation in the Church is not entirely without rules and regulations. They require:
 - Abstaining from food sacrificed to idols;
 - Abstaining from blood;
 - Abstaining from eating strangled meat;
 - Abstaining from sexual immorality.
- Does this mean that these laws are additional requirements for salvation, added to faith? It cannot be.
- This is an allusion to Leviticus 17-18, rules given to Israel *and* strangers among them intended to distinguish the people of God from the unbelieving nations they would encounter.
- James could be interpreted as saying, “The Spirit has gone to the nations, not only the Jews, and they have received the Gospel! Let them join with us as the distinct people of God in the world!”

“Converts into the church are welcomed, but not without limits. Even as a change was required of Jewish Christians to include converted gentiles in their fellowship, so converted gentiles must change for the good of the fellowship.

Luke, in his enthusiasm for the gentile mission, does not claim that old Israel is replaced by a new Israel, the church. Rather, gentiles are welcomed into a reconstituted Israel which demands that they adhere to certain basic Levitical standards for the good of all...For Luke, the law is not a means of salvation but rather is a means of signifying one's identity as a member of God's people..."
(Willimon, 130-131)

- Obedience to the law is not a condition *for* salvation, but obedience to the law is a condition *of* salvation. This is the important distinction of both justification and sanctification—the two aspects of our salvation. We are justified by faith alone *and* sanctified by progressive obedience to the law.

“So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.”
(Acts 15:30-35)

- After the council reaches their decision, Paul and Barnabas return to their home church in Antioch once again. There, they teach and preach the Word.

2nd Missionary Journey

Acts 15:36-18:22

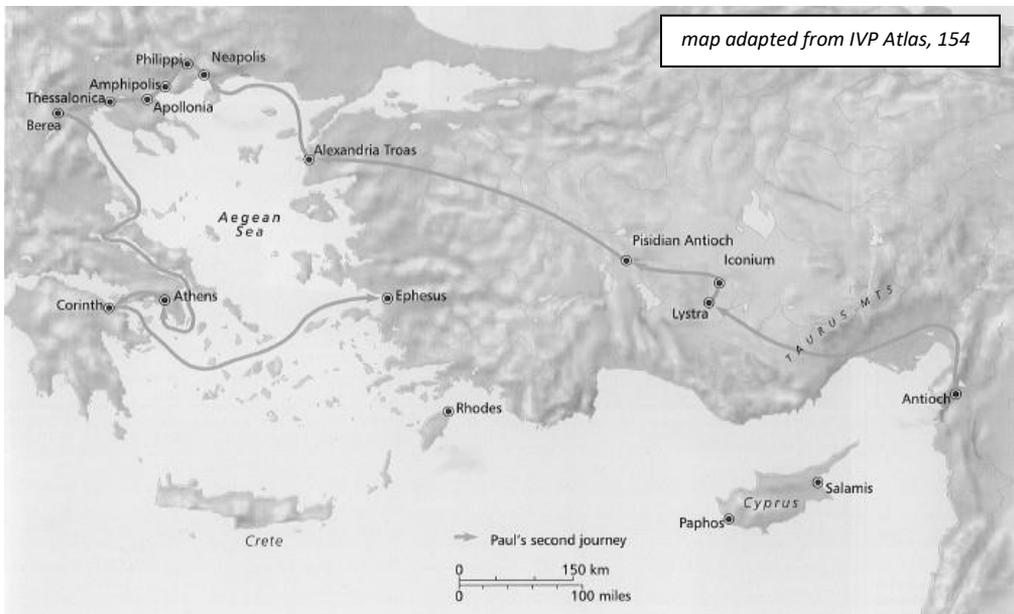
- The 1st Missionary Journey began in Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas sailed to the island of Cyprus—Barnabas’ hometown (Acts 4:36)—where they were assisted by John Mark (Acts 13:4-5).
- When they had finished this ministry work on the island of Cyprus, they sailed to Pamphylia where John Mark left them and instead returned to Jerusalem.
- Reasons for Mark’s leaving are not given, but many commentators have suggested some sort of homesickness.
 - Mark is Barnabas’ nephew (Col. 4:10), so may have had family on Cyprus and been comfortable there.
 - Mark’s mother lives in Jerusalem, Peter went to her house after being freed from prison (Acts 12:12). He would also, then, have been comfortable with family in Jerusalem.
- Whatever the reason, Mark’s leaving left a negative impression on Paul.

“And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.’ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”
 (Acts 15:36-41)

- Paul and Barnabas, the excellent discipler, want to return to the churches from their 1st Missionary Journey and encourage the Christians there. These

towns included the island of Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. But the dispute regarding Mark is so severe that Paul and Barnabas end up parting ways.

- Barnabas heads to his home island of Cyprus to visit the Christians there, taking with him his nephew John Mark.
- Paul takes Silas by land to visit the towns in Pamphylia from the first journey, in reverse order: Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. They will then press on further west.



- Like we saw at the start of the 1st Missionary Journey, this journey begins with a sending from a local church. Paul and Silas “departed, having been commended by the brothers.”

“Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and

*elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith,
and they increased in numbers daily.*
(Acts 16:1-5)

- It's here that Paul meets his to-be protégé Timothy. Luke adds that Timothy's mother was a believer. Her name is Eunice, and Timothy's grandmother Lois is also a believer (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy will grow to become very dear to Paul.
- In a surprising twist, Paul circumcises Timothy almost immediately after Paul had "no small dissension" (Acts 15:2) with those who insisted on circumcision! Has Paul gone back on his conviction? Is he acting out of accord with the Jerusalem Council? By no means!
- The Jerusalem council, remember, had *not* done away with Jewishness but with Jewishness as a means to covenant membership. Jews may still live and look *ethnically* like Jews.
- Paul realizes—and correctly so (Acts 21:28)—that it would benefit his witness to Jews to continue to observe Jewish customs. As a leader, especially a leader in new ministry, he realizes that he will be under a microscope. This is helpful advice for Christian leaders today—especially those who lead new or creative ministries: go the extra mile to be "above reproach" (1 Tim. 3:2).

"And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days."
(Acts 16:6-12)

- After ministering to the cities from the 1st Missionary Journey in the region of Galatia, the hope is to head due west toward Ephesus (the region of Asia, where the 7 Churches in Revelation are). However, they are "forbidden by the Holy Spirit."

- Instead, they head further north toward Troas (the region of Mysia). Here, too, “the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” to go northeast through Bithynia.
- “The Holy Spirit” and “the Spirit of Jesus” refer to the same Third Person of the Trinity.
- Perhaps the Spirit stopped them with an audible voice or by physically freezing their legs when the men attempted to head the wrong direction. Maybe they got word from a Christian brother or sister from Asia that things weren’t safe or ready. Or, perhaps the men missed the ferry or got their directions mixed up. God might communicate to us through spiritual experience, the community of believers, or even our circumstances.
- How the Spirit directs their movements Luke does not say, but he does clearly communicate *that* the Spirit directs their movements. The men head to Macedonia because God wants them to, “concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”
- Contrast Paul’s ability to discern the Spirit here to his conversion story, where he responded, “Who are you, Lord?” (Acts 9:5). Luke is showing the spiritual maturity and growth in Paul.
- The pronouns switch to *first person*: “we,” “us.” Most scholars assume this means Luke has joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy for this leg of the journey.

