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LESSON ONE

OVERVIEW
What Is Acts?

» See: Map: The Roman Empire

The Holy Spirit has given us in the New Testament four accounts of Jesus' ministry but only one book on the early years of the Church. It is called the Acts of the Apostles, but in fact it tells us only selected things about a few of the apostles. What about John, who gave us five of the New Testament books? What about Matthew, who wrote one Gospel? What about Andrew, Thomas, Bartholemew, James the Younger, Simon the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Matthias? Acts is even silent on the last fifteen years or so of Peter's ministry. Clearly, just as God has not chosen to give us a complete biography of Jesus, so He has determined not to inspire a thorough history of the Church's beginnings. [874]

Timeline of Acts
(All dates are approximate, based on F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, page 475.)

<table>
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<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection; Pentecost</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martyrdom of Stephen (<a href="#">Acts 6:8-8:1</a>)</td>
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<td>Paul to Jerusalem (<a href="#">Acts 21:1-23:22</a>)</td>
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What is Acts?

If Acts is not a complete history of the Church's first three decades, then what is it? Our first clue is that it is the second of a two-volume work. An early convert to Christianity named Luke wrote a Gospel and Acts for a Roman aristocrat named Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1). Luke was the "beloved physician" (Col. 4:14, NASB) of the Apostle Paul. He traveled with Paul on part of his second missionary journey. Some years later, Luke went from Philippi to Jerusalem with Paul, and when Paul was arrested there, Luke accompanied him on his harrowing journey to Rome. We surmise these facts from the way Luke changed from the third person ("they") to the first ("we") in parts of Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16).

We don't know whether Luke was a Gentile, a Gentile convert to Judaism, or a Jew before he became a Christian. His writings show that he was steeped in the urban, Gentile, Greek-speaking culture of the Roman Empire; Luke 1:1-4 is written in the literary Greek of the educated elite, and Acts describes Gentile kings, philosophers, and legal details accurately. On the other hand, Luke was also well versed in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Jews all over the Empire used.

About Theophilus we can only speculate. His name means "lover of God," but it was a common Greek name and was probably not made up by Luke. In Luke's day, people often wrote for and dedicated their works to wealthy patrons, who helped pay for publishing the books. Theophilus was probably an educated Gentile aristocrat, either a new convert or an interested pagan. Luke may have wanted to help confirm this man and others like him in the faith by showing that it rested on firm historical foundations and the power of God.

When was Acts written? The earliest would be about 62 AD, where chapter 28 leaves off abruptly. However, Luke seems to be looking back on those events from at least some distance. On the other hand, the book gives no hint of the deaths of Paul, Peter, or James, nor of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, nor even of Paul's letters. Would a book written after 90 AD partly about Paul have ignored his letters, which were so influential by then? Most scholars who think Acts is an accurate account by Luke (as opposed to fiction) guess that the book was written over some time and finished "towards AD 70."[875]


3. What does Acts 1:8 tell you about the purpose of the book?


   a. What do these verses have in common, and what progression do you see?

   b. What does this pattern tell you about Acts?

Acts does not tell us all that Jesus did through the apostles, but only some of what He did through some of them. We learn nothing about the spread of the gospel to "Crete (Titus 1:5), Illyricum (Romans 15:19—modern Yugoslavia), or Pontus, Cappadocia and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1), not to mention the church's expansion eastward toward Mesopotamia or southward toward Egypt." Instead, Luke focuses on one line of geographical expansion: from Jerusalem to Rome. Therefore, Acts 1:8 is only a partial clue to the book's theme.

Also, Luke is not concerned to give us the apostles' biographies. He begins with the apostles in Jerusalem, then ignores most of them to focus on Peter and two non-apostles. Then he turns from Peter to Paul, and he ends the book at last with Paul a prisoner in Rome probably destined to live several more years.

Moreover, Luke does not tell us all we might like to know about organization, lifestyle, and worship in the early Church. He gives us glimpses of details, but these are incidental to the focus of the story.

What is the main focus? The best way to find this out (indeed, the best way to begin studying any book) is to read it several times, noting first impressions and the major sections. If possible, you should stop now and read through Acts once. Then, get a piece of paper, go back through the book, and write down what each of the following sections is about:

1:1-6:7
6:8-9:31
9:32-12:24
12:25-16:5
16:6-19:20
19:21-28:31

This whole procedure should take you four to five hours, but Acts is a terrific story so it should be fun. However, if you don't have time for this kind of preparation, you can look at the following outlines before you read the book.

Acts can be outlined in several ways. We can divide chapters 1-12 (which focus on Peter and the Jewish mission) from chapters 13-28 (which focus on Paul and the Gentile mission). Or, we can use 1:8 as a framework, like this:

Jerusalem (1:1-7:60)
Thirdly, we can combine these two views, like this:

I. Peter and the Beginnings of the Church in Palestine (chapters 1-12)
   A. "Throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria" (1:1-9:31; see 9:31)
   B. "As far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch" (9:32-12:25; see 11:19)

II. Paul and the Expansion of the Church from Antioch to Rome (chapters 13-28)
   A. "Throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia" (13:1-15:35; see 16:6)
   B. "Over to Macedonia" (15:36-21:16; see 16:9)
   C. "To Rome" (21:17-28:31; see 28:14)

Finally, we can use those "progress reports" you observed in question 4, like this:

(6:8-9:31) The first geographical expansion: Greek-speaking Jewish Christians ("Hellenists") bring the gospel to Jews, Samaritans (semi-Jews), and a convert to Judaism. The martyrdom of Stephen (a Hellenist) causes the expansion, and the conversion of Paul (a Jew from outside Palestine) partly results from the expansion.
(9:32-12:24) The first expansion to the Gentiles: To make this breakthrough, God uses Peter (an Aramaic-speaking Jew, a "Hebrew") rather than the Hellenists. The Hellenists begin evangelizing Gentiles in Antioch.
(12:25-16:5) The first geographical expansion into the Gentile world: Paul leads. When the Church decides that Gentile Christians need not live as Jews, the Gentile mission is free to explode. Opposition is still mainly Jewish.
(16:6-19:20) Paul's westward expansion reaches Europe. Jews continue to reject the gospel, and Gentiles continue to accept it. However, success with some Gentiles produces opposition from others.

5. If you have not already done so, read the whole book of Acts, at one sitting if possible. It is one of the finest examples of the kind of history written in the ancient world. You will notice that it is not like the history written today; you'll see few dates but a great concern for the reader's enjoyment. The pace is fast, so you'll scarcely notice that the events of chapter 12 occurred some ten to thirteen years after those of chapter two.

Use the above outlines, the timeline, and the map of the Roman Empire to guide your reading. If you want to remember any observations or questions, jot them in the space below. In particular, look for repeated words and patterns of events.

7. From your observations so far, what seem to be the central themes, messages, or purposes of Acts?

Your response

Study Skill—Application

Second Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that "All Scripture... is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." James 1:22 urges us to do what the Word says, not merely hear it. Therefore, the last step of Bible study is asking ourselves, "What difference should this passage make to my life? How should it make me want to think or act?" Application will require time, thought, prayer, and perhaps even discussion with another person.

If you sometimes have trouble finding a truth in a passage that is relevant to you, consider the following five questions:

Is there a sin for me to avoid?
Is there a promise for me to trust?
Is there an example for me to follow?
Is there a command for me to obey?
How can this passage increase my knowledge of the Lord (not just knowledge about Him?)

You can recall these five questions by remembering the acronym SPECK—Sin, Promise, Example, Command, Knowledge.

Look for something specific you can do or pray about in response to the truth (the sin, promise etc.) that is relevant to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in choosing and empower you in fulfilling your application. If your application is a change of attitude rather than an action, plan to pray about it daily for awhile, and ask God to show you circumstances in which you can act on your change of attitude.

8. The book of Acts is largely about how the Church fulfilled its mission during its first thirty years (from Jesus’ ascension to about 62 AD). Why is it important for us to study this story? How is it relevant to us?

9. a. Did you notice anything in your first reading of Acts that you want to remember and apply? If so, what is the truth you want to take to heart?

b. Ask God to show you how you can apply this truth, and write your thoughts and plans here.
Themes in Acts

What is the Church's mission?

What is the Church's message?

What is the Holy Spirit's role in the Church and the world?

How do believers respond to opposition and persecution in Acts?

What is the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in Acts?

What does Acts show about fellowship (partnership, participation, sharing, communion)?
LESSON TWO

Acts 1:1-26

Preparation

Topics: Lots, Ministry, Justus, It is necessary, In their language, Brothers, Women, A Sabbath day’s walk, Baptized, Kingdom of God, Apostles, Preparation

Luke was a master of many styles of writing. He wrote Luke 1:1-4 in formal, classical Greek, but in the rest of his Gospel and all of Acts, Luke used a style reminiscent of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament.

Septuagint. Greek was a unique style. It was almost as different from the Greek spoken in Luke's day as the English of the King James Bible is different from what is spoken today. Why did Luke use the style of the Jewish Bible? Perhaps he knew he was writing "sacred history," a continuation of God's dealings with man that began in Genesis and reached its culmination in the ministry of Jesus. By using the Septuagint's style and quoting it often, Luke stressed that Acts recounted the continuation and fulfillment of the Scripture's story.

Before you begin the questions in this lesson read 1:1-26 all the way through. You might find it helpful to compare two versions of the Bible. Ask God to show you the important truths of this opening chapter of Acts.

Study Skill—Outlining

Sketching a rough outline of a chapter is often good preparation for studying it closely. It is also often helpful to relate the chapter to the themes of the whole book. Then, after studying the chapter in detail, you can reconsider your outline and how the chapter relates to the whole.

1. For each of the following sections, write a title that expresses what the section is about.

   1:1-11

   1:12-26

2. If Acts tells how the Church began to fulfill its mission through the Holy Spirit, how does 1:1-26 relate to this theme?

Commission (1:1-11)

Apostles (1:2). An apostle is literally "one who is sent"—a messenger, proxy, ambassador. In Jewish law, an apostolos (Greek) or shaliach (Aramaic) was "a person acting with full authority for another" in a business or legal transaction. John 13:16, 20 and 20:21 reflect the Jewish idea of the shaliach.

During His earthly life, Jesus appointed twelve of His disciples to be His apostles (Luke 6:12-16). To these twelve He gave the most intensive training and intimate friendship.
The early Church eventually recognized other believers as apostles in some sense: Paul (Acts 14:14), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), James the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19), and perhaps Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7). However, it is not clear that all these people held the Church's highest authority regarding doctrine and policy, as the Twelve did. Paul does seem to have eventually attained this status (Galatians 1:1-2:10). Nevertheless, in these early chapters of Acts, Luke uses the term "the Twelve" as equivalent to "the apostles."

Kingdom of God (1:3). Jesus called His message "the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43) and He spoke about the Kingdom constantly. The Old Testament had promised that God would restore His own kingship over the earth, and Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom was present in the person of the King, Jesus Himself. The early Church spoke of the Kingdom to refer to "the saving, sovereign action of God through" Jesus (Acts 8:12; Acts 19:8; Acts 20:25; Acts 28:23, 31).[882]

The Jews believed that when the Messiah (God's "Anointed One") came, He would inaugurate God's Kingdom on earth by delivering Israel from its oppressors. One of the prophesied signs of the Kingdom was that God would pour out His Spirit (Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28-32). Jesus' disciples knew He was the Messiah (Greek: Christ), so they supposed that by promising the Spirit, Jesus was saying He would soon restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Despite Jesus' teaching, they still thought He was going to establish a political kingdom at once.

3. From Acts 1:2-5, what was apparently the purpose of the forty days Jesus spent with His disciples after the Resurrection?

Baptized (1:5). Literally, "to immerse a person in water or to deluge him with it, usually as a means of cleansing."[883] The Old Testament often describes the Holy Spirit figuratively as a liquid that can be "poured out" (Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28). However, Scripture also speaks of the Spirit filling and coming upon people. We should remember that these terms are figurative; the Spirit is a Person, not a fluid or a force like electricity.

4. Consider what Jesus said to the apostles when they asked whether His reign in power was about to begin (1:6-8). Why wasn't it important for the apostles to know precisely when Jesus would finish bringing God's reign to earth?

5. Why was it necessary for Jesus to stop giving direct instructions to His disciples and ascend to be with His Father (Acts 1:9)? See John 16:5-15.

6. a. What conviction was going to sustain the apostles as they fulfilled their mission while Jesus was physically absent (1:11)?
A twelfth witness chosen (1:12-26)

A Sabbath day's walk (1:12). Jewish tradition said that traveling more than 3000 feet was work, so that distance came to be called a Sabbath day's journey.[884]

Women (1:14). Among these were probably the wives of the apostles, as well as Jesus' mother. But unlike most Jewish teachers, Jesus had permitted women to travel with Him as disciples and even support Him financially, those women were among the witnesses to His crucifixion and resurrection (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 23:49, 55-56; Luke 24:1-11).

Brothers (1:14). When the Church came to believe that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life, it was assumed that Jesus' "brothers" were either His cousins or Joseph's sons by a previous marriage. However, some people think they were the sons of Joseph and Mary, Jesus' half brothers. They did not believe He was the Son of God during His life, so they continually tried to dissuade Him from the path that appeared insane (Mark 3:21; John 7:5). But Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection, and they believed. The eldest brother, James, became a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; Acts 15:13; Galatians 2:9).

At His death, Jesus committed His mother into the care of the Apostle John, since His brothers did not yet believe (John 19:26-27). From this fact, and because Joseph is not mentioned in Acts 1:14, we conclude that he had died.

In their language (1:19). Verses 18-19 are a parenthesis that Luke has inserted into Peter's speech to explain to the reader how Judas died. Peter's words actually flow from 1:17 to 1:20.[885]

It is necessary (1:21). According to Jewish law, a hundred and twenty or more adult men could establish a community with its own ruling council. The hundred and twenty (1:15) believers were going to set up their own community with the twelve apostles as its council.[886]

Twelve men were necessary because they symbolized the twelve patriarchs who headed the twelve tribes (the whole nation) of Israel. (See Matthew 19:28, where "judging" is the Hebrew term for ruling or governing.[887]) Just as the patriarchs were the heads (under God) of Israel, so the apostles are the heads (under Jesus) of the Church.

7. How did Peter describe the chief function of an apostle (1:22)? What were the qualifications of such a person (1:21-22)?

Justus (1:23). Many Jews had both a Hebrew and a Greek or Latin name. "Joseph" is Hebrew, "Justus" is Latin. "Barsabbas" means "son of the Sabbath"; many Jews had nicknames that began "son of..." (4:36; 13:6).

Ministry (1:25). "The Greek word diakonia means 'service' (originally service at a meal table), and it is used of Christian work of all kinds, which takes its pattern from the One who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45)."[888] "To serve tables" in 6:2 (NASB) is diakonoi, this is the root of the English word deacon.
Lots (1:26). This method of discerning God's will for a decision was common in Old Testament times and among the Jews. Proverbs 16:33 states the belief that God, not chance, determined the outcome when lots were cast. Acts 1:26 is the only biblical instance of Christians casting lots.

8. a. What role did prayer have among the believers between the Ascension and Pentecost (1:14, 24-25)?

b. How is this a model for us?

Your response

9. Acts covers many topics that are relevant to our lives. Some of the book's themes are given with space for you to write what you learn about each theme as you go through the book. For now, look back over this lesson and 1:1-26, and write what you can about each theme. Give verse references for your observations.

Study Skill—Application

Because Acts is a narrative (a true story), it teaches us mainly by example, not directly as the Gospels and Epistles do. However, the first thirty years of Church history were a unique period in the history of God's dealings with man. Therefore, not everything in Acts sets an example that we should imitate. Acts records what did happen, not necessarily what should have happened or what always should happen. (For instance, the apostles cast lots and prayed to select the twelfth apostle, 1:23-26. Is this meant to be a model for choosing an apostle or leaders in general? How do we know?)

To apply Acts to our lives sensibly, we need to distinguish when Luke is describing an example we should follow; when he is describing one we may follow; and when he is giving details to portray the overall message, not to be exact models for us.

One clue to this distinction is that primary patterns recur whereas specific details vary. For instance, people repeatedly pray for God's guidance to make decisions in Acts but casting lots occurs only once, before the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost. Likewise, when people become believers in Acts, water baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit normally occur, but "these can be in reverse order, with or without the laying on of hands, with or without the mention of tongues; and scarcely ever with a specific mention of repentance, even after what Peter says in 2:38-39."

You'll find more guidelines for applications later in this study guide. For now, keep this question in mind: When is a practice in Acts a norm we should follow; when is it an option we
should consider, and when is it unique to the time? Also, watch for recurring patterns and varying details.

10. Review your answers to questions 4, 5, 8, and 9. Ask God to guide you, and write down a) the one specific truth from 1:1-26 you want to take to heart; and b) any commitment to some action or prayer you would like to make during the coming week.

a. 

b. 

**Study Skill—Outlining**

Some people remember a book better if they outline it as they go through it. Questions 1 and 2 of this lesson have given you a head start on outlining chapter 1 of Acts. If you like, start with a broad framework, such as one of those in the overview. Then add specifics:

1:1-26

1:1-5

1:6-11

1:12-26

Give each section a title that tells what it is about. Try to show how the sections contribute to the themes of Acts.

11. If you have any questions about 1:1-26, write them here.
LESSON THREE

Acts 2:1-41

Pentecost

Topics:  Three thousand, With many other words, Baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ, Repent, Lord... Lord, Christ, In the last days, Too much wine, God-fearing Jews from every nation, Filled with the Holy Spirit, Pentecost, Pentecost

Forty days after the Resurrection, Jesus left His disciples with a mission and a promise. For ten more days the believers prayed together and prepared. Then came the Jewish feast of Pentecost.

Read 2:1-41 before you begin the questions. Imagine yourself as one of the believers gathered to celebrate the feast with no idea of what was coming. Or, put yourself in the crowd of Jews witnessing the bizarre events and Peter's speech. Ask God to bring this scene alive for you.

The Spirit descends (2:1-13)

Pentecost (2:1). The fiftieth day after the Sabbath of Passover week (pente koste is Greek for "fiftieth day"). Pentecost is the name Greek-speaking Jews used for the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15-21; Deut. 16:9-12), the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16), or the Day of Firstfruits (Numbers 28:26-31). On Pentecost, the Jews brought offerings of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest to the Temple to thank the Lord for it. In Jesus' time, Pentecost "was associated with the renewal of the covenant made with Noah and then with Moses...; in second-century Judaism Pentecost was regarded as the day when the law was given at Sinai." [890]

1. Why was it appropriate that the events of Acts 2 occurred on Pentecost, the day when Jews celebrated the giving of the covenant under the Law of Moses? (Optional: See Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:6.)