“And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.”
(Acts 16:12-15)

- They sail into Macedonia and spend some time in Philippi. Here they meet Lydia.
 - She is from Thyatira, a city in Asia. You can imagine Paul’s disappointment when the trip to Asia falls through. You might also imagine his amazement when they find an Asian woman in Macedonia.

- She is a God-worshiper, a term Luke has consistently used for those who are open to the Gospel. The Spirit has been at work in her life.
- She sells “purple goods,” meaning she has some substantial means. Her home is large enough not only to accommodate these missionaries, but also a church.
- Her hospitality to the missionaries demonstrates that she has received the Gospel—and how could she not, when “the Lord opened her heart.”

“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.’ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, ‘These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.’ The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”
(Acts 16:16-24)

- In the gospels, demons are aware of Jesus’ divinity (Luke 4:34, Luke 8:28). While the slave girl’s shouting seems like a profession of faith, it apparently was a demonic attempt to distract listeners from hearing the Gospel.
- Paul delivers the slave girl from the demon. The slave owners relied on the deceit of the demon for “fortune-telling” to make their living. Their frustration at the loss of revenue is comparable to Simon Magus (Acts 8:18), the magician who attempted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit.

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And

immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, 'Let those men go.' And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.' But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.' The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed."

(Acts 16:25-40)

- Like Peter (Acts 12), Paul and Silas are put in prison and miraculously released. The jailer in Acts 12:19 is put to death, and the jailer here assumes a common fate.
- Instead of death, however, he receives life!
- Comparing Peter and Paul's imprisonment reveals an important detail for the narrative of Acts: Paul is a Roman citizen with political savvy. Even with an opportunity to leave prison, Paul remains and insists on a public apology. God has uniquely equipped Paul for a ministry to Roman-ruled Gentiles.
- Paul, Silas, and Timothy move on from Philippi. Because the pronouns change once again, it is assumed that Luke did not continue on with them.

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as

was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.' And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go."

(Acts 17:1-9)

- Thessalonica is well-known in Scripture. They are the recipients of Paul's first epistles, written shortly after this visit.
- Paul begins in the synagogue as we've seen, and "as was his custom." He will begin this way in every city on the 2nd Missionary Journey. There are converts to Christianity, but also Jews who persecute them.
- Jason, a gracious host, takes the brunt of this persecution. His home is "attacked" and he is "dragged" before the authorities. He pays money to ensure they will be left alone.
- Unfortunately, they are *not* left alone. Like we saw on the 1st Missionary Journey, persecuting Jews follow them to the next town.

"The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul

brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.”
(Acts 17:10-15)

- In comparison to the “rabble” of Thessalonica, the Bereans are considered “more noble.” They are praised for testing the teaching against the Scriptures. Christians today would benefit from examining the Scriptures with such intensity.
- “Women of high standing” are specifically mentioned. In first century Rome, wives were not permitted to worship their own gods. For women—like Lydia and these Greek women—to follow Jesus was a substantial statement about the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the Gospel.

“A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband’s friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming of a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions.”
(Plutarch, *Conjugalia Praecepta* 19)

- Because of the persecution that the Thessalonians raise, Paul is taken to Athens and is briefly separated from Silas and Timothy.

“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, ‘What does this babblers wish to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.’ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this

inscription: "To the unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.' Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."

(Acts 17:16-34)

- In Athens, Paul takes note of the abundance of Greek gods that receive worship from the people. He has empathy and compassion for these people; his spirit is "provoked." They are drunk on "hearing something new."
- Luke specifically notes Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Neither group expected humanity to have any meaningful interaction with the gods.
 - Epicureans were something like Deists (like many of America's founders). There were gods, but they were no longer interested in the world.
 - Stoics believed in god, but in practice were closer to modern day atheists. There was nothing humanity could do to change what would happen in the world.

"Epicureans believed that the gods had no interest in or influence on the affairs of men. The gods, therefore, had removed themselves from the world. The Stoics, however, believed that everything that happened was determined by a supreme god or organizing principle, which they sometimes identified with the

world itself. The Epicureans tended to see life as a matter of open chance, while the Stoics viewed the world through a lens of fatalism.”

(Mohler, 67)

“Both virtually abandoned the quest for ultimate truth and instead pursued what happiness there is to be enjoyed in the brief period man has in this world.”

(Sproul, 272)

- Many pastors laud Paul’s missional technique in Athens. He goes to the Areopagus, a prominent and busy place in the center of the city. Here he *comprehends, commends, and critiques*.
 - *Comprehends*: Paul understands the worldview of these Greeks. He knows what they believe and is able to engage with them intelligibly.
 - *Commends*: Paul finds common ground with the people. He encourages their continual search for truth represented by the “unknown god.”
 - *Critiques*: He uses this knowledge and common ground to offer them a better way. Paul *knows* the *unknown* God!
- This is a helpful model of missions that we can and should employ in our cultural contexts today.
- While Paul’s approach is creative, his presentation is still from Scripture, about Jesus, with good doctrine (concerning the resurrection in particular), and with boldness—despite the mocking he receives for his faith.
- From here, Paul heads to another place well-known to the pages of Scripture: Corinth.

“After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was

next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.' And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, 'This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.' But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.' And he drove them from the tribunal. And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this." (Acts 18:1-17)

- There are a few important historical notes in this passage that help establish not only Luke's accurate account but also gives very clear dating.
 - In *Divus Claudius 25*, Roman historian Suetonius describes an edict of Claudius forcing Jews out of Rome for what seems to be disturbances between Jews and Christians.
 - *The Gallio Inscriptions* are fragments of a letter from Emperor Claudius to "Gallio, my friend and proconsul." The fragments are narrowly dated around 51-52 AD because Gallio served as proconsul of Achaia for only a short time. Luke refers to him by the correct name and title.

"Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city."
(Suetonius, 195)

- Not only are there multiple important historical markers in this passage, there are multiple important people in this passage:
 - Aquila and his wife Priscilla are forced to relocate to Corinth because of the edict. They become close friends and fellow missionaries with Paul. They are mentioned in Paul's letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:19), to Timothy in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:19), and to the Romans (Rom. 16:3).

- Silas and Timothy rejoin Paul in Corinth. They spend a year and half establishing the church.
- During this time they convert *two* synagogue rulers: Crispus and Sosthenes. Sosthenes gives his support of Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1).
- It is typically argued that Paul wrote his earliest epistles, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, during this time in Corinth. This is why both letters include Paul and Silas in the greeting (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

“After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them he said, ‘I will return to you if God wills,’ and he set sail from Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.”

(Acts 18:18-22)

- Paul travels from Corinth to Ephesus. This was a short boat trip across the Aegean Sea, and communication between Ephesus and Corinth seems to be substantial (as we'll see in the next chapter).
- Paul loves Ephesus a lot. He declines to stay longer during this visit, but makes a lengthy visit during his 3rd Missionary Journey. He writes them an epistle, establishes Timothy as their pastor, and writes two more epistles to him.
- The journey ends when the group—now including Priscilla and Aquila—sails to Caesarea. Caesarea is where Philip had gone to evangelize (Acts 8:40) and presumably stayed (Acts 21:8). It is also where Cornelius lived (10:1), where the Holy Spirit had come upon the gentiles for the first time. Peter had “spent time” there before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 12:19).
- After a brief visit with this influential church, Paul heads to home church in Antioch.

3rd Missionary Journey

Acts 18:23-21:26

- While both the 1st and 2nd Missionary Journeys took roughly 2 years, the 3rd Missionary journey may have been as long as 5 years.
- Paul is fond of revisiting prior locations to encourage the churches. He had finished the 2nd Missionary Journey with a year-and-a-half in Corinth before ending in Ephesus. Now, he begins the 3rd Missionary Journey with two years and three months in Ephesus. Nearly five consecutive years are spent in these two interconnected cities.
- Remember that Corinth and Ephesus are a short distance apart across the Aegean Sea and communication between the cities is easy. These two locations will play the major roles on this missionary journey.

“After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ And they said, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ And Paul said, ‘John baptized with

the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”
(Acts 18:23-19:5)

- Apollos loved Jesus but wasn’t well trained. He was giving the baptism of John—a ceremonial cleansing. He did not know about the baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). John the Baptist Himself recognized this coming distinction.

“John answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

(Luke 3:16)

- God has given Apollos the gifts to be an effective preacher—he is “competent in the Scriptures” and speaks eloquently and boldly.
- Priscilla and Aquila, who took in Paul in Corinth during the 2nd Missionary Journey, identify these gifts in Apollos and take him in as well. They disciple Apollos and send him to Corinth, where he preaches effectively.
- In fact, Apollos preaches so effectively in Corinth that factions begin to form among those who prefer Apollos and those who prefer Paul.

“For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’...What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

(1 Corinthians 1:11-12; 3:5-6)

- It is during this stay in Ephesus on his 3rd Missionary Journey that Paul writes his letters to the Corinthians—around 54 or 55 AD. He addresses these factions, and commends Apollos’ ministry.

“Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.”

(1 Corinthians 16:12)

- Another major theme in 1 Corinthians considers the function of miraculous spiritual gifts in public worship. It’s interesting to consider that this teaching happens concurrently with the events in Ephesus as described by Acts.

“And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.’ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

(Acts 19:6-20)

- There are incredible and regular miraculous gifts in Ephesus over a two-year span. These seem more like recurring miracles than isolated incidents.
- Consider how Paul’s letter to the Corinthians—written during these very events—might help us think rightly about the purpose and proper function of these spiritual gifts (especially 1 Cor. 12:1-11 and 1 Cor. 14).

“So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.”
(1 Corinthians 14:39-40)

- The Seven Sons of Sceva highlight two important things to remember about spiritual warfare:
 - You are probably not that important—the demons didn’t know who these men were. Satan is not omnipresent and it seems unlikely (though not impossible) that he gives his attention to you. Don’t give Satan that much power (or blame).
 - And yet, Satan *is* powerful—like a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). Remember that we fight a spiritual battle that requires spiritual armor (Eph. 6:10-18).
- Amidst these accounts of powerful sign gifts and miracles, we might miss that “believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.” The result is that “the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.” Public confession is often a sign of revival.

“Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’ And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.”
(Acts 19:21-22)

- Paul intends to travel by land through Macedonia and down into Achaia—where Corinth is. This would allow him to stop at each of the cities from the previous missionary journey. After this, he will bring a collection to Jerusalem and hopes to take a mission trip to Rome. This is precisely what he writes to Corinth.

“I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that

you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

(1 Corinthians 16:5-9)

- These plans are interrupted due to an urgent issue that arises in Corinth. Paul apparently sails directly to Corinth to deal with this issue and is treated with hostility. He had hoped to address this issue, visit Macedonia, and return to Corinth *a third time*, but the pain of the urgent visit discouraged him, and he returns to Ephesus.

“Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea...But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth...For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.”

(2 Corinthians 1:15-16; 23; 2:1)

- Paul had written circa 55 AD that he planned to be in Ephesus for Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8), but his urgent visit to Corinth had sped up this timeline. We will see how these plans change in real time. These details are what help us pin down the date and location of the writing of Paul’s letters.

“About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, ‘Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.’ When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’ So the city was filled with the confusion, and they

rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, 'Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.' And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly."

(Acts 19:23-41)

- Demetrius is like the men with the slave girl from Acts 16:19. If people aren't practicing false religion, his income is threatened. So he incites a riot.

"[Artemis] was a fertility goddess and was also known as the goddess of the hunt. Worshipers built little household shrines in their backyards dedicated to [Artemis] before which they would bow and pray. Additionally, a large economy was established on the worship of [Artemis]."

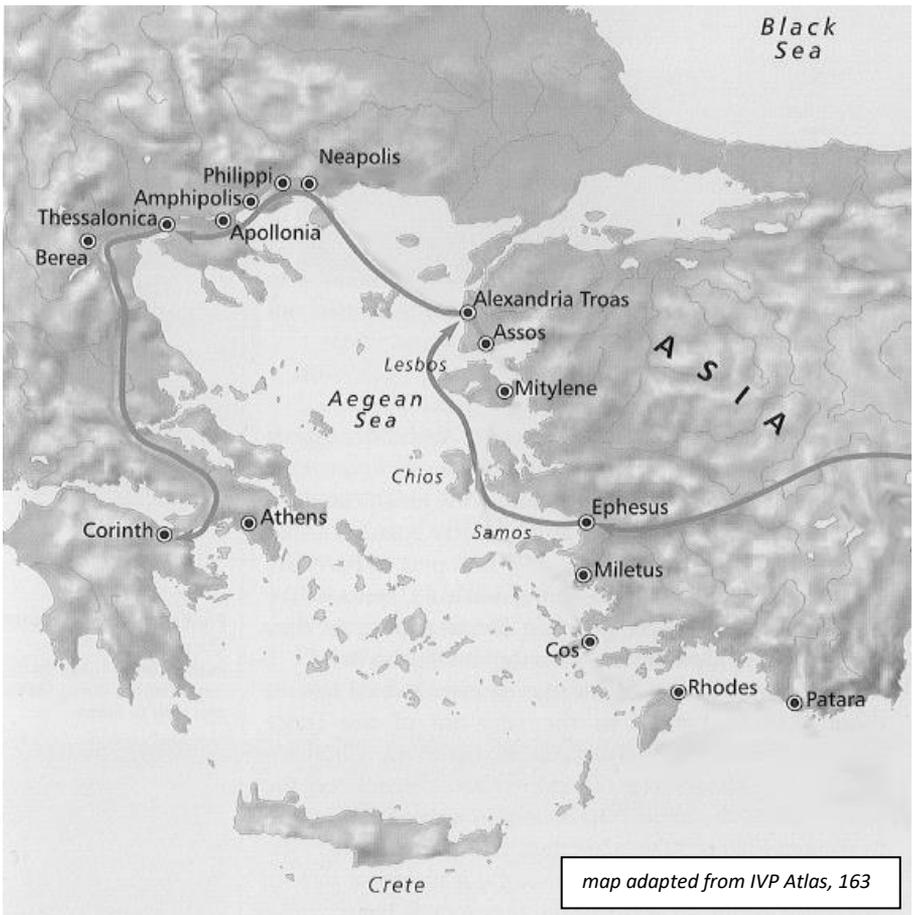
(Sproul, 297)

- The temple to Artemis in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This was important to the religion and economy of the city.