Study Skill—Metaphors and Similes

Metaphors and similes are figures of speech. They shed light on something by referring to it as something else in order to imply a comparison between the two. A metaphor compares by saying something is another ("You are the salt of the earth"). A simile uses the words like or as to show the comparison.

In Acts 2:2-3, Luke describes the sound of the Spirit as "like the blowing of a violent wind" and His visible effect as "what seemed to be tongues of fire" ("tongues as of fire," in RSV and NASB). Wind (2 Samuel 22:16; Job 37:10; Ezekiel 37:9, 14; John 3:8) and fire (Exodus 3:2; Exodus 19:18; Luke 3:16) are common biblical symbols for the presence of God's Spirit. [891] The Greek word pneuma and the Hebrew ruach mean both "wind" and "spirit."

Filled with the Holy Spirit (2:4). Luke uses the word filled "when people are given an initial endowment of the Spirit to fit them for God's service" (Luke 1:15; Acts 9:17) "and also when they are inspired to make important utterances" (Acts 4:8, 31; Acts 13:9). "Related words are used to describe the continuous process of being filled with the Spirit" (Acts 13:52; Ephes.
or the corresponding state of being full" (Luke 4:1; Acts 6:3, 5; Acts 7:55; Acts 11:24). "These references indicate that a person already filled with the Spirit can receive a fresh filling for a specific task, or a continuous filling."[92]

To be "baptized" (Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16) with the Spirit is the same as the initial filling the disciples received at Pentecost. However, the recurring experience is always called filling, never baptism.[93]

God-fearing Jews from every nation (2:5). Devout Jews tried to get to Jerusalem for the three main feasts of the year: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16). Also, Jews who came from other parts of the world often moved to Judea in their old age in order to die in the promised land. Therefore, at Pentecost Jerusalem was full of Jews and proselytes (converts to Judaism) from all over the Mediterranean world and the Middle East.

Most of them would have understood the Aramaic language (similar to Hebrew) spoken in Palestine and the Greek spoken all over the known world. However, each Jew also had a native language which almost no one from elsewhere was likely to know.

2. What were the "other tongues" (2:4) that the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak (2:6, 11)?

Too much wine (2:13). A Jew from Phrygia, for instance, may have heard one or two of the disciples speaking Phrygian. However, the disciples speaking Mede or Cyrenian would have been unintelligible and may have seemed to be babbling drunkenly.

Four interpretations of the languages have been offered: 1) in Acts 2 they are the human languages of the various nations, but in 1 Cor. 12-14 they are non-human, heavenly languages; 2) both Acts and 1 Corinthians refer to human languages not known to the speaker; 3) both Acts and 1 Corinthians refer to nonhuman languages; 4) 1 Corinthians alludes to languages both of "men" and of "angels" (13:1), while Acts portrays only the languages of "men" not known to the speaker.

Peter speaks (2:14-41)

Peter realizes that the promise of Acts 1:8 is being fulfilled, so he seizes the chance to begin fulfilling his mission. Notice the points he makes in his speech.

Study Skill—Old Testament Quotations

If you compare the Old Testament quotations in Acts with the same passages in your Bible's Old Testament, you will notice differences for several reasons:

1. New Testament writers and speakers often give "the general sense" of a passage rather than quoting it word for word.

2. They often quote from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament which was used by many Jews.

3. A New Testament writer or speaker sometimes enlarges abbreviates, or adapts an Old Testament passage or combines two or more passages to make his point. The Holy Spirit has inspired these adaptations just as He has inspired the rest of the New Testament.[94]
In the last days (2:17). The Hebrew of Joel 2:28 says "afterward," but Peter interprets the time "afterward" refers to. Jews divide history into two periods: this world or age, and the world or age to come. The end of this age and the beginning of the age to come is marked by the day of the Lord (Acts 2:20) when God will send His Messiah, vanquish His enemies, and inaugurate the new covenant (Isaiah 2:1-5; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 1:15). Peter says the last days have begun and the day of the Lord is imminent.

3. Peter says that the babble of languages is a sign of something greater than drunkenness. What does the sign demonstrate (2:15-21)?

4. Next Peter recounts the key facts of Jesus' life (2:22-24).
   a. How could the Jews have known that Jesus was a special person sent by God (2:22)?
   
b. How did Israel respond to Jesus (2:23)?
   
c. What was the crucial event of Jesus' career, and what did it prove (2:24, 36)? (Notice that the word therefore in 2:36 points to the conclusion of Peter's reasoning in 2:22-36.)

Christ (2:31). This key word appears here for the first time in Acts. To Jews, it was a title: the Anointed One, the Messiah, the king and descendant of David promised in the Scriptures. Psalm 16, which Peter quoted in Acts 2:25-28, was already considered a prophecy of the Christ.

Lord... Lord (2:34). The original Hebrew has different words. The first "Lord" is YHWH, the name of God, rendered "LORD" in the NIV of Psalm 110:1. The Jews felt that YHWH was too holy to be pronounced, so they said Adon ("Lord") instead. The second "Lord" is Adon, which means "lord" or "master."

The Hebrew of Psalm 110:1 makes it clear that the LORD (God) is speaking to David's Lord (the Messiah), but the Greek of Acts 2:34 uses the same word for both. Therefore, when Peter calls Jesus "Lord" in 2:36, it's not obvious whether he means that Jesus is just the Messiah or also God.

5. How did the Resurrection prove that Jesus is... Christ (2:25-33)?
6. According to Peter, what does Jesus have to do with the miraculous speaking the Jews have heard (2:16, 33)?

7. Hearing all this, the Jews are "cut to the heart" (2:37). Why would Peter's message (2:22-24, 36) affect a Jewish audience like this?

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**Repent (2:38).** "The word indicates a change of direction in a person's life rather than simply a mental change of attitude or a feeling of remorse; it signifies a turning away from a sinful and godless way of life. In one sense this is something of which man is incapable by himself, and therefore, although men can be commanded to repent, it can also be said that repentance is a gift of God (Acts 5:31; Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25)." Repentance "is an essential part of conversion."[896]

**Baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ (2:38).** A public declaration of allegiance to Jesus as the Christ and commitment to Him as one's own Lord. In commerce and popular speech, "in the name of" meant "to the account of" or "with reference to."[897] Paul used the phrase to mean "into union with" and "into commitment to" (Romans 6:2-5).

This baptismal formula does not contradict the fuller one in Matthew 28:19. For Jews, who already believed in the Father and the Holy Spirit, the new commitment was to Jesus as Lord and Christ.

8. What will God do for the person who makes the inner commitment of repentance and the outer declaration of baptism (Acts 2:38)?

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**With many other words (2:40).** Luke explains that 2:14-39 is only a summary of Peter's speech. He probably spoke much longer than the few minutes it would have taken to say these verses. Many of the speeches in Acts are probably summaries like this one.[898]

**Three thousand (2:41).** Many of those new believers may have returned the next day to other parts of the Roman world, taking the gospel with them.

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**Your response**

9. The sermons in Acts suggest outlines we can follow in explaining the good news to others. Summarize what Peter asks the Jews to believe and do, and why they should do these things.

truths to believe (2:21-24, 31-33, 36, 39)
actions to do (2:21, 38)

reasons why (2:20-21, 38, 40)

10. What one insight from 2:1-41 would you most like to take to heart?

11. How does this insight apply to you? (For instance, is there some promise or command addressed to all believers that you can act on more fully than you are? Does some truth about Jesus have implications for your attitudes and actions? How do you fall short with regard to your insight?)

12. What action can you take (including prayer) to begin putting this insight into practice this week?

13. What does 2:1-41 contribute to the overall message of Acts? (See 1:8 and your answer to question 7 in lesson one.)

14. In the themes section, jot down what 2:1-41 reveals about the Church's mission and message, the role of the Holy Spirit, etc.

15. List any questions you have about 2:1-41.
LESSON FOUR

Acts 3:1-26

Miracle

Topics: Repent... turn, Holy and Righteous One, Servant, Our own power or godliness, Solomon’s Colonnade, In the name of Jesus Christ, Beg, Beautiful, At the time of prayer, Miracle

As Jesus promised (John 14:26; Acts 1:8), the Father sent the Holy Spirit to empower the apostles to witness. As you read 3:1-26, consider what aspects of the story are unique to that time, and what aspects are relevant to our lives today.

Healing (3:1-10)

At the time of prayer (3:1). Nine a.m. (the third hour), three p.m. (the ninth hour), and sunset were the standard times of prayer.[999]

Beautiful (3:2). Probably the Nicanor Gate, the bronze-covered one from the Court of the Gentiles to the Court of the Women.[900]

Beg (3:2). Giving alms was considered a good deed that merited God's blessing. However, people normally just dropped coins into a beggar's hand without any personal contact.

In the name of Jesus Christ (3:6). A different Greek phrase from that in 2:38. This one means "by the authority of Jesus." [901] See 3:16; 4:10.

1. How does Acts 3:1-10 reflect Jesus' words in John 14:12-14?

2. The beggar asked for money (3:3), but Peter and John met quite a different need.


   b. What purposes did the physical healing serve in Acts? (See Acts 3:8-13, 16; 4:4-14.)

   c. Why do you think Peter and John healed the beggar physically instead of just either giving him money or offering him spiritual salvation?

3. Does 3:1-10 set any example for our priorities or mission today? If so, how? If not, why not?
Peter speaks (3:11-26)

Solomon's Colonnade (3:11). The porch that ran along the east side of the Court of the Gentiles. It had "rows of 27-foot-high stone columns and a roof of cedar." It was a good thirty yards wide and over five hundred yards long, so there was plenty of room for large gatherings (5:12).

Our own power or godliness (3:12). The Jews apparently assumed that Peter and John must either have superhuman power or be "so devout that God would respond to their prayers with miraculous signs." (902)

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4. According to Peter, how was this healing possible (3:16)?

5. Why is it important for us that the apostles did not need their own power or exceptional godliness to heal the beggar (3:12)?

6. How did Peter describe Jesus in this speech (3:13-15, 22)?

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Servant (3:13). A king's special minister or ambassador was often called his "servant" in ancient times. In the Old Testament, only God's special envoys are called His servants, such as Moses (Exodus 14:31), David (2 Samuel 3:18), and the prophets (2 Kings 17:13). Isaiah prophesied that a Servant of the Lord would come (Isaiah 42:1-9; Isaiah 49:1-7; Isaiah 50:4-9; Isaiah 52:13-53:12). By calling Jesus God's "servant" whom He "glorified" but people "disowned" (Acts 3:13), Peter was alluding to Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Holy and Righteous One (3:14). Jesus was dedicated to God (holy) and morally upright (righteous). Peter proved this by pointing out Pilate's desire to release Jesus as innocent (3:13). For the Jews, it would have seemed incredible to call someone holy and righteous who had been hanged or impaled on a pole because Deut. 21:22-23 said that this death signified God's curse.

7. In what senses is Jesus "the author of life" (Acts 3:15) or "the Prince of life" (KJV, NASB)? (Optional: See John 1:3-4, 12-13; Col. 1:15-23; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 5:11-12.)

8. What does it mean that Jesus is God's Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)?
9. Because the Jews "acted in ignorance" when they disowned and killed Jesus, God will give them a second chance to repent (3:17). What will happen if they repent (3:19-21)?

Repent... turn (3:19). In Hebrew, these come from the same root word. Repentance is turning the mind, will, and emotions away from sin; the turning that follows is therefore toward obedience, knowledge, and love of God.

Your response

10. Peter tailored his speech for his fellow Jews, who had personally supported Jesus' execution, knew the Old Testament prophecies about the servant and the prophet like Moses, and had inherited the covenant. However, what parts of Peter's sermon could you include in explaining the gospel to unbelievers you know?

11. What truth in 3:1-26 seems most significant to you?

12. What implications does it have for your life? How does it make you want to change or respond?

13. What prayer and/or action can you take this week in light of this truth?

14. On the list of themes, note what you've learned from 3:1-26 about the Church's mission and message and about the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

15. List any questions you have about 3:1-26.
LESSON FIVE

Acts 4:1-31; 5:12-42

Confrontation

Topics: Flogged, Gamaliel, Guilty of this man’s blood, No one else dared join them, Name, The stone... rejected, Healed... saved, Rulers, elders and teachers of the law, Evening, Jail, Sadducees, Captain of the temple guard, Confrontation

The Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to preach the gospel, speak in unknown languages, and even heal a lame man. Was this new Spirit-filled life all carefree fun? Read 4:1-31 and 5:12-42 prayerfully.

1. What happens in 4:1-31, and how is the passage connected to 3:1-26?

2. Briefly summarize 5:12-42.

The Sanhedrin's first warning (4:1-22)

Captain of the temple guard (4:1). Most priests worked in the Temple only two weeks a year and lived in the countryside the rest of the time. However, a few powerful families whose men were eligible to become high priests resided in Jerusalem. The captain of the temple police was a member of one of those families and ranked second to the high priest. [904]

Sadducees (4:1). Most of the priests and elders (4:1, 5) belonged to this political party or sect, including the chief priestly families from which the captain of the guard and the high priest were chosen. The Sadducees were wealthy, aristocratic Jews who supported Roman rule in exchange for Rome's protection of their power. [905]

Luke probably means that some of the lay elders accompanied the priestly Sadducees in seizing Peter and John.

Jail (4:3). The Antonia Fortress was attached to the Temple and contained a prison.

Evening (4:3). "The evening sacrifices ended about 4:00 p.m., and the temple gates would be closed at that time. Any judgments involving life and death must be begun and concluded in daylight hours" according to Jewish law. [906]

Rulers, elders and teachers of the law (4:5). The three groups who composed the Sanhedrin, the high council that governed Jewish affairs. The rulers were probably the chief priests who held "various official positions in the administration of the temple." The elders "were the lay leaders of the community, no doubt the heads of the principal aristocratic families, mostly of Sadducean outlook." [907] "The teachers of the law ("scribes" in RSV, NASB, KJV) interpreted and taught the rules and beliefs of Judaism according to their view of the Scriptures and the oral law. The teachers were mostly Pharisees.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were at odds for many reasons. The Sadducees were aristocrats and priests who considered the temple worship most important; most Pharisees belonged to the craftsman class and regarded the written and oral law above the temple ritual.
The Pharisees considered the oral tradition (including teaching about angels and demons, the immortality of the soul, reward and punishment after death, and laws for behavior) as equal to the Scripture, the Sadducees accepted only the five books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy), which they interpreted literally. The Pharisees awaited a Messiah to liberate Israel, inaugurate an age of peace and prosperity, and raise the dead; the Sadducees disbelieved in a personal Messiah and the resurrection, and they said that the Messianic age already existed. The Sadducees actively served and were supported by Rome, the Pharisees tolerated Rome but hoped for the Messiah.

The Sanhedrin was the recognized voice of God for the Jews; it was both the pastoral and the civil leadership.

Healed... saved (4:9, 12). The Greek verb sozo means both to heal and to save.

The stone... rejected (4:11). Psalm 118:22 may originally have meant that Israel (or Israel's king), whom the nations rejected, would prove to be the key nation or king in the world. Peter applies this saying about Israel or the king to Jesus.

Name (4:12). The name Jesus means "the Lord saves." However, for the Jews, the only name by which a person could be saved was YHWH, the holy, unpronounceable name of God (the LORD, see the note). Recall Peter's quotation of Joel 2:32 in Acts 2:21.

3. The Sanhedrin did not doubt that a healing had occurred; they only demanded to know by what authority (power or name, 4:7) the apostles were preaching and healing. Peter responded that his authority came from Jesus. Specifically what did Peter claim about Jesus (4:8-12)?

4. So far, Peter and John had done nothing wrong, and the Sanhedrin couldn't deny the miracle, so at this point they could only issue a command and a warning (4:13-18). How did Peter respond (4:19-20)?

5. What principles for Christian behavior before authorities do Peter and John exemplify (4:5-13, 18-20)? (See also 5:29-32.)

The believer's prayer (4:23-31)

6. How do the believers respond to the Sanhedrin's threats (4:23-31)?

7. What do they confess about God? Write down as many observations as you can (4:24-30).
8. What do they ask God to do (4:29-30)?

9. What attitudes, priorities, and feelings does the prayer in 4:24-30 reflect?

Gamaliel's counsel (5:12-42)

No one else dared join them (5:13). Word of Ananias' and Sapphira's deaths (5:1-11) had spread and discouraged uncommitted spectators.

Guilty of this man's blood (5:28). The Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus to death for blasphemy. If He really was the Messiah, then they were guilty of condemning an innocent man, as the apostles kept saying (2:23; 3:13-15; 4:10-11).

10. Peter said that the apostles and the Holy Spirit were both witnesses to Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation (5:30-32). The apostles were testifying to these facts through preaching and miracles (5:12-16, 21). How was the Holy Spirit witnessing to Jesus' identity?

Gamaliel (5:34). The leader of the more moderate of the two schools of Pharisees. He was the most renowned rabbi of his day for both his learning and his piety. One of his students was Saul (Paul; see 22:3).

11. Dozens of movements and revolts had arisen and dissolved in the last few decades; what lesson did Gamaliel draw from his two examples (5:35-39)?

Flogged (5:40). The lawful Jewish penalty was forty lashes (Deut. 25:3), but the rabbis required this to be reduced by one (2 Cor. 11:24) to prevent anyone from accidentally exceeding the limit. Although the Jewish law was more humane than the Roman, people did sometimes die from thirty-nine lashes with a whip, and even a healthy person was left in agony for days.

The Sanhedrin accepted Gamaliel's counsel to release the apostles, but the flogging was a severe warning against flouting the council's authority.

12. How did the apostles respond to their sufferings (5:41-42)?

13. What lessons can we draw from 5:12-42 that are relevant to our lives?
14. Reread questions 5, 9, and 13, and the "Optional Applications" in this lesson. What one insight about Jesus or example set by the early believers would you like to apply during the next week or so?

15. What action can you take (including prayer) to take this insight to heart and put it into practice?

16. On the list of themes, write what you learned from 4:1-31 and 5:12-42 about those topics.

17. List any questions you have about 4:1-31 or 5:12-42.
LESSON SIX


Community

Topics: Prayed and laid their hands on them, They chose Stephen... Nicolas, Wait on tables, Widows, Grecian Jews... Hebraic Jews, Church, Joseph... called Barnabas, At the apostles’ feet, In the temple courts, Breaking of bread, Fellowship, Apostles’ teaching, Community

Between the landmark events of the Jerusalem church's growth, Luke inserted bits of information about the church's inner life. Some of it is shocking, but Luke chose each detail to show us something important about that first body of believers. As you read 2:42-47; 4:32-5:11; and 6:1-7, think about how your church is like and unlike the one described here.

Fellowship (2:42-47)

**Apostles’ teaching (2:42).** Everything the apostles had learned from Jesus (Matthew 28:20), as well as the facts and meaning of His death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:23-24; Acts 3:15; Acts 4:10). That is, the facts of the gospel, the truths about the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit, and the implications for Christian life.

**Fellowship (2:42).** The Greek word koinonia had rich meaning: sharing, participation, communion, partnership. It could mean the sharing of goods as a family, partnership in a business or other enterprise, and shared religious or other experiences. It implied a degree of community, intimacy, and interdependence.¹⁰⁰

**Breaking of bread (2:42).** Here this phrase means the Lord's Supper, the commemoration of the Last Supper (Luke 22:14-23). In Acts 2:46, it means the sharing of ordinary meals as a sign of fellowship (Luke 24:30, 35).¹⁰¹

1. How can we devote ourselves to "the apostles' teaching" today?

2. Why is it important to do this together? (Optional: See Romans 12:3-8; Ephes. 4:1-16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17.)

3. How can you devote yourself to "the fellowship"? How can you share and participate with other Christians as partners? Think of some specific ways.

4. Why is the Lord's Supper important (Luke 22:14-23; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)?
5. Why should you devote yourself to prayer with other Christians?

6. What other significant details of the early life of the Church do you observe in 2:42-47?

In the temple courts (2:46). The earliest believers were still devout Jews, keeping the traditions and acknowledging the temple rites (3:1; 21:20-24). They did not fully realize how much Jesus' death and resurrection had overturned the old order of the temple sacrifices. The Temple was the familiar place for worship, prayer, and teaching, so the Jewish believers naturally gathered there. It was perhaps the only place with enough space for three thousand believers.

True sharing (4:32-37)
Luke noted in 2:44-45 that the believers felt such unity that each spent his own possessions when others were in need. He expands on this theme in 4:32-5:11 with a positive and a negative example.

7. Why did the believers sell their goods to support others who were in want (4:32)?

8. How was this generosity related to 4:33?

At the apostles' feet (4:35, 37; 5:2). This phrase "suggests some kind of legal transfer expressed in formal language," a trust for the community rather than a personal gift to the apostles.[912] Acts 12:12 shows that not every Christian in Jerusalem sold all of his or her property.

9. These early believers expressed their oneness—their fellowship—by taking responsibility for each other's needs. To what extent do you believe this is a model we should follow? Explain why your view is consistent with Scripture and sensible. (Optional: See 2 Thes. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:3-16; 1 John 3:16-18.)


False sharing (5:1-11)
10. Examine 5:1-4 carefully. Exactly what was Ananias's sin? (For instance, was it wrong in itself not to sell all his property and give it to the church?)

11. What do you think might have motivated him to do this?

12. What did God teach the early believers by striking Ananias and Sapphira dead (5:1-11)?

13. Is there a lesson here for us? If so, what is it?

Church (5:11). Luke uses this word for the first time here. The Greek word *ekklesia* was used in the *Septuagint* to render the Hebrew word for "the assembly or congregation of God's people." Gentiles used *ekklesia* to denote political and other assemblies. The other *Septuagint* word for the congregation of God's people—*synagoge*—was already being used for Jewish places of worship, so the early Christians chose *ekklesia* to name both the local congregation (8:1; 11:22; 13:1) and the universal Church (20:28).[94]

The seven Hellenists (6:1-7)
This scene serves as a bridge between 1:1-5:42 and 6:8-8:40. It wraps up Luke's snapshots of life in the Jerusalem church with an example of internal problem solving, a practical working out of fellowship. At the same time, it introduces us to a group within the church that will be pivotal in 6:8-8:40—the Hellenists. In 6:1-7 we see those Hellenists emerge who will take the next step on the road to fulfilling the commission in 1:8.

Grecian Jews... Hebraic Jews (6:1). The church was still entirely composed of Jews, but there were two somewhat distinct kinds of Jews in the Roman world. On the one hand were Hellenists or Grecian Jews; these spoke Greek as their primary language and displayed Greek customs and attitudes more than their Hebraic brethren. On the other hand were the Hebraists, these spoke Aramaic and/or Hebrew as their first language (though almost all could speak Greek as well), and they were more (though not entirely) resistant to Greek culture. There were devout law-practicing Jews among both Hellenists and Hebraists, although their customs differed. For the most part, Hebraists were natives of Palestine and Hellenists of other parts of the Roman Empire, but even this distinction was not absolute. The chief distinction was that Jerusalem had Hellenistic synagogues that worshiped in Greek and Hebraic ones that worshiped in Hebrew, Hebraists tended to consider Hellenists too liberal, and Hellenists regarded Hebraists as narrow-minded and self-satisfied.[965]
Widows (6:1). Widows were vulnerable in the ancient world because wage work was seldom available for women, and women had fewer legal rights than men, women depended on male relatives for livelihood and protection. Elderly Jewish widows from all over the Empire often moved to Palestine to spend their last days. If they became destitute, the Jewish community may have supported some of them. There may have been a large number of Hellenistic widows who became the responsibility of the church rather than the synagogue when they became Christians.[916]

Wait on tables (6:2). Behind this phrase lies the Greek word from which we get the word deacon (see the note on "ministry"). The Seven may not have been called deacons as a distinct office, but the Church eventually began to assign to deacons the function of caring for material needs.[917]

They chose Stephen... Nicolas (6:5). All seven had Greek names and were probably Hellenists.[918]

Prayed and laid their hands on them (6:6). "Laying on of hands was used in the Old Testament period to confer blessing (Genesis 48:13-20), to transfer guilt from sinner to sacrifice (Leviticus 1:4) and to commission a person for a new responsibility (Numbers 27:23). In the New Testament period, laying on of hands was observed in healing (Acts 28:8; Mark 1:41), blessing (Mark 10:16), ordaining or commissioning (Acts 6:6; Acts 13:3; 1 Tim. 5:22) and imparting of spiritual gifts (Acts 8:17; Acts 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).[919]

14. It's risky to decide that because something is done in Acts, we should do it today. However, does 6:1-7 have any lessons relevant to us?

15. From 2:42-47; 4:32-5:11; and 6:1-7, summarize the things that mattered to the early believers.

16. What one insight from 2:42-47; 4:32-5:11; or 6:1-7 would you like to apply to your life this week? (Perhaps you found something you want to help your church apply.)

17. What specific action can you take toward applying this insight?

18. Write any notes about the Church's mission, etc. on the list of themes in Acts.

19. If you have any questions about 2:42-47; 4:32-5:11; or 6:1-7, list them here.
Through chapter 5, the spotlight was on the Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians in Jerusalem: the apostles. Luke introduced the other segment of the church—Greek-speaking Jews—in 6:1-7, and foremost among them he named Stephen. The apostles, who faithfully attended temple services and followed the customs of Jewish tradition, were "highly regarded by the people" (5:13) even though the authorities detested them. But Stephen and his Hellenistic Christian brethren were arousing the ire of the other Jews in their synagogues. Observe the next stage of the drama in 6:8-8:3.

1. Review your outline of Acts or the ones in lesson one. Does closer study suggest any ways you can improve your summary of 1:1-6:7? Recall what 6:8-9:31 is about, and consider how 6:8-8:3 fits into this section. Then read 6:8-8:3 at least once.

*Full of God's grace and power... wonders and miraculous signs* (6:8). What was true of the apostles (4:33; 5:12) was also true of Stephen. (See 6:5, which was true even before the apostles laid their hands on Stephen.)

**Synagogue of the Freedmen** (6:9). Freedmen were former slaves—prisoners of war or their descendants. For example, when the Roman general Pompey conquered Judea in 64 BC, he took many Jews prisoner to Rome who were later released.

Ten or more adult Jewish men could form their own synagogue for study of the Scriptures and worship. People preferred to join with others of like background in relatively small groups; mass meetings were for the Temple.

It's not clear if 6:9 speaks of one, two, three, or five synagogues. F. F. Bruce\(^{920}\) thinks all four of the ethnic groups were freedmen meeting in one synagogue; I. H. Marshall\(^{921}\) thinks the freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians were in one synagogue, while the Cilicians and Asians were in a second.

**Cyrene** was the chief city in Libya and **Alexandria** the chief in Egypt (and the largest in the Empire after Rome)—both of these were in North Africa. **Cilicia and Asia** were two provinces in Asia Minor; Ephesus was the capital of Asia and Tarsus was a major town in Cilicia. (See the [map of the Roman Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire).) One of the men of Cilicia who probably debated Stephen was Saul of Tarsus, a student of Rabbi Gamaliel (5:34; 9:11; 22:3).

**Blasphemy against Moses and against God** (6:11). Specifically, 6:13-14 says they accused Stephen of speaking against the Temple (saying that Jesus would destroy it and end its sacrifices and rites) and against the Law (saying that the commands given to Moses need no longer be obeyed). The charges against Jesus were similar. Jesus prophesied that the Temple
would be destroyed (Mark 13:2) and said that the Jews would destroy the temple of His body (John 2:18-21), so He was accused of promising to destroy and replace the Temple (Mark 14:57-59). Jesus also criticized not the Law of Moses but the Pharisees' and Sadducees' interpretations of that Law (Matthew 5:17-6:18; Matthew 12:1-14; Matthew 15:1-9; Matthew 19:1-12). Since the Jewish leaders considered their interpretations to be the same as the Law itself, they judged that Jesus spoke against God's Law.

Covenant of circumcision (7:8). A covenant was a treaty or contract between two individuals, in this case, it was between a sovereign (the Lord) and His subject (Abraham). The Lord promised to be Abraham's God, protect him, give him heirs, and grant him and his heirs real estate in Palestine. In exchange, Abraham agreed to obey God and to show his commitment by circumcising every male in his household (Genesis 17:1-14). Cutting away the foreskin signified the dedication of "cutting a covenant" ("May I and my heirs be cut off if I do not remain loyal to God"); see Genesis 17:14. Metaphorically, circumcision symbolized cutting away "pride and sinfulness from the heart" (Leviticus 26:41; Deut. 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; Acts 7:51). The covenant of circumcision predated both the Law and the Temple, Paul makes clear the implications of this in Romans 4.

Angel (7:30, 35, 38, 53). The book of Exodus does not say that God spoke through angels on either occasion at Mount Sinai, but the Jews of Stephen's day believed that He had done so.

Deliverer (7:35). The Greek word ἱλατρότες comes from the verb "to redeem." In the New Testament, only Moses is called a redeemer, never Jesus, but Stephen's choice of this word (and others in 7:35-39) would have suggested to Christians a comparison between Moses and Jesus.

Living words (7:38). "Living oracles" in NASB. These are the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law.

Tabernacle (7:44). From Moses to David, Israel's sacrifices and rituals centered around the sacred tent whose pattern God had given Moses (Exodus 25:1-27:21). Its principal contents, the tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments was called the Testimony (Exodus 25:16, 21).

2. The Hellenistic Jews accused Stephen of speaking against the Temple and the Law. Were these accusations true (6:11, 13-14)? What does Luke say?

3. Stephen answered the charges and gave his testimony in 7:2-53. What pattern in Jewish history did Stephen trace through Joseph (7:9-16), Moses (7:17-39), and Jesus (7:51-52)? What was similar about these men and their experiences with the Jews (see 7:9-10, 25-29, 35-39, 51-52)?

4. What did Stephen imply was wrong with the Jews' attitude toward the Temple (7:48-50)?
5. The Jews thought their Temple in the Holy City was the holiest place on earth, the center of God's dealings with His people. How did Stephen's account of Israel's history subtly explode that myth? (See 7:2, 9, 30-34, 36, 38.)

6. Stephen also repeatedly mentioned God's promises to Abraham (7:2-8, 17, 32, 34-37). How was God's promise relevant to Stephen's view of the Jewish laws?

7. Now that you've looked at Stephen's speech in some detail, answer the high priest's question (7:1). What were Stephen's beliefs about...

   Moses and the Law (7:22, 35-39, 53)?

   the Temple (7:41-50)?

8. Stephen did not just answer the charges against him; he responded with charges of his own (7:51-53). What were his accusations and assertions that roused the Jews to fury?

   Glory of God (7:55). The glowing cloud that was the visible manifestation of God's presence and hid Him from view (Exodus 16:10; Exodus 24:17; Exodus 40:34-35). Compare Acts 7:2.

   Son of Man (7:56). This was Jesus' favorite title for Himself, but rarely in the New Testament does anyone else call Him this. "In Daniel 7:13-14 the Son of Man is pictured as a heavenly figure who in the end times is entrusted by God with authority, glory and sovereign power." Jesus often spoke of the Son of Man in connection with His rejection, death, resurrection, and exaltation to the right hand of God (Luke 9:22; Luke 22:69). He also told His disciples that they must be willing to suffer for the Son of Man (Luke 9:23-26; Luke 12:8-12). Thus, in his moment of acknowledging and suffering for Jesus, Stephen sees Him as the Son of Man standing (not sitting, as in Luke 22:69 and Acts 2:34) to welcome His first martyr into heaven.

   Covered their ears... yelling (7:57). To block out the sound of blasphemy.

   Stone him (7:58). The Sanhedrin was not authorized to carry out executions; that was why they sent Jesus to the Roman governor. However, this was "a spontaneous act of mob violence"—a lynching mob. The Romans looked the other way.

   Lord Jesus, receive my spirit... do not hold this sin against them (7:59-60). The prayers Jesus offered to the Father at His death (Luke 23:34, 46) Stephen offered to Jesus.

10. Stoning is an agonizing death. What is significant about Stephen's response to it (7:59-60)?

Persecution (8:1). It was directed chiefly against the Hellenists, for the apostles were allowed to stay in Jerusalem. It probably died down after some weeks or months, for many disciples were able to return (9:26-29). However, it accomplished God's purpose.

11. How did the persecution of the Hellenistic Jewish Christians in Jerusalem serve the progress of the Church?

1:8; 8:1, 4

7:58, 60; 8:1, 3; 9:1-6

12. What lessons for us does 6:8-8:3 offer?

sins of the Jews to avoid

eamples of Stephen to follow

key truths about God, Jesus, and the Spirit (6:8, 10; 7:2-60)

13. What one of these lessons seems most relevant to you? What would you like to apply this week?

14. How can you respond in prayer and action to make this insight part of your life?

15. Write down any notes you have from 6:8-8:3 on the topics found in Acts.

Study Skill—Obstacles to Application

Here are some of the most frequent obstacles to applying God's Word:

1. "I didn't have time to meditate on and pray about a passage this week." Answer: What do you think about while in the car, getting dressed, or doing other things besides working and
talking? Most people have at least a few minutes a day in which they can think about God rather than earthly concerns. Try turning off the radio and television, and just being quiet with God.

2. "I forget to think about Scripture during my free moments." Make reminders: tape a card with a reminder or quotation to your dashboard, refrigerator, desk; or mirror. Tie a string on your finger, purse, or brief case. Try any gimmick that helps! It's important to let the Scripture come to mind frequently during the day.

3. "I can't ever think of specific ways to act on what the Scripture says." Divide your life into spheres (home, work, church, school...) or people (spouse, children, co-workers, boss, church friends...). Choose one person, and pray about what that person needs from you, what might prevent you from fulfilling that need, and how you might fulfill that need. Or, review a recent situation in which you sinned. Look for a similar situation in the near future to act rightly. Ask God to enable you to recognize and respond rightly to the situation.

   Persistent prayer, inviting God to show you opportunities to apply what you have learned, will be answered.

16. Write down any questions you have about 6:8-8:3.
The persecution of Hellenistic believers had at least one good effect: it got people like Philip out of Jerusalem and into the rest of Palestine. Acts 8:4-40 gives a few examples of what one man did in Samaria and Judea; Luke probably heard these stories when he visited Philip twenty-five years later (21:8). We shouldn't imagine that Philip was the only evangelist at work (8:4); he was simply the one with whom Luke was later able to speak.

As you read 8:4-40, consider how it fits into the overall plan of Acts and what it reveals about the Christian mission.

The Samaritans (8:4-25)

**Philip (8:5).** He was one of the Seven chosen from the Greek-speaking Jewish branch of the church in Jerusalem to manage the daily distribution (6:5). Saul's persecution focused on the Hellenists because Stephen had been one of their leaders.

**Samaria (8:5).** There was a longstanding feud between Jews and Samaritans. When Solomon died back in 930 BC, his kingdom split in two: the northern tribes of Israel rejected the southern Judah. The northerners chose the city of Samaria as their capital, and they set up a temple and a cult to rival those in Jerusalem. The two nations were at war off and on until Assyria overran Israel in 723 BC, destroyed Samaria, and deported most of the Israelite population. Thereafter, the whole territory of Israel was known as Samaria.

The Assyrians settled pagans from other parts of their empire in Samaria. Some Samaritans remained loyal to the God of Israel, but most worshiped Him alongside other gods with mixed pagan and Israelite customs. The Samaritan version of the Law of Moses differed slightly from the Judan (Jewish) version, and as the centuries passed, Samaritan and Jewish approaches to the ancestral faith diverged more and more. The Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim to rival the one in Jerusalem. Thus, Jews regarded Samaritans not as Gentiles but as heretics, a deplorable quasi-Jewish cult. Some Samaritans were more godly than some Jews (Luke 10:33-37; Luke 17:11-19), but Samaritans and Jews generally despised and avoided each other (Luke 9:52-56).

**The Christ (8:5).** The Jews expected a Messiah who would be descended from King David and a powerful ruler like him. The Samaritans had rejected the Davidic kings in 930 BC, so they did not share the Jewish doctrines of the Messiah. Instead, they awaited the ta’eb, "the restorer"—a teacher, lawgiver, and deliverer like Moses (Deut. 18:15-22; John 4:25). Some Samaritans were more godly than some Jews (Luke 10:33-37; Luke 17:11-19), but Samaritans and Jews generally despised and avoided each other (Luke 9:52-56).

**Sent Peter and John (8:14).** The Samaritan mission was an initiative of the Hellenists, but the apostles (the Hebraic leadership in Jerusalem) took responsibility to inspect and affirm new communities of believers. This was especially important when a radical new step like evangelizing Samaritans was taken (compare 11:22).

1. Questions 1 and 5 will help you compare the two episodes in 8:4-25 and 8:26-40.
a. In 8:4-25, who is evangelized, convinced, and baptized?

b. What do the Jews think of these people (John 4:9)?

c. How is this group's conversion significant to the progress of the gospel? (Recall who has been converted up to now.)

d. What convinces this group to become believers (8:6-8, 12)?

e. What is the apostles' role in bringing this group into the Church (8:14-17)?