“After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece.

There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.”

(Acts 20:1-6)

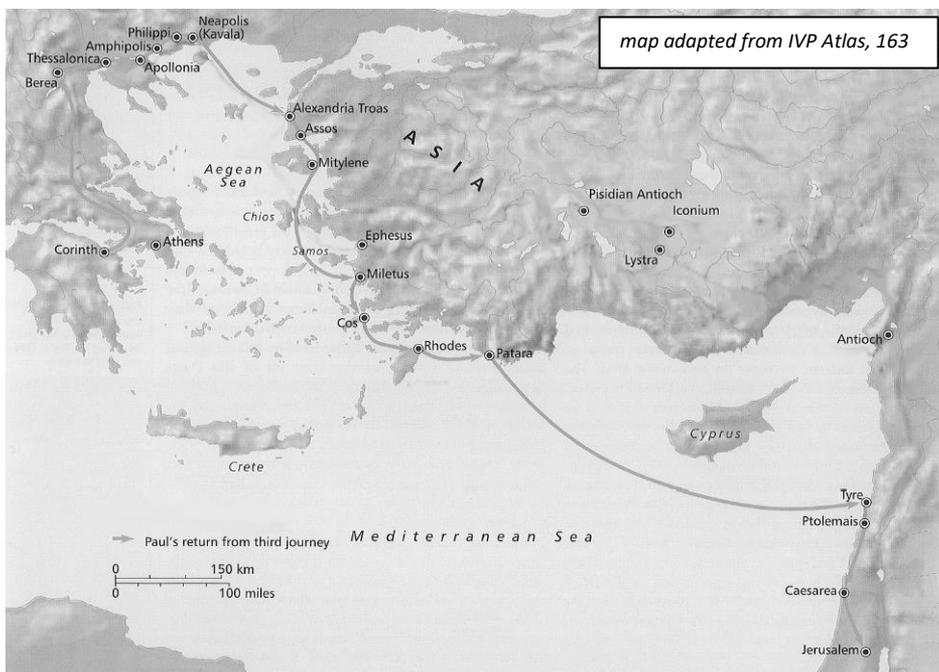


- Paul *does* pass through Macedonian and into Greece (likely Corinth). These are his original travel plans, but not his original timeline. Rather than staying in Ephesus until Pentecost, he is on pace to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost.
- Paul spends three months in Corinth (here “Greece”). This is where he writes *Romans*, circa 57 AD.
- This is clear from the travel plans Paul communicates in *Romans*. He is writing as he anticipates heading to Jerusalem, and from there hopes to go to Rome (Rom. 15:30-33). He is with Gaius and Timothy (Rom. 16:21-23), consistent with the narrative in *Acts*.
- He is joined by disciples he had met on previous journeys.
 - Secundus, Aristarchus and Gaius.
 - Gaius and Aristarchus were the two men threatened by the riot in Ephesus. Gaius is from Derbe, the final city on Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey and the first city on his 2nd Missionary Journey.
 - Aristarchus becomes a frequent companion of Paul. He is with Paul, Luke, and Mark during Paul’s Roman imprisonment (Col. 4:10, Philem. 1:24).
 - Secundus and Aristarchus are from Thessalonica, a stop on Paul’s 2nd Missionary Journey
 - Timothy, who Paul met at Derbe on his 2nd Missionary Journey, becomes one of Paul’s closest companions.
 - Sopater, who is from Berea. Bereans welcomed Paul on his 2nd Missionary Journey and were known for testing the Scriptures for accuracy.
 - Tychicus and Trophimus represent the region of Asia.
 - It seems Tychicus was Paul’s letter carrier. Scripture suggests he carried the letters to the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21), Colossians (Col. 4:7) and brings encouragement to both Timothy (2 Tim. 4:12) and Titus (3:12).
 - Trophimus is mentioned again in 2 Timothy 4:20 as “ill...in Miletus.”
 - Luke, presumably, rejoins the group at Philippi. Once again, the pronouns become plural: “us,” “we.” The plural pronouns had followed the 2nd Ministry Journey from Troas to Philippi. They pick up again in Philippi, suggesting that Luke had stayed and ministered there until rejoining the group at this point.

“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we

were gathered. And a young man named Eutyclus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.' And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted. But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost."

(Acts 20:7-16)



- We're impressed by the all-night worship service—Paul “prolonged his speech until midnight,” then “talked still longer,” then “conversed with

them...until daybreak.” We should be challenged that this is not uncommon in other parts of the world.

- Notice that they have gathered “on the first day of the week.” Sunday becomes the worship day of the early church. They also observe regular days of celebration: the days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost at least.
- The pace of the journey picks up considerably. They travel from Assos to Mitylene to Chios to Samos, past Ephesus to Miletus. These are short stops because, as we’ve seen, Paul is intent on getting to Jerusalem.
- The group intentionally sails past Ephesus. This is not because Paul doesn’t want to see them. Quite the opposite, it seems that Paul knows his affection for Ephesus is so strong that another stop in the city will draw him into yet another long stay there.

“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: ‘You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the

inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship." (Acts 20:17-38)

- Paul certainly loves the church in Ephesus.
- Ephesus commands considerable attention in the New Testament. It was the longest stay of Paul's missionary career. He writes them an epistle we call *Ephesians*. He also writes two letters to Timothy (*I Timothy*, *II Timothy*) while Timothy serves as bishop/pastor of Ephesus. The Apostle John also includes a short address to this church in Revelation (Rev. 2:1-7).
- Paul tells the Ephesians elders about his concerns over the Jerusalem visit. He expects "imprisonment and afflictions." His letter to the Romans, written at the same time, expresses a similar worry about unbelievers in Jerusalem.

"I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company."

(Romans 15:30-33)

- From Miletus, the group takes short trips to the islands of Cos and Rhodes before finding a large cargo ship making the substantial journey from Patara to Tyre—passing by Cyprus on their left.

"And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. And having sought out the disciples, we

stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home. When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.”
(Acts 21:1-9)

- This is the same Philip who witnessed to the Samaritans in Acts 8:4-8. He was ordained as a deacon—“one of the seven”—in Acts 6:5. He has apparently made a home in Caesarea.
- His daughters are capable of explaining the Word of the Lord just like their father had been ready to explain the Scriptures to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:35). He has met the qualifications for a deacon to be “managing their children and their own households well” (1 Tim. 3:12).

“While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”’ When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, ‘What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, ‘Let the will of the Lord be done.’”
(Acts 21:10-14)

- We met Agabus in Acts 11:28. He had correctly prophesied of the famine in Jerusalem.
- Agabus tells Paul that he will be bound in Jerusalem. Despite consistent warnings from his friends and despite his own internal worries (expressed to the Ephesian elders and to the Romans), Paul heads to Jerusalem.

- Paul’s attitude here reminds us of Jesus, who showed a similar resolve to follow the will of God as He entered Jerusalem despite knowing the prophesied end that would result: His crucifixion.