**Study Skill—Patterns of Practice in Acts**

The apostles' role in 8:14-17 has created much confusion for later Christians. Romans 8:1-17 asserts that no one who does not have the Holy Spirit is a Christian. Hence, Acts 8:14-17 has just three explanations:

1. The Samaritans were not yet real believers. (But would Philip have baptized them if he had any doubt about their faith? Luke casts no doubt on either their faith or Philip's judgment in; the apostles added no teaching to what Philip had given.)
2. A person can receive the Spirit only when an apostle (or his successor?) lays hands on him.
3. God withheld the Spirit in this unique case so that the apostles could confirm that Samaritans were part of the Church.

Explanation (2) assumes that 8:14-17 is normative for all time, while explanation (3) states that the Samaritans' case differed from most others. We test these alternatives by examining what happens elsewhere in Acts. We find that:

a. In 19:17, the men at Ephesus have not yet been baptized into Jesus or received the Spirit, they receive both at once, with laying on of hands by an apostle.

b. In 10:44-48, the Spirit comes on people before baptism, without laying on of hands, and after only hearing the gospel.

c. In 2:38, the Spirit comes without laying on of hands but after hearing the gospel.

d. In 9:17, Saul receives the Spirit when Ananias, not an apostle, lays hands on him.

This variety suggests that neither the order "water baptism then Spirit reception" nor the order "apostolic laying on hands then Spirit reception" is a rule or norm. Instead, the experience
varies according to what God wants to do in the particular situation. The principle illustrated is that when acts records variety, none of the patterns is probably a norm, when Acts records uniformity, the pattern is more probably a norm. Baptism and spirit reception are norms for Christians, the manner and order of these events are not.

2. Why do you think it was important for God to use the apostles to demonstrate officially that Samaritans were true participants in the Church (John 4:9, 21-24)? Why wasn't Philip's confirmation enough in this case?

Simon (8:9). Another thread in 8:4-25 concerns Simon, a magician. The Roman world was full of men like this. Astrologers, prophets, philosophers, cult priests, and sorcerers traveled throughout the Empire offering their services to predict destiny, compound love potions, or influence the gods for money.

After Luke's time, Simon was known as a dangerous opponent of Christianity and the father of the heresy called Gnosticism.

Great Power (8:10). Simon was being acclaimed to be either God, a god, or an emanation or representative of God.

3. What was so terrible about Simon's request in 8:18-19?


The Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40)

Desert road (8:26). This hot, nearly deserted route was a much less likely mission field than Samaria.

Ethiopian eunuch (8:27). He was from the country south of Egypt (modern Sudan, not modern Ethiopia). In those days, men were often castrated to serve as court officials. A eunuch could not have been a convert to Judaism because eunuchs were barred from the congregation (Deut. 23:1). However, he could have been what the Jews called a "God-fearer," a Gentile who believed in the One True God, obeyed the moral laws of Judaism, and worshiped in the synagogue and the part of the Temple open to Gentiles. (Compare Acts 10:2; Acts 13:16; Acts 16:14.)

Candace (8:27). The title of the queen mother of ancient Ethiopia (like Pharaoh or Caesar). The king was considered too sacred for political and economic matters, so the queen was the effective ruler of the land.

Chariot (8:28). It was probably an ox-drawn wagon slow enough for Philip to run beside easily.
**Heard the man reading** (8:30). In ancient times, people normally read aloud, not silently as we do.\[99\]

**Who is the prophet talking about...?** (8:34). The Jews were not certain on this point. Some said the Servant was Israel or a godly part of Israel (Isaiah 44:1-2), some said Isaiah referred to himself (as Jeremiah did in Jeremiah 11:18-20) some said he spoke of the Messiah of Isaiah 11 or the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13.\[98\]

5. Keep question 1 in mind as you answer these questions.

   a. Who accepted the gospel in 8:26-40?

   b. What status did this kind of person have with the Jews (Deut. 23:1)?

   c. How was this person's conversion significant to the progress of the gospel (Psalm 68:31; Isaiah 56:3-5; Ephes. 2:11-18)?

   d. What was the apostles' role in taking the step to permit such a person into the Church? Why is this important?

   e. What convinced this person to be baptized (8:35)?

6. Summarize what 8:4-40 contributes to the over all message of Acts.

7. How is this section relevant to your life? What sins to avoid, examples to follow, or truths about God does it offer?

8. What one insight from 8:4-40 would you like to apply? How can you do this?
9. Jot any notes on the **topics found in Acts**.

10. List any questions you have about **8:4-40**.

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**Study Skill—Norms from Acts**

*Acts 8:36-39* makes it fairly clear that the eunuch was baptized by immersion in a pool or stream. However, we are fairly sure that there was no body of water in Samaria deep enough to immerse the Samaritans,[941] and Luke didn't bother to tell us what Philip did to them. Paul's language about baptism as burial (Romans 6:1-3) suggests that he presupposed immersion, but the early Christian manual called the *Didache* (written around 100 AD) says that if there is no cold, running water or warm, still water available for immersion, people may have water poured over them.[942] Thus, in the *Didache* immersion is the norm but pouring is an acceptable option, and in Scripture immersion is implied as the norm but often no one is concerned to specify. This suggests a question: **When the biblical narrative is not about method must we conform to a norm or are alternatives acceptable?**
LESSON NINE


Saul Appointed

Topics: Famine, Prophets, Christians, Saul, They sent Barnabas, Greeks, Antioch, Phoenicia, Tarsus, After many days... a basket, Saints, Did not eat or drink, The Way, Damascus, Letters, Saul Appointed

Philip disappears from the stage of Acts except for a walk-on twenty-five years later (21:8). Luke's camera shifts back to the young Pharisee Saul, whom we left in 8:3 arresting Christians on a house-to-house search. One of the momentous events in Church history is about to happen.

As you read 9:1-31 and 11:19-30, try to put yourself in Paul's, Ananias', the Jews', and the Jerusalem believers' places. Ask God to help you identify with these people.

Saul's conversion (9:1-31)

Letters (9:2). The Sanhedrin's authority over synagogues outside Judea probably didn't extend to arresting Jews in Damascus accused of blasphemy. At this point in history, the Jewish communities were relatively independent. Instead, the Sanhedrin probably authorized Saul "to injure and even kidnap leading Christians, if he could with impunity." Damascus (9:2). An important city in the province of Syria because "it was the hub of a vast commercial network with far-flung lines of caravan trade reaching into north Syria, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Persia and Arabia. If the new 'Way' of Christianity flourished in Damascus, it would quickly reach all these places." Damascus was about 150 miles (six days' journey) from Jerusalem.

The Way (9:2). Believers apparently called their movement this. It referred to "the way to be saved" (16:17) or "the way of the Lord/God" (18:25-26); that is, the only way of life that God established by which people could be saved. Did not eat or drink (9:9). For three days the blind Saul fasted in shock and penitence, as the dreadful realization of what God thought of his life began to dawn on him.

Saints (9:13, 32). "Holy ones" or "persons set apart for God." The believers also called themselves all who call on your name (Acts 9:14) from the passage Peter quotes in Acts 2:21.

After many days... a basket (Acts 9:23-25). Saul spent a brief time in Damascus, then went into the neighboring kingdom of Arabia. While he was there, his preaching evidently aroused the ire of Aretas IV, king of the Nabatean Arabs, so Saul returned to Damascus. Both Aretas's governor and the Damascene Jews wanted to kill Saul, so he had to escape the city in a basket (2 Cor. 11:30-33; Galatians 1:13-18).

In Acts 22 and 26, Saul/Paul retells the story of his conversion in speeches to the residents of Jerusalem and to King Agrippa. Since Paul adds details there that Luke omits in chapter 9, we'll look at parts of the later retellings here.

1. The episode on the Damascus road was a profound learning experience for Saul. What did he learn about... who Jesus is (9:4-5, 20, 22; 22:14)?
what his own mission was going to be (9:15-16, 20-30; 22:14-16; 26:16-18)?

2. How else did his encounter with Jesus affect Saul?

9:8-9

9:1-2, 20-30

3. Saul later emphasized that he saw Jesus Himself not just a vision of Him (Acts 9:27; 22:14-15; 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15:7-10). What did this mean for him (1 Cor. 9:1)?

4. What roles did Stephen, Ananias, and Barnabas have in Saul's reconciliation with God and His people?

Stephen (Acts 7:60-8:1)

Ananias (9:10-17)

Barnabas (9:26-27)

5. How do these men's examples apply to us?

6. Why is it important for us to think about the early Christians' willingness to suffer for Jesus' name (5:40-42; 7:59-60; 9:15-16, 23-30)?

7. Like 6:7; 9:31 is a summary or progress report. Review your title for 6:8-9:31 (from the overview or your separate outline), and write an improved summary of this section if necessary. What does 6:8-9:31 add to the story of Acts?

_Tarsus_ (9:30; 11:25). Saul's birthplace (22:3). He was born a citizen of that city as well as of Rome (21:39; 22:25-29), so his family probably owned property or a business. (Only people with rank and/or property were citizens in their provincial towns, and Roman citizenship was
even harder for non-Italians to obtain.) Tarsus was a prosperous city on the trade route from Syria to Ephesus. It was known for its schools of philosophy and liberal arts. If Saul's family were Greek-speaking Jews, he may have had some contact with Gentile schools. However, "Hebrew of Hebrews" in Phil. 3:5 may mean that Saul's people were Hebraists and kept away from Gentiles. Also, it's possible that Saul moved to Jerusalem at a young age (22:3).

The church in Antioch (11:19-30)

After recording Saul's departure for Tarsus, Luke reported some groundbreaking deeds of Peter (9:32-11:18), then returned briefly to Saul and Barnabas (11:19-30), then finished with Peter and the Jerusalem church (12:1-24), and finally focused on Saul and Barnabas (12:25-15:41). Luke had his reasons for alternating back and forth like this, but we will look at 11:19-30 now and deal with all the material about Peter in lesson ten. Acts 11:19 refers back to 8:1 again; as Philip went to Samaria and then Caesarea when the persecution started.

**Phoenicia** (11:19). Modern Lebanon. Cyprus was an island in the Mediterranean and the home of Barnabas (4:36). See the map of the Roman Empire.

**Antioch** (11:19). This is the Antioch in Syria, as opposed to the one in Pisidia (13:14). With about 500,000 people it was the third largest city in the Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. Because it was near the border between the Roman world and the Orient, Antioch had a cosmopolitan population. That included a large Jewish community which had attracted a particularly large number of converts from paganism (recall Nicolas from 6:5). The city was a splendid example of Greek and Roman city planning, and a center for trade, tourism, and culture. Some of the chief attractions were the chariot races and the temple of Daphne.

According to the myth, Daphne was a woman whom Apollo pursued and whom Artemis changed into a laurel tree to protect her virginity. At night, the temple priestesses and worshipers reenacted the myth in sacred laurel groves; the priestesses were renowned cult prostitutes. "The morals of Daphne" was Greek slang for loose living.

**Greeks** (11:20). The term meant people who spoke Greek. The context suggests that Luke did not mean Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists), since there was nothing new about evangelizing them. Rather, the Hellenistic Jewish believers from Cyprus and Cyrene were evangelizing Greek-speaking Gentiles—Syrians, Mesopotamians, Cappadocians, Romans, Greeks, and whatever other nationalities were represented in Antioch.

The first contact was probably with Gentile "God-fearers" in the synagogues, since if the Antiochene Jews had attracted many converts they had probably attracted many more sympathizers. Gentiles were often drawn to the Jewish God but repelled by circumcision and the food laws; these were a ripe harvest field for the followers of Jesus. There seems to have been no suggestion that the Gentile believers keep the Jewish laws until Judean believers arrived to insist on it (15:1).

**They sent Barnabas** (11:22). Nearly every cult known in the Empire was represented in Antioch, and it was common for people to participate in as many as they liked. Religions borrowed deities, doctrines, and rituals from each other, so there was no telling what Antiochene Gentiles might do to the gospel when they got hold of it. The apostles were therefore wise to send Barnabas to inspect the situation.

**Saul** (11:25). He had presumably been preaching in his hometown of Tarsus since he left Jerusalem about nine years earlier (9:30).
Christians (11:26). Latin for "those of the party of Christ," as "Herodians" means "those of the party of Herod" (Matthew 22:16). To the Jews, "Christ" was a sacred title—the Messiah—so they would never have used it in a nickname. The Gentile Antiochenes probably thought Christos was someone's name. "Christians" seems to have been what outsiders called the group: they called themselves "believers," "brethren," "those of the Way," or "disciples." "Christian" rarely occurs in the New Testament, and only in a possible context of ridicule (Acts 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16).

Prophets (11:27). Almost from the beginning of the Church, there seems to have been a recognized office of prophet, just as of apostle (1 Cor. 12:28). Essentially, a prophet was someone inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak on God's behalf. Prophets exhorted, encouraged, explained how the Old Testament prophecies applied in the present, spoke God's current word to the community on contemporary matters, and foretold the future when God wanted the believers to act in preparation (Acts 13:1; Acts 15:32; Acts 19:6; Acts 21:9-11; 1 Cor. 14:3-5, 24-33).

Famine (11:28). There were no recorded famines that devastated the entire Roman world, but the Roman historian Suetonius wrote that there were "frequent famines" in various parts of the Empire. There was definitely a famine in Judea in 46 AD, and since 47-48 AD was a Sabbath year when Jews were not permitted to cultivate the land (Leviticus 25:1-7), the situation would have been serious. Agabus may have been prophesying this famine years ahead of the event. Claudius was emperor from 41 to 54 AD.

8. What was the relationship between the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch (11:22, 27-29)?

9. What laudable traits do Barnabas and the Christians at Antioch show in 11:19-30?

10. Look back at your answers to questions 1-9. What one insight from 9:1-31 and 11:19-30 would you like to apply to your life? How will you apply it?


12. List any questions you have about these passages.
LESSON TEN

Acts 9:32-11:18

Peter Moves Out

Topics: What has happened throughout Judea, Peace, I am only a man, Peter entered the house, Invited the men, Animals... reptiles... birds, Roof to pray, Lord, Memorial offering, Three in the afternoon, God-fearing, Italian Regiment, Centurion, Caesarea, Tanner, Lydda, Peter Moves Out

The conversion of an Ethiopian Gentile (8:26-40) did not affect the policy of the Church because he returned immediately to his homeland and had no more contact with Jewish believers. However, two almost simultaneous events confronted the Jewish church with the issue of the Gentiles’ place in their fellowship. One was the evangelism of Hellenistic Christians in Antioch (11:19-30). The other bore the authority of Peter himself, a leader of the Hebrew church in Jerusalem. Read 9:32-11:18, trying to see the episodes from Peter’s point of view.

Aeneas and Dorcas (9:32-43)

Lydda (9:32). See the map of the Roman Empire. Lydda was a small town just north of the road from Jerusalem to Joppa (9:36). Joppa (modern Jaffa, near Tel Aviv) was the main seaport of Judea, some thirty-eight miles from Jerusalem and twelve miles from Lydda. Sharon (9:35) was the coastal plain that ran fifty miles from Lydda and Joppa to Caesarea. (There is some evidence of a town named Sharon near Lydda. [957])

Tanner (9:43). Common people often used their occupations as a kind of last name, but Simon’s is significant. A man who tanned animal skins routinely touched dead creatures and so was ritually unclean according to Jewish law (Leviticus 11:39-40). Since anyone or anything he touched became unclean, a tanner was often despised by strict Jews. Also, the chemicals used in tanning smelled foul. Apparently, Peter was already beginning to overcome ingrained Jewish prejudices. [959]

The conversion of Cornelius (10:1-11:18)

Caesarea (10:1). Herod the Great built this harbor city in the Greek style shortly before the birth of Jesus, and it became the headquarters for the Roman administration. From 6-41 AD, a Roman procurator (Pontius Pilate was one of them) lived in Caesarea, and his troops were garrisoned there. [960] Caesarea was thirty miles from Joppa, so it would have taken a full day on horseback for each leg of the journey.

Centurion (10:1). The commander of a century, about a hundred soldiers. There were six centuries in a cohort and ten cohorts in a legion. Thus, Cornelius was roughly equivalent to a sergeant major or a captain over a company. Commanders of legions and cohorts were generally aristocrats who served for a year or two on their ways to high civilian office, but centurions were career military men chosen for their talent and character. They provided the stability that made the Roman army strong. [961]

Italian Regiment (10:1). Literally, "the Italian Cohort" (RSV). These six hundred men were originally recruited from Italy. [962]
**God-fearing** (10:2). A *proselyte* was someone who fully converted from paganism to Judaism; if he was a man, he underwent circumcision and kept the whole Jewish law. A *God-fearer* was a Gentile who was not circumcised and perhaps continued to eat Gentile food, but who attended and supported the synagogue, kept the moral laws, and prayed to the God of Israel. Acts 10:2 emphasizes Cornelius' sincere devotion.

**Three in the afternoon** (10:3). Cornelius the God-fearer was observing a regular hour for Jewish prayer (3:1).

**Memorial offering** (10:4). In God's ears, Cornelius' prayers were like one of the kinds of sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple.

**Lord** (10:4). Cornelius did not necessarily think the angel was God. "Lord" in those days was the polite address, equivalent to "Sir."[963]

**Roof to pray** (10:9). A Middle Eastern house normally had a flat roof with an outside stairway. There was often a cloth awning over the roof to shield the sun. The inside of the house was hot, stuffy, smelly, and busy during the day, but the roof was cool and private for prayer or relaxation.[964]

**Animals... reptiles... birds** (10:12). The three Old Testament categories of animals (Genesis 6:20; Romans 1:23). Leviticus 11:1-47 stated which creatures from each category were clean or unclean for food, and Jews were raised to consider unclean meat (including pork, shellfish, rabbit, and reptile) disgusting.

**Invited the men** (10:23). Giving hospitality to Gentiles according to Jewish customs did not break Jewish law, since the food would be kosher. However, a deep-seated aversion often kept strict Jews from associating comfortably with Gentiles.

**Peter entered the house** (10:25). It was a "distinct breach of custom"[965] for a Jew even to enter a Gentile's house, since everything in it was unclean by contact with unclean Gentiles.

**I am only a man** (10:26). People often knelt before their superiors in the cultures of both the Old Testament and the Roman Empire. However, Christians disavowed such reverence because it was similar to the honor given a god. When there was a possibility of misunderstanding, Peter and others made their position clear (Acts 14:14-15; Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:9).[966]

1. What was the immediate lesson of Peter's trance vision in 10:9-16?

2. After the messengers from Cornelius came and reported the angelic appearance, what further application of the vision was apparent to Peter (10:23-29)?

3. When Peter observed Cornelius' manner and heard his account of the angel's message, what did Peter realize (10:34-35)?

4. In what sense does God "not show favoritism" (10:34)? From this story, what kinds of things don't influence God to love a person?
5. Peter said God was willing to accept all those "who fear him and do what is right" (10:35). Did this mean that Cornelius' good deeds had earned him salvation? Why or why not, in light of the whole context of the story (especially 10:22, 33, 43-48)?

6. Peter's speech to this Gentile household differed in several ways from what he said to Jewish audiences. What key points did he make in this instance (10:36-43)?

**Peace** (10:36). Reconciliation between God and man, and all the blessings that proceed from that reconciliation: wholeness in relationships, security, inner tranquility, etc. 

**What has happened throughout Judea** (10:37). Like the Gospel of Mark, Peter began with the ministry of John the Baptist, covered Jesus' ministry, and culminated with Jesus' resurrection appearances. Around 140 AD, the Christian writer Papias recorded that Mark was a "close associate of Peter" and that his Gospel was a collected account of Peter's testimony about Jesus.

Peter's speeches to the Jews did not mention Jesus' earthly ministry as much as the Jews' rejection.

7. What unprecedented thing happened in the middle of Peter's speech (10:44-46)?

8. What did this signify?

9. Why were Peter's fellow Jewish believers astonished (10:45)?

10. What shocked the Jerusalem church most about the rumors from Caesarea was not that Peter had baptized Gentiles. What shocked them most, and why (11:1-3)?

11. Consider Peter's account of the events (11:4-17). What was the significance of this whole episode (11:18), and why was it so important? (Optional: See Ephes. 2:11-22.)
12. It may be hard to imagine a time when the idea of a Gentile Christian was astonishing. Still, what is the most important insight about God, the gospel, the Church, or yourself that you have had from 9:32-11:18?

13. What would you like to do or pray about this truth? How do you want it to affect your life?


15. List any questions you have about this passage.
LESSON ELEVEN


To Asia Minor

Topics: Shook the dust from their feet, God-fearing women of high standing, Justified, As it is written... So it is stated..., Synagogue rulers, Pisidian Antioch, Perga, Saul... called Paul, Proconsul, Bar-Jesus, Paphos, Cyprus, Seleucia, The Holy Spirit said, Finished their mission, The appointed day, Tyre and Sidon, Executed, James, His angel, Mary, Feast of Unleavened Bread, King Herod, To Asia Minor

The believers in Jerusalem have been forced by God's direct intervention to receive Gentiles into the Church on an equal basis with Jews (10:1-11:18). The believers in Antioch have been enthusiastically evangelizing Gentiles in their own city for some time (11:19-26). In 12:1-13:52, we see God at work among the Christians of both Jerusalem and Antioch, pushing the Church ever outward. As you read these chapters, try to imagine yourself in Peter's and Saul's shoes.

Herod and the Church (12:1-24)

King Herod (12:1). Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1-20) and nephew of Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12). Agrippa I was a boyhood friend of Gaius Caligula and Claudius. When Gaius became emperor in 37 AD, he awarded his friend a small tetrarchy in Palestine, and in 40 BC he deposed Antipas and gave his territory to Agrippa. When Gaius was assassinated in 41 BC, Agrippa was in Rome and helped to secure Claudius as emperor, Claudius rewarded him with the rest of Herod the Great's kingdom. Thus, Agrippa had friends in high Roman circles, and Judea had no Roman procurator or soldiers as long as Agrippa ruled.

Herod Agrippa was also popular with the Jews because he was a descendant of the rightful Jewish ruling house. He was more considerate of Jewish feelings than the Roman procurators like Pilate had been, and in Jerusalem he behaved like a devout Jewish king. In Caesarea however, he was a typical oriental despot with a taste for Greek and Roman culture; his Gentile subjects detested him.[969] In 12:1-24 we see both sides of him: currying favor with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, and encouraging Gentiles to treat him as a god in Caesarea.

Feast of Unleavened Bread (12:3). This seven-day festival in April immediately followed the one-evening feast of Passover (12:4). Therefore, the two were regarded as one festival, which was often called Passover.

Agrippa lived in the palace of Caesarea, but as a good Jew he was in Jerusalem for Passover. (Jesus' crucifixion had also been scheduled not to overlap Passover.)

Mary (12:12). She was Mark's mother and Barnabas' aunt (Col. 4:10).

His angel (12:15). Apparently, some Jews believed that a person's guardian angel sometimes appeared in the person's likeness. Luke recorded the belief but did not say it was valid.

James (12:17). James the brother of John was dead (12:2), so this was "James, the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19). He was converted when Jesus appeared to him after the Resurrection (John 7:5; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:7). James became a recognized leader of the Jerusalem church along with Peter (Acts 15:6-21; Galatians 2:9).

Executed (12:19). This is what usually happened to guards who let their prisoners escape.
1. What part did the believers in Jerusalem have in Peter's escape from Herod (12:5)?

2. God saved Peter from being executed by Herod (12:6-11), but He allowed James to die (12:2). What conclusions about persecution, prayer, and deliverance can we draw from these facts?

Tyre and Sidon (12:20). The main cities of Phoenicia (modern Lebanon). Both were ports with mixed Gentile populations, and both depended on grain from Galilee for bread.[971]

The appointed day (12:21). Herod Agrippa I died in 44 BC. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that Herod held Roman games (athletics, etc.) in Caesarea in honor of Emperor Claudius. On the second day of the games, Herod arrived in a robe of silver threads that glittered in the sun. Herod gave a speech, and some Gentiles offered him the stock flattery for a ruler: "henceforth we agree that you are more than mortal in your being." After he accepted that flattery, Herod was seized with internal pain, was carried out, and died five days later.[972]

Barnabas and Saul commissioned (12:25-13:3)

The Holy Spirit said (13:2). Possibly through one or more of the prophets.[973]

3. In your judgment, why were "worshiping the Lord and fasting" (13:2) both important preparations for hearing the Holy Spirit speak?

4. Once the Spirit had spoken and the missionaries were prepared to leave, the believers fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on the two men (13:3). What was apparently the point of these actions?

Cyprus (13:4-12)

Seleucia (13:4). The seaport of Antioch. (See the map of the Roman Empire.)

Cyprus (13:4). A large island in the Mediterranean, sixty miles from Seleucia. Salamis (13:5) was a Greek city on the island's east coast, with enough Jews to support several synagogues.

Paphos (13:6) was the capital of Cyprus, on the west coast.[974]

Bar-Jesus (13:6). That is, "son of Joshua." Paul rejects this name and calls the sorcerer "son of the devil" (13:10, NASB).

Proconsul (13:7). Cyprus was a senatorial province because of its important copper mines, so it was governed by a proconsul, an official of senatorial (ultra-elite) rank.[975]
Saul... called Paul (13:9). As a Roman citizen, Saul had three Latin names: a first name, a family name, and a surname. Like the proconsul of Cyprus, his surname happened to be Paullus (spelled "Paulus" in Greek). As a Jew, he also had a Hebrew name, Saul (spelled "Saulus" in Greek). Luke calls him by his Hebrew name when he is among Jews (7:58-13:2) but shifts to his Latin name when he goes among Gentiles. This was probably how Paul used his names. 

Notice that until now Luke has written "Barnabas and Saul" because Barnabas has been the leader, but now he shifts to "Paul and Barnabas" to indicate that Paul takes the lead in evangelism. When the two return to Jerusalem, the order returns to "Barnabas and Paul" (15:12) because Barnabas is more recognized there. The order of names was a way of signifying seniority in ancient times.

Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52)

Perga (13:13). The capital of Pamphylia, a district on the coast of Asia Minor.

Pisidian Antioch (13:14). "The leading city in the area known as Phrygia Galatica," and "the hub of good roads and trade. The city had a large Jewish population. It was a Roman colony which meant that a contingent of retired military men was settled there. They were given free land and were made citizens of the city of Rome, with all the accompanying privileges." This policy of settling retired soldiers in colonies was designed to ensure pockets of loyal citizens in strategic spots throughout the Empire. The veterans were there partly to balance and control the volatile Greeks, Phrygians Jews and others in this cosmopolitan city. Pisidian Antioch was 110 miles (five to eight days' walk) from Perga.

Synagogue rulers (13:15). There was no ordained minister in a synagogue. Instead, one or more of the elders conducted services, kept order and cared for the synagogue building. These officers were called rulers.

The synagogue service normally began with prayer, then followed with readings from the Law (the books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy) and the Prophets (Joshua through Malachi). The readers then briefly interpreted and expounded the texts. The rulers chose the day's readers, and often invited educated visitors to have this honor.

As it is written... So it is stated... (13:33, 35). Both Psalm 2 and Psalm 16 were originally written by or for David and the kings of his line. By Paul's time, most Jews already recognized that those psalms referred ultimately to the Messiah.

Justified (13:39). Legally acquitted of guilt. In Romans 3:21-22, Paul adds a further dimension of justification: the positive gift of righteousness, the restored relationship with God that flows from forgiveness and acquittal.

5. In the first part of his sermon, Paul traces Israelite history. What episodes does he mention?

13:16-19

13:20-22

13:23-25
Next Paul explains the significance of these events. What has God promised the Jews that He has now fulfilled (13:32-37)?

What will happen if the Jews believe what Paul claims about Jesus (13:38-39)?

What happens when many of the Jews reject Paul's message (13:41-51)?

In Acts 13:47, Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6, which was originally addressed to the Servant of the Lord (see Acts 3:13; Isaiah 49:1-7). Why can Paul apply the Servant's commission to himself and Barnabas? (Optional: See, for example, John 20:21; Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 12:27.)

God-fearing women of high standing (13:50). Judaism was especially attractive to Gentile women of the middle and upper classes. These women had enough wealth, education, and leisure to feel that traditional religion and social relations were unfulfilling. According to their various temperaments, dissatisfied women flocked either to Judaism or to the oriental cults. It was easier for a woman than a man to become a Jew since women did not have to undergo circumcision.

Shook the dust from their feet (13:51). Jews shook the unholy dust from their feet when they left Gentile territory and entered Judea. Paul and Barnabas were saying that the unbelieving Jews of Antioch were Gentiles in God's sight, rejected from Israel because of their unbelief. (See Luke 9:5.)


Write down one or more insights from 12:1-13:52 that apply to your life.

How can you begin to put one of these insights into practice with prayer and/or action this week?
LESSON TWELVE

Acts 14:1-15:35

Gentile Christians?


Paul and Barnabas are still on their mission, acting as "a light for the Gentiles" to "bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (13:47). Their view of the Church's mission will soon prove decisive for the whole of history. As you read 14:1-15:35, think about how those events have affected your life.

Iconium, Lystra, Derbe (14:1-28)

Iconium (14:1). "An important crossroads and agricultural center in the central plain of the province of Galatia."[999] It was ninety miles east of Pisidian Antioch on the Roman road.[990] Both Antioch and Iconium were in the district of Phrygia.

Miraculous signs and wonders (14:3). The Holy Spirit was active through Paul and Barnabas, just as through Jesus and Peter (Luke 4:17-26; Acts 3:1-10; Acts 14:8-10).

Apostles (14:4, 14). Luke has so far used this term for the Twelve who followed Jesus during his earthly life (1:21-22), but here Luke calls Paul and Barnabas apostles. As a friend of Paul, Luke was no doubt aware that Paul considered both himself and Barnabas to be apostles on the level of the Twelve (1 Cor. 9:1-6; Galatians 1:1, 12, 15-17).[991] Also, Paul had received a direct commission from Jesus (9:15-16) and both men had been performing the works of an apostle (14:3).

Lycaonian cities (14:6). The missionaries escaped the lynch mob in Iconium by fleeing across the Phrygian border to the district of Lycaonia.[992] Lystra was "an insignificant village which had been made into a Roman colony in 6 BC, as part of a scheme for defense against local warlike tribes."[993] It was just eighteen miles from Iconium, so it was easy for the Jews to pursue the apostles (14:19). Derbe was sixty miles further on.

Zeus... Hermes (14:12). An ancient local legend said that these two gods had once visited Phrygia disguised as mortals. Only one old couple on the Lycaonian border gave them hospitality. Later a flood drowned everyone in the region except that couple; they became guardians of a temple to Zeus and Hermes and changed into lofty trees when they died. The Lystrians were determined not to offend the gods again.[994]

1. The Lystrians reacted to the healing of the lame man like typical rural pagans of that time (14:8-13). What do you learn from this incident about the religious beliefs of those people—the assumptions that Paul and Barnabas had to overcome? (List as many observations as you can.)
2. Acts 14:15-17 gives us our first example of what Paul and Barnabas preached to purely Gentile audiences, as opposed to Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers. In addition to proclaiming Jesus, what did the apostles have to explain to pagans that they didn't have to say to Jews and God-fearers?

3. What does 14:19-20 tell you about Paul's character?

The kingdom of God (14:22). In a sense, the Kingdom is already among us (Luke 17:20-21). However, here Paul and Barnabas are referring to the future fulfillment of God's realm that believers will experience when they die or when Jesus returns.

Appointed (14:23). "Ordained" in KJV. This Greek word originally meant "to elect by a vote of raised hands." It came to mean either to appoint or to elect, without regard to method. Thus, the word itself doesn't tell us whether Paul and Barnabas chose the elders, or whether the congregations elected them and the apostles approved them.

4. When the apostles returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen and encourage the infant disciples, they warned them, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (14:22). From 13:50; 14:4-6, 19-20 and from your own knowledge of bigotry, discrimination, and hostility, what hardships could the new Christians expect?

5. Despite all the hardships on their trip, what was Paul and Barnabas' verdict when they reported back to the church in Antioch (14:26-27)?

Council at Jerusalem (15:1-35)

Paul had been a Pharisee, but when he recognized Jesus as the Christ, his attitude toward the Law began to change radically. However, there were Pharisees and other Jews who followed Jesus Christ but did not yet realize how His coming had affected the status of the Law. They continued to interpret God's Word in Scripture according to Jewish tradition. Also, it was ingrained in them from birth that the Law was the essence of moral good and holiness. Since God had commanded circumcision, the dietary laws, and the rest as "an everlasting covenant" (Genesis 17:13; Exodus 31:16), and since those laws were manifestations of holiness (Leviticus 20:25-26), these Jewish Christians could not imagine that God had set the laws aside. It followed that if the laws were God's desire for His people, then they were binding on Gentile as well as Jewish believers. What evidence was there that God had abandoned the laws?

Further, even if Gentile believers were exempt (these Jewish Christians reasoned), Jewish ones were not. Therefore, Jewish believers could not eat unclean food with Gentiles in
fellowship meals. So some argued, Gentile Christians should keep the laws in order to maintain fellowship with Jewish ones. Thus, there were two issues at stake: 1) Does God still require His covenant people to keep the Law of Moses (and the oral tradition)? and 2) Even if the Law is just a cultural preference for Jewish Christians, should Gentile Christians keep it anyway in order to keep peaceful fellowship?

In all this, the Jewish believers were partly concerned not to put barriers in the way of converting fellow Jews. The Antiochenes, of course, were concerned not to hinder Gentiles.[998]

6. How did the Church handle this major dispute between some Jewish believers and the Antiochene Christians (15:2, 6, 12, 22-30)?

7. Why did Peter support the Antiochene position? List his key reasons in 15:6-11.

8. What evidence did Paul and Barnabas offer to defend their view that Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jews (15:4, 12)?

9. James was by now a leader of the Jerusalem congregation and known for his conservative Jewish practice (Galatians 2:11-12). What convinced James that Paul was right about the Gentiles and the Law (Acts 15:13-19)?

Abstain (15:20). The council made four requirements regarding habits to which Gentiles were especially prone but which especially disgusted Jews. Sexual immorality was not only rampant in private affairs, but also a religious rite to honor certain gods. Most meat from non-Jewish butchers came from pagan temples, since only part of any sacrificed animal was burnt. Also, Gentile civic, social, and professional associations often held dinner parties in temples of patron gods. Thus, meat polluted by idols was hard to avoid. Strangled animals could not have the blood properly drained, as Jewish law required. All four requirements reflected the laws of holiness in Leviticus 17-18.[999]

10. What are the most important lessons the Jerusalem council's decision can teach us?

11. What one insight from 14:1-15:35 seems most relevant to you? How can you apply this insight through prayer and/or action?
LESSON THIRTEEN

Acts 15:36-17:15

Paul and Silas

Topics: Berea, Post bond, Caused trouble all over the world, Jealous, Amphipolis, Escort us, Without a trial, About to kill himself, Inner cell... stocks, Stripped and beaten, Customs unlawful, Spirit by which she predicted the future, Thyatira, Philippi, We, Macedonia, Troas, Phrygia and Galatia, Decisions, Timothy, Silas, Mark, Paul and Silas

Since winter travel was hazardous, Paul and Barnabas spent a few months after the Jerusalem council teaching and preaching in Antioch. But others in the church could fill that role; Paul and Barnabas were called to spread the gospel elsewhere. When spring brought calm seas, it was time for another mission. Read 15:36-17:15 prayerfully, asking yourself how you would have responded to various circumstances if you had been in Paul's place.

Strengthening the churches (15:36-16:5)

Mark (15:37). We don't know why Mark left the team in Pamphylia (13:13), nor why Paul thought his desertion was so serious. We do know that Mark was blessed to have such a cousin as the Son of Encouragement, for after some years evangelizing with Barnabas, Mark proved himself a worthy saint. He worked with Peter in Rome and wrote his Gospel from Peter's memories (1 Peter 5:13); he helped Paul during the apostle's first imprisonment in Rome (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24); he eventually impressed Paul so much that he asked Mark to come during his final days in prison (2 Tim. 4:11).

Silas (15:40). He was the Silvanus mentioned as a partner in Paul's and Peter's letters (1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12). He was a prophet (Acts 15:32), a leader in the Jerusalem church trusted to relay the decision about the Gentiles (15:22, 27), and a Roman citizen (16:37-38).

Timothy (16:1). Since Paul called him a young man about fifteen years later (1 Tim. 4:12), Timothy must have been a teenager at this point. Since both Luke and Paul mentioned his mother's faith but not his father's (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5), his father was probably not converted either to Judaism or Christianity, and he may well have been dead. Apparently on Paul's first visit to Lystra about two years earlier, Timothy's whole household had become Christians, including his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5).

Jews were not supposed to marry Gentiles, so Timothy was a child of a mixed marriage in everyone's eyes. He was legally Jewish and raised Jewish (2 Tim. 3:15), so he was probably somewhat excluded by his Gentile peers. However, perhaps because his father had forbidden a rite Greeks found disgusting, Timothy was not circumcised. Therefore, he was an outsider—illegitimate according to some schools—to Jews as well. Timothy would be a much more effective missionary if he were a full Jew rather than neither Jew nor Gentile, so Paul circumcised him (16:3). Earlier, Paul had refused to circumcise another colleague, Titus, because Titus was a Gentile (Galatians 2:1-5). In that case, the rite would have meant that Titus had to become Jewish in order to be Christian.