“After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge. When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.’ Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.”
(Acts 21:15-26)

- The believers in Jerusalem receive the group “gladly.”
- Paul meets with “James, and all the elders.” Remember that James, according to church history, was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Peter and John are not mentioned, which suggests that they took on missionary responsibilities outside of Jerusalem by this time.
- The issue that James raises is difficult to understand rightly. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35) had concluded that gentile believers did not have to become ethnically Jewish in order to join the Church.

- Yet, there are “thousands” of Jews who have believed in Jesus as Lord and these are “zealous for the law.” How should we understand this?
- It cannot be that those who have genuinely understood and believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ are accomplishing the law for any merit before God. The consistent testimony of Scripture precludes this.
- So, in what way are they “zealous for the law”? We must remember that the law functioned in both religious and national capacities. The law was, in part, God’s answer to Moses’ question, “For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” (Ex. 33:16).
 - For a Jew, the law was a way to serve God—to “know that I have found favor.”
 - For a Jew, the law was a way to demonstrate Jewish ethnicity—“so that we are distinct...from every other people on the face of the earth.”
- We can understand the issue this way: The Jewish Christians are *not* doubting Paul’s faith in the Gospel, they are frustrated by his abandoning his national pride. They are annoyed that Paul doesn’t want to look and act like a Jew—and he teaches other Jews to do the same!

“The church in Jerusalem was composed largely of Jews who wanted to maintain as many of their Jewish traditions as possible. There are ways in which that might be done rightly, at least in part, just as German Christians can retain German customs while still being Christians and Asians can retain certain Asian customs, and so on.”

(Boice, 359)

- Because the labels *Christian* and *American* can be so interwoven, we should be careful that we don’t fall into the same temptation of overemphasizing *American* expressions of Christianity. Christians come from every tribe, language, and nation. We mustn’t insist they all worship like Americans.
- Even though this is not true—“there is nothing in what they have been told about you”—Paul is willing to submit publicly to the Jewish customs in order to put their consciences at ease. This kind of radical submission is important to the way Paul lives and ministers (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Paul's Arrest

Acts 21:27-23:22

- Paul and the Jewish members of his missionary party participate in the seven days of purification according to the law (see Num. 6:1-13).
- This, we might assume, calms the anxiety of the Jewish Christians. However, practicing Jews continue to persecute Paul and the Church.

“When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.”

(Acts 21:27-29)

- There are Jews from Asia in Jerusalem—perhaps some who even participated in the riots there only a short time before. They recognize Trophimus, who is from Asia.
- Paul has now experienced challenges from both believers and unbelievers based on false assumptions.
 - The believers wrongly assume that Paul doesn’t keep up his Jewishness and encourages others to do the same.
 - The unbelievers wrongly assume he has taken Gentiles into the temple.
- Just like the riot in Ephesus had resulted in confusion, so this riot descends into an unintelligible mess. Because there is such confusion, some have mistaken Paul for an Egyptian man who had tried to lead a revolt against Rome.

“Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, for the mob of the people followed, crying out, ‘Away with him!’ As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, ‘May I say something to you?’ And he said, ‘Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?’ Paul replied, ‘I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.’”
(Acts 21:30-39)

- From this point forward, Paul’s unique upbringing will open many doors for the Gospel. Paul is a Greek name, and he hails from the Greek city of Tarsus and is a full Roman citizen. And yet, he was born to a Jewish family and raised in Jerusalem speaking Aramaic and studying as a Pharisee.

“And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying: ‘Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.’ And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said: ‘I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven

suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting." Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said to me, "Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do." And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, "The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, "Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me." And I said, "Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him." And he said to me, "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.""
(Acts 21:40-22:21)

- Paul recounts his testimony in great detail. We find this story in Acts 9:1-30. His testimony is an important part of his witness. He tells it here, again in Acts 26, in Philippians 3 and in 1 Timothy 1.
- The Jews in the audience are amenable to most of the details. They appreciate that Paul was brought up in Jerusalem and are impressed that he trained as a Pharisee under Gamaliel. They like that he persecuted Christians. Perhaps they are nervous about his experience with Jesus, but are comforted that Ananias, "a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews" bears witness and that Paul continued to worship in the temple.
- But when Paul claims that his passion for the Gentiles is the will of God, the people revolt.

“Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.’ And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this. But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, ‘Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?’ When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, ‘What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.’ So the tribune came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?’ And he said, ‘Yes.’ The tribune answered, ‘I bought this citizenship for a large sum.’ Paul said, ‘But I am a citizen by birth.’ So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him. But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.”
(Acts 22:22-30)

- Paul is in Jerusalem, looks Jewish, and speaks Aramaic. That Paul might be a Roman citizen certainly never occurred to the tribune. Not only his, but Paul is a citizen by *birth* while the tribune is Greek and has purchased his citizenship.

“This means that Paul’s father had been a Roman citizen before him. How the citizenship was originally acquired by one of Paul’s ancestors we are not told, but analogy would suggest that it was for valuable services rendered to a Roman general or administrator in the south-eastern area of Asia Minor, perhaps to Pompey in 64 B.C.”
(Bruce, 446)

“Theophilus must have thoroughly enjoyed this delightful twist in the narrative, thinking of Paul sending the soldiers into confusion with the revelation that his Roman credentials are more impressive than even those of the tribune himself. The tribune is a dime store Roman, whereas Paul, the man whom the tribune

would teach a lesson in civics by use of the whip, is a citizen by birth. Who is laughing now?"

(Willimon, 170-171)

- Because Paul is a Roman citizen, he is entitled to a trial before punishment by the protection of Caesar. The tribune immediately halts the beating and arranges for the Jewish council to meet so he can get to the bottom of this.

"And looking intently at the council, Paul said, 'Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.' And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, 'God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?' Those who stood by said, 'Would you revile God's high priest?' And Paul said, 'I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people."'" Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.' And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, 'We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?' And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks. The following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.'"

(Acts 23:1-11)

- Luke is not afraid to show Paul's flaws. He loses his temper with the high priest and, upon realizing his mistake, makes an apology.
- Only moments ago, Paul had leaned into his Roman citizenship. Now, he leans into his training as a Pharisee. The Pharisees and Sadducees represented the two largest factions of Jews. Their sharpest disagreement was over the physical resurrection after death.

“There came to [Jesus] some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, and they asked him a question...”

(Luke 20:27-28)

- Most importantly, God explains the purpose of Paul’s unique equipping: the persecution will take him to Rome, where he can witness to the Gospel.
- Getting to Rome is what Paul had wanted, as he expressed in Acts 19:21 and in Romans 15:32. However, this trip will be made in chains as a prisoner.
- Many have experienced the twists of God’s plan for our lives. God’s ways are better than ours. May we handle these twists with the grace and faith of Paul.

“When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, ‘We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul.

Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near.’ Now the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

(Acts 23:12-16)

- Paul apparently still has family in Jerusalem. His nephew appears in the narrative, uncovering a plot to kill Paul.

“This is the first time we have heard anything about Paul’s family. Obviously, he had at least one sister, and that sister had a son, Paul’s nephew. We do not know how Paul’s nephew heard about this plot to kill Paul. His family may have disowned him upon his conversion, but it is apparent that Paul’s sister and nephew had remained loyal to him.