Decisions (16:4). The letter of Acts 15:22-29 was addressed only to the Christians in Syria and Cilicia, but Paul wanted to use it in the Galatian churches he had founded. Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe were all in the province of Galatia, and the believers there were
probably the ones to whom Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians (either shortly before or shortly after the Jerusalem council). That letter had addressed the issue of whether Gentile Christians must keep the Law, now Paul had an official letter from Jerusalem confirming his position.

**Philippi (16:6-40)**

*Phrygia and Galatia (16:6).* The geography in Acts is hard for modern people to follow. One reason is that before Rome conquered Asia Minor (modern Turkey), the area was divided into ethnic districts: Phrygia, Galatia, Pisidia, Lycaonia, etc. However, when the Romans took over, they divided the region into provinces that ignored the old district boundaries. Thus, the province of Galatia included parts of Pisidia, Lycaonia, and Phrygia, as well as the district of Galatia. Another part of Phrygia was in the province of Asia, and so on. So, "Phrygia and Galatia" could well mean the Phrygian part of Galatia where Iconium and Antioch were.\(^1\)

*Mysia (16:7)* was a district in the northwest of the province of Asia, and *Bithynia* was a province just east of Mysia. See the [map of the Roman Empire](#).

*Troas (16:8).* "A Roman colony and an important seaport for connections between Macedonia and Greece on the one hand and Asia Minor on the other."\(^2\) Paul later visited believers there several times (Acts 20:5-12; 2 Cor. 2:12), but we don't know when or by whom the church was started.

*Macedonia (16:9).* A Roman province north of Greece (see the [map of the Roman Empire](#)). Across it ran the Egnatian Way, the Roman road that connected the eastern half of the Empire (the Aegean Sea, Asia Minor, etc.) to the western half (the Adriatic Sea, Italy, etc.). With good winds, it took just two days to sail from Troas to the Macedonian seaport of *Neapolis (16:11)* at the beginning of the Egnatian, after an overnight stop on the island of *Samothrace*.

*We (16:10-17).* Evidently, Luke joined Paul's party in Troas and accompanied it to Philippi; the rest of chapter 16 is his eyewitness account. It is also possible that Luke incorporated part of someone else's travel diary into this section, but it is odd that he gave no warning of this and didn't bother to make the verbs consistent with the rest of his carefully composed writing.\(^3\) The "we" account ends when the mission team leaves Philippi (16:39-40) and begins again when Paul returns to Philippi five years later (20:5-28:16).

1. On your [Themes in Acts](#), write how the Holy Spirit guided Paul and his team in 16:6-10. (Also, observe what Luke calls the Spirit in 16:6-7, 10.)

2. From your notes on [Themes in Acts](#), what patterns do you see in the way the Spirit works in Acts 1:1-16:10? (What does He do? How does He make God's will known? What are His goals?)

3. How are the Spirit's goals, activities, and methods in your life like and unlike those you have observed in Acts?
4. Describe at least one way in which you think your observations of Acts should affect the way you expect the Spirit to act in your life or the way you respond to Him when He does act or speak.

5. How can you grow more responsive to God's guidance, in whatever forms He chooses to give it? Think of some specific steps you can take.

 Philippi (16:12). This city was ten miles down the Egnatian Way from Neapolis. It was the only one of the half-dozen Roman colonies mentioned in Acts that Luke specifically identified as such, perhaps because the reaction of Romans to the gospel was the big issue in Philippi (16:16-40). The Philippians were self-consciously Roman; their magistrates (16:20, 22) had Roman titles and were accompanied by the traditional lictors who bore bundles of rods with which to administer judicial floggings.

 Philippi was full of retired military men who tended to despise Jews, so few Jews had settled there. Just ten adult circumcised males were required to form a synagogue, but Philippi had only a place of prayer (16:13) where women gathered. It was outside the city walls by the river Gangites, perhaps because synagogues were banned within the city limits, or possibly because the women needed water for ritual purification.

 Thyatira (16:14). A city in the province of Asia, in the old district of Lydia (the woman may have been named after the district). Thyatira was famous for its production of crimson-purple dye and dyed cloth, made from the juice of the local madder root. Independent businesswomen were not uncommon, especially if their male relatives died and left them the family businesses. Lydia was no aristocrat, but she was wealthy enough to rent a house in Philippi where the missionaries could stay comfortably. She probably became a worshiper of God in Thyatira, where there was a sizable Jewish community.

 Spirit by which she predicted the future (16:16). Literally, "a spirit, a Python." The pythonic spirit was a snake that supposedly inspired the prophetesses at Delphi to speak oracles.

 Customs unlawful (16:21). "The Romans were officially not supposed to practice foreign cults, although in practice they might do this so long as these did not offend against Roman customs. The principle was clearly a flexible one which could be invoked as necessary." The real issue for the slave girl's owners was economic loss but they appealed to the authorities' prejudice against Judaism, an "un-Roman" superstition. (At this stage, the Romans did not yet see a distinction between Christianity and the other dozen or so Jewish sects.) Paul and Silas were in Philippi in about 50 AD, less than a year after Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome for causing disturbances (18:2); Roman scorn for Jews was at high tide.

 Stripped and beaten (16:22). This was common Roman practice. Legally, the magistrates should have imprisoned the missionaries until they could have their case heard before the proconsul of Macedonia, but the magistrates considered this a trivial case that required a swift, firm hand, not judicial niceties. They may have planned to expel the outsiders the next day.
This, too, may not have been strictly legal, but two unpopular Jews, even Roman citizens, would have been fools to refuse to leave.

**Inner cell... stocks (16:24).** Men capable of exorcising spirits required maximum security. However, since the Romans did not have the Jewish law that limited the severity of beatings, Paul and Silas were probably scarcely able to move from blood loss and lacerated muscles. Sitting or lying with their feet fastened in stocks so that they could neither shift nor roll over must have been agony.

6. Bloody and battered in the stocks of a lightless prison, Paul and Silas spent the night "praying and singing hymns to God" (16:23-25). Why do you think they did this? (For instance, what attitudes toward self, God, circumstances, the other prisoners, or the jailer do these actions show?)

**About to kill himself (16:27).** "If a prisoner escaped, the life of the guard was demanded in his place (see 12:19)." Suicide was the accepted Roman alternative to the disgrace of execution, especially since the suicide's property went to his heirs but the executed man's went to the state. However, this jailer was too terrified by the supernatural power of his prisoners to think rationally, he didn't even check to see if they were gone or consider that the magistrates would hardly hold him responsible for an earthquake. He knew of the exorcism and the men's preaching, had heard Paul and Silas singing in the stocks, and was deranged at the divine power invoked by these holy men.

**Without a trial (16:37).** Roman citizens were exempt from beatings, and they had a much better chance than non-citizens of having the magistrates disciplined for denying them a trial.

**Escort us (16:37).** Paul and Silas had to establish their innocence in order to protect the believers in Philippi and to avoid a precedent of treating Christian missionaries with hasty harshness. The magistrates agreed to appease and exonerate the two Jews, but they still insisted that Paul and Silas leave Philippi (16:40), perhaps because they feared more anti-Jewish clamor from the local people.

7. How did Paul and Silas deal with Roman officials in Philippi (16:35-39)?

8. Why do you think they didn't just leave submissively? What principles for dealing with authority do their actions suggest? (You might make a note of this on your Themes in Acts.)

**Thessalonica (17:1-9)**

**Amphipolis (17:1).** A city one day's travel on horseback (33 miles) west of Philippi on the Egnatian Way. **Apollonia** was 27 miles further, and **Thessalonica** was another 35 miles west.
Paul and Silas passed over the former two cities (by the Spirit's guidance or human planning?) to concentrate their evangelistic efforts on Thessalonica.

Thessalonica was a port city, the seat of Roman government in the province of Macedonia, and therefore the largest city in the province. It was a free city, governed by an assembly of citizens in the Greek tradition, rather than by aristocrats in the Roman style (the crowd of 17:5 is the demos in Greek, from which we get the word democracy, "rule by the people"). Non-Roman politarchs (the city officials of 17:6) were the magistrates. However, both the politarchs and the popular assembly probably took an oath to obey the emperor that empowered and required them to judge charges of treason (17:7-9).[1014]

Jealous (17:5). ("Envy" in KJV.) The Jews were trying to attract prominent Gentiles to the synagogue, but in Paul's preaching these Gentiles found the attractive spiritual aspects of Judaism without the burdensome laws like circumcision. Even some Jews were drawn to what orthodox Jews regarded as heresy and blasphemy.

Caused trouble all over the world (17:6). The KJV translation "turned the world upside down" could be taken as unintentional praise, but the accusers were in fact charging the Christians with subversion and sedition (17:7). At that time (about 50 AD), the Romans were having trouble with Jews all over the Empire. In Judea, Jewish terrorists were assassinating Jews who collaborated with Rome, and there were numerous messianic groups in other provinces. Uproar in the Jewish community had already led Emperor Claudius to expel all Jews from Rome in 49 BC (18:2). Back in 41 BC, Claudius had to quell riots between Greeks and Jews in Alexandria. Neither the Romans nor the Thessalonians were equipped to distinguish Paul's messianic preaching from other Jewish doctrines, so they lumped the Christians together with other Jewish troublemakers. Paul's presence had indeed caused a riot both in Philippi and now in Thessalonica. Besides, Paul was preaching that a man executed by Rome for proclaiming Himself king of the Jews was in fact Lord of the world (16:31; 17:7). Paul was also predicting that this Jesus would return and replace the Roman government (1 Thes. 1:10); predictions of this kind were politically dangerous and were punishable by death according to imperial decrees (17:7).[1003]

Post bond (17:9). "Taken security" in RSV. Jason had to pay a fee and guarantee that the missionaries would leave and not return; otherwise, Jason "would face the confiscation of his properties and perhaps even death"[1008] for disturbing the peace.

9. In response to the gospel, Lydia and Jason both invited the missionaries to stay in their homes (16:15; 17:7). They welcomed at least four virtual strangers for indefinite periods of weeks or months. What kinds of trouble and expense were they risking by doing this (consider 16:20-22; 17:5-9)?

10. What can Lydia and Jason teach us about Christian fellowship/partnership?

Berea (17:10-15)
Berea (17:10). Instead of continuing westward on the Egnatian Way, Paul and Silas detoured south 50 miles to Berea. The Way would have been the logical route to take if Paul had been going to Rome, but that was impossible because Claudius had expelled all Jews. Paul may have been hoping to return to Thessalonica, but "Satan stopped us" he wrote later (1 Thes. 2:17-18). It soon became clear that Macedonia was too hot for Paul just now, so he sailed to Athens (Acts 17:13-15).

11. How did the Berean Jews respond differently to Paul's message than the Thessalonian Jews did (17:5, 11)?

12. Why was the Bereans' reaction the best way to deal with new and startling teaching?

13. Look back at questions 1 through 12 and the "Optional Application" questions in this lesson. What one insight from 15:36-17:15 would you like to apply to your own circumstances?

14. With what prayers and actions will you begin to put this insight into practice this week?

15. List any questions you have about 15:36-17:15
LESSON FOURTEEN

Acts 17:16-18:23

Athens and Corinth

Topics: Went up, Vow, Turned on Sosthenes, Gallio, Silas and Timothy came, Tentmaker, Aquila... Priscilla, Corinth, Some of your own poets, Religious, Areopagus, Babbler, Stoic, Epicurean, Athens, Athens and Corinth

Paul left Macedonia in a hurry when it became clear that the Jewish vigilantes there were not going to leave him alone. Silas and Timothy were able to go discreetly back to Philippi, leaving Paul to wait alone in Athens. But Paul was not one to sit idly, paralyzed by memories of persecution and prospects of ridicule, even in a sophisticated city like this one. So, despite or even because of the conflict in Macedonia, the gospel came to Greece, the cradle of the culture that dominated the known world. As you read about Paul's time in Athens and Corinth in 17:16-18:23, try to put yourself into those cities in Paul's place, or think of yourself as one of the people who heard Paul. Ask God to show you Himself at work.

Athens (17:16-34)

Athens (17:16). The golden age of Athenian art, literature, philosophy, and democracy was five centuries earlier, and by Paul's time the city's pride rested on faded laurels. It had a major university and was the first home of the four chief philosophical schools, but the best students went to Alexandria and other centers. However, Athens was still a beautiful city and a free ally of Rome with at least the forms of democratic government, and the name of Athens retained a certain mystique.

Epicurean (17:18). These were followers of Epicurus (341-270 BC), who taught that:

a. Everything that exists is made of particles of matter called "atoms."
b. Therefore, there is no immortal soul; when you die, your atoms disintegrate and form other objects.
c. Therefore, you don't need to fear death or punishment after death.
d. The gods, too, are made of matter; they live "in the spaces between the worlds, enjoying perfect blessedness, undisturbed by concern for mankind or worldly affairs."
e. Therefore, you don't need to fear or pray to the gods.
f. The highest good for a person is "pleasure"—not sensuality, but "peace of mind, freedom from disturbing cares." The pleasures of the flesh should be minimized because they often lead to pain; instead, one should "live unobtrusively" and not stick one's neck out.

Stoic (17:18). This group was founded by Zeno (335-263 BC), who taught in a stoa or covered porch in Athens. Stoics believed that:

a. Man is completely a part of and a microcosm of nature. Just as creative Reason (logos) imposes order on matter, so it should govern a person's life. The best way to live is in
harmony with nature. Fate is unavoidable, determined, but not capricious, thus, a person should seek to cooperate with and submit to destiny.

b. Self-sufficiency is the highest human virtue; one should tolerate and endure life as far as possible, then commit suicide with dignity if things become unbearable.

c. God is not a person, but rather the soul of the universe and a spark in each thing.

d. The soul survives when the body dies but it becomes part of the world-soul instead of keeping an individual personality.\[1039\]

**Babbler** (17:18). Literally, "seed-picker"—a bird that goes about picking up scraps in gutters. This was Athenian slang for a person who hangs around lectures picking up scraps of learning and parrots them without understanding.\[1020\]

It was fashionable among cultured persons all over the Empire to write and speak in the style of the classical Athenians of four to eight centuries earlier. The common Greek spoken by men like Paul was derived from this classical "Attic" Greek, but any aristocrat could tell in a second who was and wasn't one of them by the sort of Greek he spoke and wrote.\[1021\] Paul didn't use the complex grammar, pure accent, and sophisticated jargon of the genteel philosophers, so he was obviously a boor from some backwater province. (Paul's Jewish legal and theological training and his sharp mind were irrelevant to the Greek philosophers.)

**Areopagus** (17:19). Literally, "Hill of Ares," the god of war (Mars to the Romans). Before Athens became democratic, the governing council of the city used to meet on that hill south of the marketplace. Its authority was reduced under the democracy, but "it retained considerable prestige and continued to exercise responsibility in the realm of religion, morals and homicide."\[1022\] In Paul's time, the Council of the Areopagus met in the Royal Portico in one corner of the marketplace.

**Religious** (17:22). This Greek word could mean "pious" in a good sense or "superstitious" in a bad sense. Paul's audience would have to listen to find out whether he was being complimentary, critical, or ironic.\[1023\]

**Some of your own poets** (17:28). "In him we live and move and have our being" is from the Cretan poet Epimenides. "We are his offspring" is found in works both by Aratus and Cleanthes. All these poets were popular with Stoics, who understood the God in their poems to be the *Logos*—divine Reason, the world-soul.\[1024\]


2. What did the cultured men think of Paul, and why (17:18, 32)?

3. Put yourself in Paul's place, addressing well-born, well-dressed intellectuals in an age where class distinctions were stone walls between people. Why was Paul able to face those men confidently? (Optional: See 1 Cor. 1:18-31.)
4. When invited to speak to the prestigious Areopagus (17:24-31), what did Paul say about...

   the nature, character, and attributes of God?

   the nature of man?

   idols?

   Jesus?

5. How was this speech in Athens different from what Paul said to Jews (9:20, 22; 13:16-41; 17:2-3)?

6. Why do you think Paul addressed the Athenians differently than Jews? (What principle of evangelism was he practicing, and why is it important?)

7. Is anything in 17:16-34 relevant to your life? If so, what is relevant and why?

**Corinth (18:1-17)**

*Corinth* (18:1). See the map of the Roman Empire. A Roman army leveled ancient Corinth in 146 BC after a revolt, but Julius Caesar rebuilt it a century later as a colony for Roman veterans. Corinth quickly regained its former prosperity and character. Situated on the Isthmus of Corinth, the city commanded both the land route through Greece and the sea trade from the Aegean Sea to the Adriatic Sea. From Cenchrea (18:18), the port east of Corinth, ships or cargoes were dragged three-and-a-half miles on a sort of wooden railroad track to Lechaeum, the port west of Corinth. In that way, sailors could avoid the time-consuming and hazardous trip around the Peloponese (the Greek peninsula). This system made Corinth a hub for traders, tourists, and business travelers.

The temple of Aphrodite was one of Corinth's chief attractions for sailors and tourists passing through. It housed "a Hellenized form of the Syrian cult of Astarte," a fertility goddess. At the temple were at least a thousand male and female slaves dedicated to holy prostitution for men of whatever taste. This institution and the general tenor of the town prompted the Greek verb "to Corinthianize," which meant "to practice sexual immorality."

Corinth's population of some 250,000 free persons plus 400,000 slaves included not only Roman colonists, but also Greeks, Jews, Syrians, and other nationalities crowded together into just a few bustling square miles.
Aquila... Priscilla (18:2). Because Luke does not mention them converting and because Paul made a business partnership with them, they were probably already Christians when they met Paul. Christianity had undoubtedly reached Rome by this time, since it was the Empire's number one crossroads.[1028]

Tentmaker (18:3). Tents were made of goat's hair cloth or of leather, so this term could also mean "leatherworker" in general. Paul followed the Jewish custom that a rabbi did not charge for religious duties, but supported himself with a trade.[1029]

Silas and Timothy came (18:5). They brought money from the Philippian church, so that Paul could devote himself to preaching without burdening the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 1:3-5; Phil. 4:15).

Gallio (18:12). The son of the famous rhetor M. A. Seneca, and the brother of the Stoic philosopher L. A. Seneca. He was considered good-tempered and just, but ill health made his tenure over Greece brief.