(Sproul, 343)

“Who was Paul’s nephew, who received such prompt news of the plot—who perhaps was even present when it was hatched? We wish we knew more than we do about Paul’s family...it is usually inferred (and very reasonably so) that he was disinherited for his acceptance and proclamation of Jesus as Messiah. His father, a provincial Roman citizen, would certainly be a wealthy man. But it

appears that the mother of this young man retained some sisterly affection for her brother, and something of that affection had been passed on to her son. We do not even know if Paul's sister lived in Jerusalem; if she did, Paul had no thought, apparently, of lodging with her during his stay in the city. Perhaps, however, she lived in Tarsus, and her young son had come to Jerusalem for his education, as his uncle Paul had done in years gone by. It may be that the plotters, or whoever the young man's informants were, did not suspect his relationship to Paul, or if they did, it may have been common knowledge that Paul's bitterest opponents were the members of his own family. We wish we knew more, but we do not. "

(Bruce, 457-458)

- God's plan will bring Paul before the most powerful people in the known world.

"Paul called one of the centurions and said, 'Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him.' So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, 'Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you.' The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, 'What is it that you have to tell me?' And he said, 'The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent.' So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, 'Tell no one that you have informed me of these things.'"

(Acts 23:17-22)

Felix, Festus, Agrippa

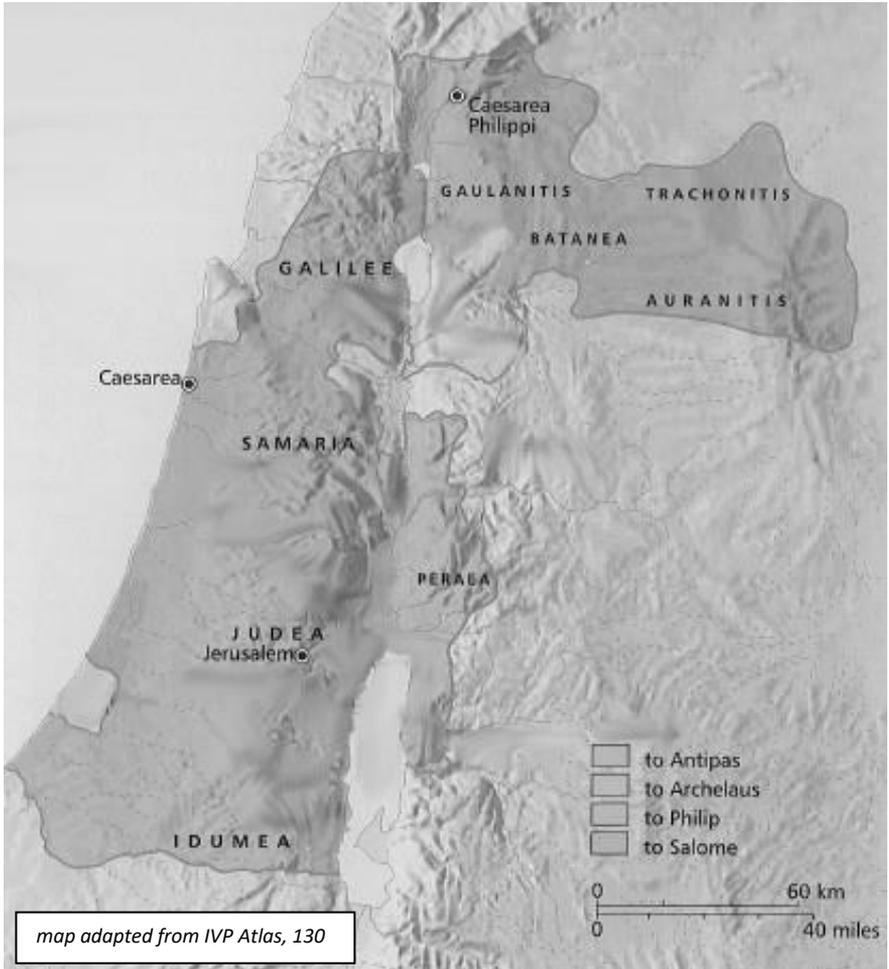
Acts 23:23-26:32

- To this point, Paul has been in the care of a tribune named Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:25). The title “tribune” could apply to various positions. It seems this man is a military tribune—perhaps one of 24 in the Roman army. He has command over centurions (who in turn have command over 100 troops).
- “Lysias” is a Greek name. “Claudius” suggests he purchased his Roman citizenship during the reign of Emperor Claudius.
- He assigns 270 soldiers to accompany Paul to the governor. They also take a letter where Claudius Lysias paints himself as the hero.

“Then he called two of the centurions and said, ‘Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor.’ And he wrote a letter to this effect: ‘Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.’ So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him.

(Acts 23:23-33)

- The 270 armed soldiers only take Paul as far as Antipatris, a Roman military stronghold just outside of Jerusalem. At this checkpoint, they are comfortable that the 40 rebels waiting to kill Paul are no longer a threat.
- From Antipatris, the horsemen deliver Paul to Governor Felix who presides over Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and Perea—essentially Old Testament Israel. He is in charge of more territory than Pontius Pilate, for comparison.



“Felix was the procurator of Judea from A.D. 52-59. He was ruthless in quelling Jewish uprisings, and though he was a freedman he seems never to have outgrown his slavish mentality. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote that he wielded ‘the power of a king with all the instincts of a slave.’”

(Boice, 386)

- Governors were either *senators* (first tier) or *equestrian* (second tier) in Roman government. The title “his Excellency the governor Felix” suggests Felix was in this second level of government.

“On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, ‘I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.’ And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod’s praetorium. And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: ‘Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.’ The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.

(Acts 23:31-24:9)

- The high priest Ananias, along with several others, makes the trip to Caesarea to repeat the same false accusations against Paul.

“And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: ‘Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the

God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia—they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: “It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.””
(Acts 24:10-21)

- Only a short time before this, Paul had written in *Romans* that Christians should “be subject to governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1). He practices this.
- Paul demonstrates a couple important Christian attitudes here:
 - Christians are model citizens. He speaks kindly to Felix, corrupt as he is, and makes clear that he has not been “disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd,” but rather “always take[s] pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.”
 - Christians believe in “everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets.” By this, Paul means “the Old Testament.” The Old Testament is every bit the authority for us as it was for Paul.
 - Christians humbly seek forgiveness. Paul acknowledges that his comment on the resurrection was meant to cause a scene. He is truthful and honest.

“But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, ‘When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.’ Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs. After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, ‘Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.’ At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.”
(Acts 24:22-26)

- God had said that Paul’s imprisonment would allow him to testify to Jesus Christ. Not surprisingly, this is precisely what happens.
- Drusilla is Felix’s third wife. She is the sister of Agrippa II.
- “Righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” are not things Felix wants to hear about. He rejects the Gospel in favor of his fleshly desires. He’d rather receive money from Paul than receive Jesus.
- Felix was to decide Paul’s case when Claudius Lysias came to Caesarea. Luke does not tell us why Lysias never arrives, but perhaps its because he knows his version of the story stretches the truth. Of course, God is ultimately behind the movements and has determined to bring Paul to Rome.
- Felix allows Paul visitors. He is in Caesarea, that important church where the Holy Spirit was poured out on the gentiles. Philip lives here with his family. Presumably Luke remains with Paul (Acts 27:1). Paul has made at least two visits to encourage the church here. Knowing the kind of hospitality practiced in the early church, we can safely assume Paul was well cared for by his brothers and sisters.