The Jews accused Paul of urging religious practices that broke Roman law, but Gallio decided Paul's doctrine was just a variety of Judaism, a legal religion. This decision by an important Roman magistrate set a precedent for several decades: Christianity was a Jewish sect, so it was as legal as Judaism. That is, highborn Romans were discouraged from fully converting to Judaism, but the state seldom cared if lowborn folk or provincials joined foreign religions. Religious clubs were mistrusted and Jews were considered peculiar, but Judaism was tolerated as an ancient and venerable religion. If Gallio had decided against Paul, Christianity might have been outlawed all over the Empire.[1030]

Turned on Sosthenes (18:17). The Greek grammar allows three possibilities: 1) The Greeks vented their anti-Jewish feelings on him, since Gallio had declined to intervene; 2) the Jews beat their leader because he had failed to present their case well enough; or 3) the Jews beat him because he had converted to Christianity and Gallio would not interfere in Jewish squabbles.[1031]

8. What did God promise Paul in Corinth (18:9-10)?

9. How did Paul respond to that promise (18:11)?

10. How did God keep His promise (18:12-17)?

11. What do the events of 18:1-17 tell you about God?

12. Describe at least one way in which 18:1-17 is relevant to your life. Is there a promise, an example, or an insight about God that you might take to heart?
13. Consider questions 7 and 12, and the "Optional Applications" in this lesson. What one aspect of 17:16-18:17 would you like to focus on for application this week?

14. What prayer and/or action will be part of your attempt to grow in this area by God's grace?

15. On your Themes in Acts, record what you learned about those topics from Paul's time in Athens and Corinth.

**Corinth to Ephesus to Antioch (18:18-23)**

**Vow (18:18).** "Jews made vows to God either in thankfulness for past blessings (such as Paul's safekeeping in Corinth) or as part of a petition for future blessings (such as safekeeping on Paul's impending journey); the present context inclines toward the former interpretation. A temporary Nazirite vow involved abstinence from alcohol and also from cutting one's hair. Its conclusion was marked by shaving one's hair completely off and offering a sacrifice in the temple at Jerusalem" ([Numbers 6:1-21; Acts 21:17-26](https://www.biblegateway.com)).

Thus, a Jewish vow was not a promise to God to do something in one's own strength Paul knew the truth of [John 15:5; 2 Cor. 12:9-10](https://www.biblegateway.com); and [Phil. 4:13](https://www.biblegateway.com). Rather, the vow was the way a person expressed great thankfulness according to the Jewish custom in which Paul had been raised.

**Went up (18:22).** Since Jerusalem was in the mountains, people spoke of "going up to" Jerusalem and "going down from" Jerusalem. [Verse 22](https://www.biblegateway.com) probably means that Paul went to Jerusalem to offer the sacrifice that ended his vow and to visit the church.

16. List any questions you have about 17:16-18:23.
LESSON FIFTEEN

Acts 18:24-19:41

Ephesus

Topics: City clerk, Crowd... assembly, Officials of the province, Craftsmen... workmen in related trades, Scrolls, Chief priest, Miracles, Lecture hall of Tyrannus, Three months... two years, With great fervor, Disciples, Achaia, The baptism of John, Alexandria, Ephesus

When Paul passed through Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem and Antioch, he left Priscilla and Aquila there to begin building a church. Ephesus was the queen of the rich Roman province of Asia. Through her port passed goods from China and the eastern provinces bound for Italy. Wide avenues, huge public buildings and squares, and luxurious private homes were designed to impress tourists.

A hundred local aristocrats owned most of the land around Ephesus and controlled the city government. However, the strength of the city was its large class of merchants, businessmen, and craftsmen. These people might be barely better fed than day laborers, nearly as wealthy as aristocrats, or somewhere in between, but none of them had any say in the government unless he was a "client" of one of the ruling hundred.

This working/business class was probably the group among whom Priscilla and Aquila began to explain their faith. God did not leave the couple to be the only missionaries in the city; they had first Apollos and later Paul as partners. As you read 18:24-19:41, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what He wants you to see.

Apollos and the twelve disciples (18:24-19:7)

Here Luke records two separate incidents side by side, probably for comparison.

Alexandria (18:24). The Museum of Alexandria attracted the premier scholars of the Empire, and allegorical interpretation of the ancient pagan myths was the up-to-date form of literary criticism. Therefore, it was fashionable among Alexandria's large and sophisticated Jewish population to see the Scriptures as allegory; learned men found hidden inner meanings in the Law and the Prophets that only the wise could discern. We know nothing about the beginnings of Christianity in Alexandria, but it is not surprising that the gospel may have gotten a bit confused in that philosophical environment. [1037]

The baptism of John (18:25). Luke 3:1-18 portrays John's ministry. His was a baptism of repentance (Acts 19:4), signifying a recognition of one's sin and a desire to change and be forgiven, but John only pointed toward the fuller baptism into Jesus.

Achaia (18:27). The province of which Corinth was the capital.

Disciples (19:1). That is, Paul thought they were followers of Jesus (and perhaps they thought they were, too), but Paul soon found they believed in some form of the teaching of John the Baptist. They had faith that the Messiah was coming, but they didn't know the full story about Jesus and the Spirit. [1038]

1. Both Apollos and the disciples Paul met had a similar gap in their information about the gospel. What did they not know (18:25; 19:2-3)?
2. Why was it essential to be baptized in the name of Jesus, not just for repentance as John had done? (See Romans 6:3-11.)

With great fervor (18:25). Literally, "with fervor in the spirit" or "in the Spirit." Apollos was not rebaptized, while the others were (18:26; 19:5) the reason may have been that Apollos had fairly accurate faith and had received the Holy Spirit, while the others had not (18:25; 19:2).

3. Why was it necessary to receive the Holy Spirit? (See John 3:5-6; John 14:26; Romans 8:1-17, 26-27.)

4. What do you learn from 18:24-19:7 that is relevant to the Body of Christ today? (You might think about one of the optional questions that interests you.)

Power in Ephesus (19:8-22)

Three months... two years (19:8, 10). The longest Paul spent in any mission city that Luke records. Since Jews reckoned a part of a year as a year, Paul spoke of his time in Ephesus as three years (20:31). During these years, Paul wrote several letters to the church in Corinth, including the one we call 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9; 1 Cor. 16:8; 2 Cor. 2:4, 9; 2 Cor. 7:8-12).

Lecture hall of Tyrannus (19:9). During the normal working hours of morning and evening, Paul earned his keep making tents and leather goods. During the siesta time of 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Paul borrowed the building in which someone named Tyrannus taught (or possibly a building this man rented out). Those hot midday hours would have been the ones when Tyrannus was not using the building and when working people would have had time to listen to Paul. In a Gentile city, Paul adopted the method of a teacher of philosophy, a role with which his potential audience was familiar.

Miracles (19:11-12). Pagans believed that power emanated from a healer and made even his clothes effective. Apparently God chose to work through that notion, although (as in the case of the bleeding woman, Luke 8:43-48), a person eventually had to face the difference between God’s healing power (which He gives as He chooses) and magic (which is an attempt to control and use divine power).

Chief priest (19:14). Sceva may have been related to the high priestly family, but more probably he used the title to impress people. The Jewish high priest was believed to possess potent secrets, such as the way to pronounce the name of the Jewish God. Charlatans claiming to be magicians and exorcists were all over the Empire (13:6), since people were terrified of Fate and demons and wanted power to deal with them.

Scrolls (19:19). Books were written on scrolls of parchment or papyrus reed. Every town had its sorcerers, astrologers, and exorcists selling their services to cast a spell, mix a love-potion, read a horoscope, or drive out a demon of illness. Ephesus was known as the source of some
of the best spells, magical books were known in Greek as "Ephesian letters." *Fifty thousand drachmas* was an immense sum for working people—nearly two months' wages for a thousand laborers—but people were willing to spend much hard-earned cash for books that claimed to guarantee health, wealth, power, and happiness.[1041]

5. From what you know about the people of Ephesus (19:17-20), can you think of a reason why God worked healings and exorcisms through Paul (19:11-12)? If so, explain.

6. Why couldn't Jesus' name be invoked to magically cast out demons (19:13-16)? What else is necessary for the name to be effective?

7. The power of Jesus' name convinced many Ephesians to abandon their vain ways of seeking what they wanted (19:17-19). How is Jesus' power still at work among us, convincing unbelievers to give up their useless strategies?

**A riot (19:23-41)**

Of the dozens of vividly painted temples in Ephesus, the greatest was dedicated to *Artemis of the Ephesians* (19:28). It was known as one of the seven wonders of the world:

425 feet long, 220 wide, 60 high, with 127 pillars of Parian marble inlaid with gold, and woodwork of cypress and cedar; it was filled with works by the great artists of the Greek world. The priestesses were called bees, and were virgin, the priests or *megabyzi* were eunuchs, drones which 'die' in fertilizing the queen-bee [Artemis]... On 25 May the statues of the goddess were taken up the broad processional road with music, dancing and pageantry to the theatre where they were exhibited to a congregation which might reach 30,000; in Roman times a wealthy Roman paid for a roofed portico to shield the procession from the weather.[1042]

All year round, but especially in May tourists came to see the temple and its rites, and they bought little terra cotta or silver models of the temple as souvenirs (19:24). Ephesian Artemis was a fertility goddess, the Great Mother worshiped in Asia Minor centuries before Rome came. She was not the virgin huntress called Artemis in classical Greek myths. Her image in the temple was a black, squat, many-breasted object of some unknown material. It was said to have fallen from heaven (19:35); the description sounds like a meteorite.[1043]

**Craftsmen... workmen in related trades (19:24-25)**. Nearly every man in the urban working class belonged to a club with other men in his profession. Although these were social clubs, not political parties, Rome sometimes outlawed them because they encouraged sedition. The smiths or the weavers or the Cretans of a city often rioted when they felt their economic interests threatened, for there was no peaceful, legal means of petitioning the government.
Rome left city affairs to local governments for the most part, but *rioting* (19:40) was one thing the Romans refused to tolerate and suppressed ruthlessly.\[1044\]

**Officials of the province** (19:31). The *Asiarchs* were the aristocratic rulers of Ephesus who represented the city in the council of confederated cities of Asia.\[1045\] An Asiarch could also be an aristocrat elected to preside over the emperor cult in his city—this was a half-religious, half-political job of promoting patriotism.\[1046\] Paul had friends in high places.

**Crowd... assembly** (19:30, 32, 39, 41). The *demos* or *ekklesia* was the citizens' assembly that met three times a month in the theater to decide certain cases.\[1047\] However, this gathering of the *demos* was behaving more like a mob (the Greek is *ochlos,* "mob," in 19:33, 35) than a legal body.

**City clerk** (19:35). He was the chief executive officer of Ephesus. He published the decisions of the citizens' assembly, received official correspondence, and acted as liaison between the city and the Roman provincial government.\[1048\] If there was a riot in Ephesus, Rome would hold him and the Asiarchs responsible.

8. Why were the Ephesian silversmiths against Paul (19:23-27)?

9. How was this reason similar to the one that set some Philippians against Paul and Silas (16:16-21)?

10. Do economic interests set any groups against the gospel today? If so, give an example.

11. What protected Paul from the violence of an outraged mob (19:31, 35-41)?

12. In light of this episode (19:37-40) and the one in Corinth (18:12-17), explain why Paul and Peter considered it so important that Christians carefully obey the civil laws ([Romans 13:1-7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2013:1-7&version=ESV); [1 Peter 2:13-17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%202:13-17)).

13. How is this episode relevant to your life? (What does it reveal about the Church in the world? What attitudes and habits does it encourage you to adopt?)
14. What one insight from 18:24-19:41 would you like to focus on for application this week? How do you want to be changed by this insight?

15. With what prayer and/or action will you begin addressing this area, with God's help?

16. Note any thoughts you have on the topics found in Acts.

17. List any questions you have about 18:24-19:41.
Even before the silversmiths' riot, Paul had planned to leave Ephesus and go to Jerusalem (19:21). Although Luke barely mentions the reason (24:17), we know that Paul's chief errand was to deliver money collected from his Gentile churches as a gift to the poor believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-33; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15). To gather this money, Paul intended to visit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia—in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth.

From Acts 19:21 and Romans 1:8-15; Romans 15:17-33, we also know that Paul was already convinced he "must visit Rome also" and that he hoped to bring the gospel to Spain thereafter. Thus, he already planned his visits with the disciples of Macedonia, Corinth, Troas, and Ephesus to be goodbyes as well as pastoral sessions. However, something told those who were spiritually sensitive that this might be a more serious farewell than they hoped. As you read 20:1-21:16, watch for signs of the bond of fellowship among the believers.

**Macedonia and Greece (20:1-6)**

Luke tells us little of what Paul did after he left Ephesus and before he reached Greece (20:2), but Paul's letters fill in some details. While in Ephesus, Paul learned of a dispute in the Corinthian church. He sent two letters to settle the strife (one is lost; the other is 1 Corinthians), but neither the letters nor a visit by Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17) achieved peace. Paul even went to Corinth briefly himself but he was humiliated by the defiant factions; Paul called that visit "painful" (2 Cor. 2:1). Back in Ephesus, Paul wrote a severe letter "out of great distress and anguish of heart" (2 Cor. 2:3-4). That letter he sent by the hand of Titus, another of his young associates (like Timothy, but perhaps a more forceful personality). This anguished letter is also lost.

All this happened before Paul left Ephesus. Now, as he set out for Macedonia (Acts 20:1), he went first to Troas, hoping to meet Titus on his way back from Corinth with a response. Paul did some successful evangelism in Troas, but when Titus did not arrive, the apostle went on to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12-13). There Titus met him with good news: the Corinthians had repented of their rebellion. Paul quickly sent Titus back with a fourth letter full of affection—our 2 Corinthians. Still, it is possible that Luke joined the group at Philippi (notice the "we" in 20:6).

He was accompanied by (20:4). These were representatives of each church that had given money for Jerusalem; they were going to accompany Paul with the gift. No delegate from Philippi is mentioned, but Luke apparently joined the party at Philippi (notice the "we" in 20:6).
Feast of Unleavened Bread (20:6). The eight-day Jewish festival that began with Passover. Marshall thinks Paul "was celebrating the Christian Passover, i.e. Easter, with the church at Philippi (1 Cor. 5:7-8)."[1051]

Miracle in Troas (20:7-12)

Break bread (20:7). The meeting probably included both the Lord's Supper and the Agape, the love feast that Christians commonly held along with the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34 discusses the same double observance).[1052]

In a window (20:9). Lower class people in Roman towns often lived in multi-story tenements. The large windows had no glass panes. The stuffiness, the smell of the oil lamps (20:8), and the incessant talking was too much for one young man—the Greek word indicates a boy between eight and fourteen.[1053]

1. In the events of 20:1-21:16, how did the various believers show fellowship/partnership/communion with each other? What feelings did they express, and how?

20:1-6

20:7-12

20:13-38

21:1-16

2. What good examples do you see here for the way churches should function and the way believers should treat and feel about each other?

Farewell to the Ephesian elders (20:13-38)

Assos (20:13). While Paul walked twenty miles south from Troas, the others sailed forty miles around the peninsula, so they all arrived at Assos at about the same time. They then continued down the coast of Asia, stopping at night at Mitylene (20:14) on the isle of Lesbos, on Kios (20:15), on Samos, and finally at Miletus. There the ship planned to stop for a day or two, so Paul summoned the elders from Ephesus, thirty miles north, to bid him farewell.

Pentecost (20:16). Of the fifty days between Passover and Pentecost, sixteen had passed (20:6, 13-15). If Paul had stopped at Ephesus, he would have had to visit many families and change ships and there might even have been trouble from local enemies. All that would have taken more time than Paul could afford.

Observant Jews tried to be in Jerusalem for either Passover or Pentecost as often as possible. We don't know why this Pentecost was important to Paul, he may have wanted to
bring the gift of money in time for the occasion, or he may have wanted to celebrate his ancestral customs even though Christ had given them new meaning.

3. What actions and attitudes had Paul practiced as a model for Christian leaders (20:17-27, 33-35)?

4. What warning and command did Paul repeat (20:28-31)?

5. What would protect the elders in the face of this danger (20:32)?

To Jerusalem (21:1-16)

Cos... Rhodes... Patara (21:1). See the map of the Roman Empire.
Phoenicia (21:2). A coastal district of the province of Syria (21:3). Phoenicia's chief city was the port of Tyre (21:3). Ptolemais (21:7) was a day's sailing further south, and Caesarea (21:8) was a day further.
Philip the evangelist (21:8). About twenty-five years earlier, Philip reached Caesarea on his missionary wanderings (8:40). Apparently, he eventually settled there, married, and raised a family. "Evangelist" may have been Philip's office, as Paul was an apostle and Agabus was a prophet.
Agabus (21:10). The same man who prophesied famine about fifteen years earlier (11:27-29). His demonstrative method of prophecy (21:11) was used by Old Testament prophets to make their points more vivid than mere words could.

6. Why was Paul going to Jerusalem (20:22; 24:17)?

7. The Holy Spirit repeatedly warned Paul both internally and through prophets that danger waited in Jerusalem (20:22-25; 21:4, 10-13). With what attitude did Paul respond to these warnings (20:24; 21:13)?

8. Why do you think the Holy Spirit warned Paul repeatedly of his destiny in Jerusalem? (For instance, did He want Paul not to go? Why do you think so or not?)

10. What insight from 20:1-21:16 would you like to concentrate on for application this week? How do you want to grow or obey in this area?

11. What steps do you plan to take to begin applying this truth?


13. List any questions you have about 20:1-21:16.
LESSON SEVENTEEN

Acts 21:17-23:11

Arrest in Jerusalem

Topics:  I did not realize that he was the high priest, Whitewashed wall, Ananias, Flogged, Witness... martyr, Aramaic, The Egyptian who started a revolt, Commander, Brought Greeks, Expenses, Purification rites, Turn away from Moses, James... the elders, Arrest in Jerusalem

Just as Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem, knowing He would die there (Luke 9:21-22, 44, 51), so Paul went resolutely to the Holy City, prepared for the same fate (Acts 21:13). A new generation of Jews and Romans controlled the land since Jesus' death, but Paul knew that the passions which moved him to approve the stoning of Stephen still burned in his countrymen. He had so much in common with his Jewish brethren that his heart ached to draw them across the gulf which now separated them (Romans 9:1-5; Romans 10:1; Romans 11:13-16). As you read Acts 21:17-23:11, try to feel what Paul felt when he faced his people.

Agreement with the elders (21:17-26)

James... the elders (21:18). Now that the twelve apostles were scattered on missionary trips, these men led the church in Jerusalem. Paul was staying with Mnason, a Hellenistic Jewish Christian (21:16), but now he met with the Hebraic Christian leaders. Luke emphasizes the report of the Gentile mission at this meeting (21:19), but this was also probably the moment when Paul and the Gentile delegates presented their gift of charity. Luke doesn't say how the Jewish believers felt about receiving the money from Gentiles, Paul had earlier expressed some concern about this (Romans 15:31).