“When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.

Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. ‘So,’ said he, ‘let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.’ After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.”

(Acts 24:27-25:6)

- Felix is governor until 59 A.D, so we can date Paul’s imprisonment precisely.
- Porcius Festus assumes the position Felix leaves vacant.

“When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. Paul argued in his defense, ‘Neither against the law of the Jews, nor

against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.’ But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, ‘Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?’ But Paul said, ‘I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.’ Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, ‘To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.’
(Acts 25:7-12)

- According to Roman law, any citizen facing the penalty of death had the right to appeal to the emperor himself. Because we can assuredly date this moment to 59 A.D., that emperor was Nero who reigned from 54-68 A.D.

“Seneca instructed Nero how to judge and rule, and, for the first five years of Nero’s reign, he was a model emperor. Then, for reasons we do not know, he became the bloodiest, most ruthless, most corrupt emperor in the history of Rome. At this time his corruption had not yet been manifested, so Paul did a very intelligent thing by appealing to Nero to hear his case. He did not know that Nero was waiting for him with a sword.”
(Sproul, 355-356)

“Gradually Nero’s vices gained the upper hand; he no longer tried to laugh them off or hide or deny them, but turned quite brazen.”
(Suetonius, 222)

- Church history maintains that Paul was martyred by Nero in 68 A.D. Before then, Paul will continue to minister by letters—several of which are known to our New Testament.

“Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying, ‘There is a man left prisoner by Felix, and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone

before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar.’ Then Agrippa said to Festus, ‘I would like to hear the man myself.’ ‘Tomorrow,’ said he, ‘you will hear him.’ So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. And Festus said, ‘King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.’”
(Acts 25:13-27)

- We are introduced to Agrippa (Agrippa II)—governor of the neighboring regions of Batanea, Trachonitis, Gaulonitis, and part of Galilee. These regions are less familiar to us because they are northeast of Israel and do not factor much into the biblical story.
- Agrippa holds an equal position to Festus, and comes to welcome him into office. He is accompanied by Bernice, who was both his sister and his wife.

“The pair were involved in one of the most infamous incestuous relationships in ancient history. It was a matter of imperial concern and a scandal in Rome. The Emperor Claudius had ordered Bernice to marry (someone besides her

brother, obviously), but she almost immediately left her marriage (to a man named Polemo) to go back and live as her brother's queen."

(Mohler, 160)

- Agrippa is a descendant of the Herodian Dynasty.
 - Herod the Great rules 37-4 B.C. over Idumea, Judea, Samaria, Peraea, Galilee, Gaulantis, Satanea, Auranitas, Trachonitis. The magi visit him, and he orders the killing of babies in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1, 16).
 - When Herod dies, his kingdom is split between his three sons (Matt. 2:19).
 - *Archelaus* (4 BC-6 AD) rules over Idumea, Judea and Samaria. Mary and Joseph flee when they hear Archelaus is in charge (Matt. 2:22).
 - *Herod Antipas* (4 BC-39 AD) rules over Galilee and Peraea. He is the most commonly referred to "Herod" in the gospels. He marries his half-brother's wife and killed John the Baptist for preaching against him (Matt. 14:1-12). He also met Jesus (Luke 23:8).
 - *Herod Philip* (4 BC-34 AD) rules over Gaulantis, Satanea, Auranitas, and Trachonitis (Luke 3:1).
- Because Archelaus has no heirs, Rome assigns his regions to Felix and later to Festus. King Agrippa II rules over the regions left by Herod Antipas and Herod Philip. Because of his familiarity with the Jews, he provides some expert opinion into Paul's case.

"So Agrippa said to Paul, 'You have permission to speak for yourself.' Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: 'I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving

authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." And I said, "Who are you, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.'"

(Acts 26:1-23)

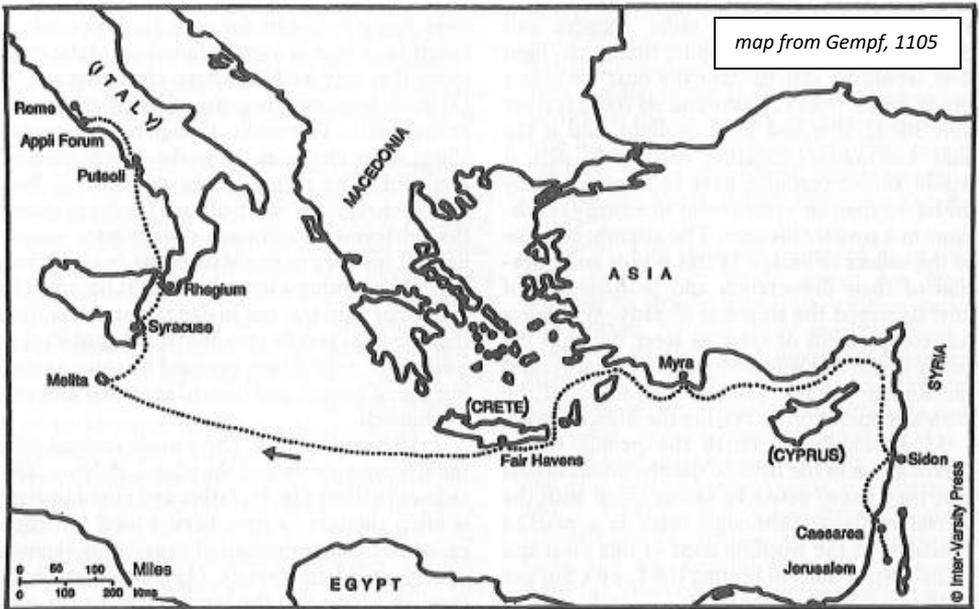
- Paul recounts his testimony again. This is the third time Luke has recorded it.

"And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.' But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.' And Agrippa said to Paul, 'In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?' And Paul said, 'Whether short

or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.’ Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, ‘This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.’ And Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.’
(Acts 26:24-32)

- Routinely, it’s Paul’s comments about the international nature of the Gospel that evokes strong reactions. It was this comment about being sent to the gentiles in Acts 22:21 that caused the uproar among the Jews. Here, the same conviction about taking the Gospel to the gentiles startles Festus and Agrippa.

“Ironically, it was only Paul’s appeal to Caesar that kept him in his chains, since to free him now would have been to usurp the emperor’s right to judge the case. Paul had wanted to go to Rome in any case and Festus was glad not to be responsible in the eyes of the Jewish leaders for releasing him.”
 (Gempf, 1104)



Shipwreck

Acts 27-28

- While Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea, Felix had ordered “that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs” (Acts 24:23). It seems Luke was one of these friends, because the pronouns once again change to first person plural: “we,” “us.”
- Paul, apparently with some companions, will be taken to Rome to present his case before Nero.
- The trip is guided by “a centurion of the Augustan Cohort.” A centurion is a military commander, the Augustan Cohort likely served from Rome.

*“And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.
(27:1-8)*

- Conditions are not favorable for such a lengthy trip. Almost immediately, the winds cause them problems. They use the islands of Cyprus and then Crete

as “lees,” shelters from the wind. They stop at Fair Havens and will attempt to make the trip from there to Rome, what would be the longest trip in Acts.

- Because the ship they take is “of Adramyttium,” the name of a port in Mysia, it is probably going to continue up the coast of Asia (toward Mysia).
- The crew could have continued with this ship and probably finished the journey—with frequent stops—in a couple of months. However, Julius hopes to speed up the progress. The group switches to an Alexandrian ship from Egypt headed for Rome with grain for winter.
- Often our desire to get things done faster brings us trouble. Julius experiences exactly this.

“Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, ‘Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.’ But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there. Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship’s boat. After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. And on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.”

(Acts 27:9-20)

- Luke mentions “the fast,” referring to the Day of Atonement. This helps us date Paul’s voyage to Rome down to a specific day.

“The dangerous season for sailing began about September 14 and lasted until November 11; after the latter date all navigation on the open sea came to an end until winter was over...By the ‘Fast’ he means, of course, the Great Day of Atonement, which falls on Tishri 10. Luke’s remark has point only if that date fell rather late in the solar calendar that year. In A.D. 59 it fell on October 5, but in all the neighbouring years from A.D. 57 to 62 it fell earlier.”

(Bruce, 506)

- It is October 5, well into the dangerous fall season of sailing. The winds continue to cause problems, so the crew hopes to go only to the edge of Crete and winter there.
- Paul encourages Julius to winter in Fair Havens, but the crew wants to go *just a little further* to a more convenient port. The desire for convenience and to get *just a little more* also complicates our lives considerably. So it is with this crew.
- When the wind is favorable, they set sail for Phoenix, but a wind from the northeast pushes them away from the island and into the open sea.
- In an effort to lighten the ships load, they dump cargo and tackle, but they are able to secure the life boat.

“The tackle was used in hoisting and lowering the sails; its loss left the ship without means of navigation or propulsion. It was the ultimate act of desperation.”

(Mohler, 184)

- Perhaps its with this experience in mind that Paul warns his beloved friend Timothy—making the similar trip from Ephesus to Rome—to “Do your best to come before winter” (2 Tim. 4:21).

“Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, ‘Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.” So take heart, men, for I have

faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island.”
(Acts 27:21-26)

- Paul is surrounded by worldly men motivated by greed and speed. They want coin and convenience. But Paul is motivated by the Gospel. He is going to Rome to serve the living God—and the living God will accomplish His purposes. Paul is able to see the situation with superior wisdom and peace. This is available to all those who put their full confidence in Christ!

“When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.’ Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go. As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, ‘Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.’ And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.”
(Acts 27:27-38)

- The sailors realize they are approaching land—a small island. This should be good news, but they know Alexandrian cargo ships are large and sit very low in the water. With no ability to steer the ship, chances are they will strike a rock below the surface of the water and be sunk before they reach land.
- To avoid this, the sailors secretly lower the life boat. The life boat can be steered and will sit much higher in the water. The ship meant certain

shipwreck, the life boat almost certainly meant safety. Yet, Paul is able to convince the sailors to stay with the ship.

- We find here that despite having serious concerns about the weight of the ship, the crew had not yet dumped the wheat into the sea. Delivering this wheat to Rome was worth a considerable payday, and their greed had led them into peril. Speed, convenience, and greed are terrible guides.
- Paul also encourages the Jews observing the fast to eat. Fasting is a good and healthy spiritual discipline, but this is a good point to hear: it's ok to break a fast.

“Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

(Acts 27:39-44)

- The best they can do is hope to run the ship into the shore. Their worst fears are realized when the heavy ship strikes a reef. The back of the ship begins to break into pieces and the crew and prisoners are thrown into the water.
- God's word through Paul is true: everyone is safe.

“After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.’ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm.

They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

(Acts 28:1-10)

- Remember that hospitality is often a sign of openness to and receiving of the Gospel message. These people on the island of Malta show radical hospitality to the prisoners and crew that wash ashore.
- The word here routinely translated “native people” suggests that they were “barbarians,” or in some way less civilized. The Gospel is for them, too!

“After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.”

(Acts 28:11-16)

- Sailing would become safe again in February. Three months after the shipwreck in October, they are able to set sail for Rome.

“After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, ‘Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. When they had

examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.’ And they said to him, ‘We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.’”
(Acts 28:17-22)

- As has become his custom, Paul makes his case before the Jews first. They are not aware of him, but don't think kindly about Christians. These Jews are certainly aware of Claudius' edict, expelling Christians and Jews some years earlier. They are aware of Nero's punishments against Christians.

“During his reign a great many public abuses were suppressed by the imposition of heavy penalties...Punishments were inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous superstition.”
(Suetonius, 215)

- Despite their assumptions, Paul gets a chance to present to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We shouldn't be surprised, as all throughout this book we've seen Christ continue His ministry through His Church to the ends of the earth with rapid expansion.

“When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: ‘The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: “Go to this people, and say, ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.’ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”
(Acts 28:23-28)

- Here in Rome, Paul preaches “from morning till evening,” and “welcomed all who came.” He preaches from Scripture, about Jesus, with good doctrine, and with boldness.

“He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”
(Acts 28:30-31)

- It’s here on house arrest in Rome circa 60-61 A.D. that Paul will write what we often refer to as *The Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*.

“On the assumption that Paul was released after the two-year period Luke mentions in Acts 28:30-31, he engaged in further ministry in the East (e.g., Ephesus [see 1 Timothy] and Crete [see Titus]) during the years 62-64. Paul was probably rearrested at the time of Nero’s persecution and executed shortly thereafter (64 or 65).”
(Carson & Moo, 369-370)

- It’s unclear whether Paul ever got the chance to present the Gospel to Nero, but Nero certainly heard it from someone. Fierce persecutions would come against the Christians in the years that followed Paul’s imprisonment.

“This apostle and martyr was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, born at Tarsus in Cilicia. He was at first a great enemy to and persecutor of the Christians; but, after his miraculous conversion, he became a strenuous supporter of Christianity. At Iconium, St. Paul and St. Barnabas were near being stoned to death by the enraged Jews; on which they fled to Lycaonia. At Lystra, St. Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. He, however, happily revived, and escaped to Derbe. At Philippi, Paul and Silas were imprisoned and whipped; and both were again persecuted at Thessalonica. Being afterwards taken at Jerusalem, he was sent to Caesarea, but appealed to Caesar at Rome.

Here he continued a prisoner at large for two years; and at length, being released, he visited the churches of Greece and Rome, and preached in France and Spain. Returning to Rome, he was again apprehended, and, by the order of Nero, martyred, by beheading. About the same time Saints James, Philip, Matthew, Mark, Matthias, Jude, Bartholomew, Thomas, and Luke the Evangelist also suffered martyrdom for the cause of Christ.”

(Fox, 12-13)

- And yet, beyond the pages of Acts, the ministry of Christ continues. No persecution or loss, no failure of a church or pastor, no competing worldview or culture has ever overcome the Church that Christ leads by His Spirit. What Gamaliel had asked among the Sadducees was nearly prophetic.

“So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”

(Acts 5:38-39)

- Today, we receive that same Spirit of power and the same call to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The gates of Hell will not overcome us. Will you join with the Church?



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