Turn away from Moses (21:21). These rumors were false, but we can understand how they arose. Paul did teach Gentiles not to keep the Law, but he insisted that Jewish believers were free to maintain their customs (Romans 14:1-15:13). He himself had circumcised Timothy because the lad was a Jew and had taken a Nazirite vow (Acts 16:3; Acts 18:18). However, Paul's own freedom among the Gentiles (1 Cor. 9:19-23), his teaching that law-keeping did not enhance a Jewish believer's standing before God (Romans 2:25-29; Galatians 5:6), and his disparaging comments about the Law (Galatians 4:9) might have led some of his Jewish converts to give up their customs without Paul telling them to do so.

Purification rites (21:24). If a person under a Nazirite vow touched a dead body, he became ritually unclean. He then had to offer animal sacrifices to cleanse himself before he could complete his vow (Numbers 6:9-12). Paul knew that Jesus was the eternal sin offering (Romans 8:3) and that baptism into Jesus made a person permanently clean, but he apparently felt that performing ritual cleansing did not contradict faith in the grace of Jesus' sacrifice. Paul evidently regarded the Nazirite rite as an acceptable custom for Jews, although he would not have approved of Gentiles performing Jewish rituals.

Expenses (21:24). Numbers 6:9-21 suggests how expensive the offerings of animals, bread, and wine would have been. It was considered an act of piety for someone with wealth to pay for a poorer man's vow of gratitude to God, King Agrippa I did so often.

1. Why did the leaders of the Jerusalem church want Paul to participate in the vow (21:20-25)? In their eyes, how would this act serve the gospel?
2. What might have been some of Paul's reasons for doing as these believers asked? (Do 1 Cor. 9:19-23 and Romans 14:13-15:3 shed light on his possible motives?)

3. What can 21:17-26 teach us about dealing with differences within the Church today?

**Arrest (21:27-39)**

*Brought Greeks* (21:28). The outer court of the Temple was called the Court of the Gentiles. At the gate from that one to the inner courts was a low barrier and a sign warning that any Gentile who entered had himself to blame when he was instantly killed. The Romans permitted this death sentence just as they upheld the holiness of other religions' sanctuaries. However, it is highly unlikely that Paul did bring a Gentile into the inner Temple, especially since his accusers did not seize the alleged Gentile.  

*Commander* (21:31). The tribune of a cohort (about a thousand troops). These were stationed in the Antonia Fortress beside the Temple. The cohort was charged with keeping order in Jerusalem, where hatred of Rome was seething, murders were increasingly frequent, and riot might explode at any moment.

*The Egyptian who started a revolt* (21:38). Josephus wrote that an Egyptian false prophet "led 30,000 men to the Mount of Olives in order to take Jerusalem" (Josephus tended to exaggerate numbers). His followers were all killed, but the leader escaped. The Roman tribune assumed that Paul was this man back in town.

The Egyptian's followers were called *sicarii* (terrorists; "assassins" in RSV) because they used a short dagger called a *sica* in Latin, to assassinate powerful Jews who collaborated with Rome. These *sicarii* eventually led the disastrous revolt against Rome in 66-70 AD, and even now in 57 AD they were considered highly dangerous.

**Paul's defense to the Jews (21:40-22:29)**

*Aramaic* (21:40; 22:2). The Greek word could mean Hebrew (NASB, KJV), but Aramaic was the common language of the people. The two languages were related, so the people could have understood Hebrew with some effort (like modern people hearing a man speak King James English). Because many Jews outside Palestine could not speak Aramaic or Hebrew, Paul was identifying himself with his audience of patriotic, conservative Palestinian Jews by using their ancestral tongue.

*Witness... martyr* (22:15, 20). The Greek word *martys* meant "witness," but in Christian circles it gained the sense of "witness unto death" because of what so often happened to witnesses for Christ.

4. Paul called his speech a "defense" (22:1; Greek: *apologia*). Summarize what he said to the Jews in 22:1-21.

6. Why did 22:21 make the Jews interrupt with rage?

7. What might make people of your country react as in 22:22 to an evangelist? What aspects of the gospel seem offensive or unethical to your people?

8. Paul might have known that 22:21 would infuriate the Jews. Why do you think he risked his life to say 22:6-21, instead of just refuting the charge of defiling the Temple?

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**Flogged (22:24).** The tribune could not comprehend Paul's speech in Aramaic, full of religious terms, so he decided to have Paul tortured for the straight story. The scourge was a bundle of leather whips with pieces of lead or bone fixed to the ends. Scourging was far worse than a Jewish beating or the Roman beating with rods (16:22), victims often died from it. Therefore, it was legal to scourge slaves and non-Romans, but it was expressly forbidden to scourge a Roman citizen (22:25).[^1062]

Roman citizenship was not very easy to obtain in Paul's day. A person could 1) receive it as a reward for military or other service to Rome; 2) receive it when freed from slavery to a citizen; 3) bribe key Roman officials; or 4) be born into a family of citizens. The fourth was the most prestigious way.[^1063]

**Before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:11)**

Since the tribunal couldn't torture Paul to learn his crime, he summoned the Sanhedrin to hear Paul and explain why he was offensive to the Jews.

**Ananias (23:2).** He was high priest from 47 to 59 AD, then assassinated by the sicarii as a Roman pawn in 66 AD. Josephus agrees that Ananias was "insolent and quick-tempered."[^1064]

**Whitewashed wall (23:3).** A hypocrite: either a tomb whitewashed to mark its unclean interior (Matthew 23:27) or a flimsy wall whitewashed to appear firm (Ezekiel 13:10-12).[^1065] Paul may have lost his temper (compare Matthew 5:39; 1 Cor. 4:12), or he may have been pronouncing a solemn curse by God's prompting. The sicarii's dagger was an effective fulfillment of this promise.

**I did not realize that he was the high priest (23:5).** Although many explanations for this extraordinary statement have been offered, including that Paul had poor eyesight or that Ananias was dressed in ordinary clothes, most modern commentators find it unlikely that
Paul did not recognize the high priest. His words were ironical: "I did not think that a man who could give such an order could be the high priest."[166]


10. What one truth from these passages would you like to take to heart this week? How can you apply it?


12. List any questions you have about this lesson.
LESSON EIGHTEEN

Acts 23:11-26:32

Prisoner in Caesarea

Topics: Agrippa, I appeal to Caesar!, Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem... ?, Grant a favor to the Jews, Porcius Festus, Drusilla, Ringleader of the Nazarene sect, Troublemaker, Peace... foresight... reforms... gratitude, Felix, Herod’s palace, From Cilicia, Antipatris, No charge against him that deserved death, Oath, Prisoner in Caesarea

On the day of Paul's baptism, the Lord had said of him, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (9:15-16). Paul's mission was to be a witness for the Righteous One (22:14-15), to testify to the gospel of God's grace (20:24). In God's eyes, these years in prison were as crucial to His plan as the years in Corinth and Ephesus.


1. The Lord discloses His plan in 23:11. How do this verse and 9:15-16 summarize what happens in the following sections of Acts?

21:17-23:10

23:12-26:32

27:1-28:31

A plot thwarted (23:12-35)

Oath (23:12). Unlike the Nazirite vow of dedication and gratitude, this was a vow called cherem in which a person invoked God to curse him if he broke the vow. Jewish law did, however, provide loopholes for escaping the curse if one failed to keep the oath. The conspirators were probably members of the Zealots or the sicarii, the extremist patriots or terrorists who later led the Jewish revolt in 66-70 AD (see the note to 21:38). These groups assassinated many people whom they considered threats to the true religion of God.[1067]

No charge against him that deserved death (23:29). The charge of defiling the Temple was apparently dropped for lack of evidence, although it turned up again (24:6). Commander Lysias' judgment is important: if Paul was later executed, it was not because he had broken any law, but because he had angered the Jews and fell victim to Roman politics.[1068]

Antipatris (23:31). A military post thirty-seven miles from Jerusalem and twenty-five from Caesarea.[1069]

From Cilicia (23:34). Cases were usually tried in the province where the alleged crime was committed, but a governor could foist a touchy case onto the prisoner's home province.
However Governor Felix knew the Sanhedrin would not appreciate traveling to Cilicia for the trial and the legate of Syria would not appreciate being handed a silly case.\(^{[1070]}\)

**Herod's palace** (23:35). Herod the Great had built it but now it was used as a *praetorium*—"the headquarters of the Roman administration." \(^{[1071]}\) Paul's letter to the Philippians was written from a *praetorium* either in Caesarea or Rome (Phil. 1:13).

2. Consider the lengths to which the Jewish fanatics were willing to go to silence Paul (23:12-15). What human and divine factors prevented them (23:16-30)?

**Trial before Felix (24:1-27)**

**Felix** (23:26; 24:2). He was born a slave, but because his brother Pallas was "a corrupt favorite" \(^{[1072]}\) of the emperors Claudius and Nero, Felix was first freed and later promoted. He became "the first slave in history ever to become governor of a Roman province"; \(^{[1073]}\) this office was usually reserved for Roman knights. (The reigns of Claudius and Nero were notorious for allowing freedmen to virtually run the Empire.)

Felix became governor of Judea in 52 AD but was recalled in 59 AD for mishandling riots, overusing violence, and other acts of incompetence and corruption. \(^{[1074]}\) The Roman historian Tacitus summarized Felix's character thus: "He exercised the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave." \(^{[1075]}\)

**Peace... foresight... reforms... gratitude** (24:2-3). It was customary to begin by flattering the magistrate to gain his favor, and Tertullus did not mind stretching the truth. In fact, there were frequent riots during Felix's tenure, and the Jews detested him for his methods and manners. \(^{[1076]}\)

**Troublemaker** (24:5). Literally, "pestilence." To incite dissension was treason against the emperor.

**Ringleader of the Nazarene sect** (24:5). Tertullus claimed that Christianity (Jesus of Nazareth was called a Nazarene) was not a branch of Judaism but a cult not approved by Rome. The Romans were conservative polytheists: they were happy to let subject peoples worship their ancestral gods (see Paul's claim in 24:14), but they disliked "new" religions. \(^{[1077]}\) Tertullus needed to prove that the Way was not Judaism, and Paul needed to prove that it was true Judaism.

3. How did Paul refute each of Tertullus's charges against him?

- making trouble, inciting dissension (24:11-13, 17-18)

- leading a new and unlawful sect (24:14-16)

- desecrating the Temple (24:11-13, 17-21)
4. Why is it important to us that Paul claimed Christianity was not something new, but the true continuation of the faith recorded in the Law and the Prophets?

*Drusilla* (24:24). Felix's third wife. When she was sixteen, Felix used a magician to persuade her to leave her first husband for him.\(^{1078}\)

5. a. How did his expectation of resurrection and possible judgment affect Paul (24:15-16)?

b. How did this idea affect Felix (24:25)?

c. Why do you think the prospect of judgment affected these men so differently?

*Porcius Festus* (24:27). According to Josephus, he was much more prudent and honest than Felix, but he died after just two years in office.\(^{1079}\)

*Grant a favor to the Jews* (24:27). Felix was going to Rome to face Jewish accusations of gross mishandling of a mob in Caesarea.\(^{1080}\) He hoped that by leaving Paul in prison he might avoid even more anger from the Jews.

*Festus* (25:1-12)

*Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem...?* (25:9). A question like this from a governor was effectively a decision.\(^{1081}\) In Jerusalem, members of the Sanhedrin would be on Festus's official board of advisors (see 25:12) and could even engineer evidence and public outcry against Paul.

*I appeal to Caesar!* (25:11). If a Roman citizen had not broken a specific statute, he had the right to appeal for a trial before the emperor.\(^{1082}\) An acquittal in Rome might protect Christians from prosecution for decades and Paul would have loved the chance to declare the gospel to the emperor himself. (Paul had no way of knowing it, but Nero usually delegated cases to other judges rather than sit through such tiresome business himself.\(^{1083}\))

Paul did not fear death (25:11), but there was no sense in throwing his life away in Jerusalem when he might accomplish so much through a trial in Rome.

Agrippa (25:13-26:32)

Having appealed to Rome, Paul could not now be tried by Festus or his colleague Agrippa. But Festus could ask a well-informed neighboring king to advise him about what to write in the legal brief he had to send with Paul to Rome.

Agrippa (25:13). Herod Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I who died in 44 BC (12:23). Agrippa II ruled some territory in northeast Palestine and tried constantly to make peace between the Jews and Rome. As official head of Judaism (Agrippa had the right to appoint the high priest, controlled who had the priest's sacred vestments, etc.), he was the logical man to advise Festus on a case like Paul’s.

After the death of her husband, Agrippa's sister Bernice moved in with him; there were rumors of incest. Later, she became mistress to Emperor Vespasian and then Emperor Titus.

7. What did Paul think was the issue for which he was being held prisoner (26:6-8)?

8. Summarize the gist of what Paul said to Agrippa (26:2-23).

9. Agrippa could do nothing to free Paul since he had appealed to Caesar. Why did Paul gave this speech and the words in 26:25-27? (See 26:29.)


11. What overall impression of the Roman system do you get from 23:12-26:32? Summarize both the good and the bad points.

12. What one aspect of Paul's example or another insight from 23:12-26:32 would you like to apply?

13. Describe some specific steps you can take to let this insight influence your habits and character.
LESSON NINETEEN


Journey to Rome

Topics:
We want to hear what your views are,
We have not received any letters from Judea, Jew, Live by himself, Forum of Appius... Three Taverns, Spend a week, Puteoli, Rhegium, Syracuse, Twin gods, After three months, Justice, Islanders, Kill the prisoners, 276 of us on board, Dropped four anchors, Took soundings, Adriatic Sea, Neither sun nor stars, Ship’s tackle, Throw the cargo overboard, Syrtis, Paul warned them, The Fast, Fair Havens, Cnidus... to the lee of Crete, An Alexandrian ship, The lee of Cyprus, Sidon, Aristarchus... us, Adramyttium, Journey to Rome

The story of Acts does not end with the death of Paul, for he is not the only witness Jesus sent "to the ends of the earth" (1:8). But for Luke, who accompanied Paul on his voyage to face Caesar's court, Paul typifies the ambassador of Jesus representing his Lord in every circumstance. Paul has faced a king, governors, scornful philosophers, and lynch mobs; the next stage of his journey holds no more terror for him than those.

As you read 27:1-28:31, imagine how you would have felt and acted on board ship, on Malta, and in Rome with Paul.

Storm at Sea (27:1-28:16)

Adramyttium (27:2). A port on the coast of Asia, near Troas. The ship was on its way back from Caesarea to its home port. When it reached southern Asia Minor, Julius hoped to find a ship sailing to Rome.

Ancient ships had no rudder and only one sail. They were steered rather clumsily with two large oars (the "rudders" in 27:40), one on either side of the stem (back). Also, they had no compass or sexton, so the sailors needed to see the sun or the stars in order to judge their position and navigate. Finally, there was no way of preserving food for long voyages without restocking. For all these reasons, it was safer to sail from port to port along the coast than directly across the Mediterranean Sea, far from food supplies or a haven from a sudden storm.[1085]

Aristarchus... us (27:2). Aristarchus may have been heading home to Macedonia, but Col. 4:10 and Philemon 24 describe him as Paul's companion and fellow prisoner. William Ramsay explained the advantage to Paul of having Luke and Aristarchus along: in the eyes of the centurion and other passengers, these were two of Paul's slaves—his personal physician and his servant. In that status conscious society, Paul thereby acquired the respect due a gentleman; a man without servants was a peon.[1086]

Sidon (27:3). Seventy miles (one day's sailing) up the coast from Caesarea. A ship often docked for hours to unload and load goods, so passengers went ashore. The centurion was remarkably generous to let a prisoner off the ship, even though Paul was a Roman citizen not yet convicted of any crime.[1087]

The lee of Cyprus (27:4). The direct route would have been to the west and south of Cyprus. However, the prevailing winds in summer were west or northwest, and a ship with one sail could not tack into the wind. So, the ship sailed to the east and north of Cyprus to let the island shield the wind, "keeping close to the coast and taking advantage of the night breeze from off the shore."[1088]
An Alexandrian ship (27:6). Egypt produced most of the wheat that fed Italy. Grain ships left Alexandria, sailed straight north to Myra (27:5), then made their way west. (The northwest winds made it impossible to sail directly from Alexandria to Italy.)[1089]

Cnidus... to the lee of Crete (27:7). The captain probably wanted to head straight west between Greece and Crete. However, that northwest wind kept forcing the ship to change course and lose time. Cape Salmone was on the eastern tip of Crete.[1090]

Fair Havens (27:8). It was "an open bay, a poor harbour in bad weather."[1091] Thus, it was fine as a temporary shelter, but unpromising as a place to spend all winter.

The Fast (27:9). The Day of Atonement, when Jews fasted for repentance. Its date was set by the Jewish lunar calendar, so it varied between September and October. In 59 AD it was on October 5. Because of frequent winter storms in the Mediterranean, shipping was considered hazardous after September 15 and impossible from November 11 to March 10.[1092]

Paul warned them (27:9). Apparently, Paul was admitted to a meeting of the sailors and officers, although the centurion overruled his advice.

Syrtis (27:17). These banks of quicksand and submerged rock off the coast of Libya were legendary for sinking ships. They were still 380 miles away, but a storm could drive a ship that far.[1093]

Throw the cargo overboard (27:18). To lighten the ship and keep it from sinking, it was probably heavy from filling with water.

Ship's tackle (27:19). Spare gear, such as the mainsail, yardarm, and spars.

Neither sun nor stars (27:20). Without these, the sailors had no idea where they were.

Adriatic Sea (27:27). In ancient times, this included the sea between Italy, Malta, Crete, and Greece.[1094]

Took soundings (27:28). "Measured the depth of the sea by letting down a weighted line."[1095]

Dropped four anchors (27:29). "To keep the ship's head from swinging round and to prepare the ship to be run ashore when it was light and a suitable opportunity and place could be found."[1096]

276 of us on board (27:37). These grain ships were as much as 140 feet long, 36 feet wide, and 33 feet draught (depth in the water).[1097] Josephus mentions a ship with 600 people aboard.[1098]

Kill the prisoners (27:42). If the prisoners escaped into the countryside after swimming ashore, the Roman authorities might execute the guards in exchange.

Islanders (28:2). The Maltese were descended from the Phoenicians, who colonized the island centuries earlier. They spoke a dialect of Phoenician rather than Greek, but they were like Roman peasants in culture.[1099]

Justice (28:4). To Greeks (and other peoples), Justice was a goddess who assured retribution to the wicked.[1100]

After three months (28:11). If they landed in early November, it was now early March. Providentially, another grain ship had been forced to winter in Malta.

Twin gods (28:11). Castor and Pollux were the guardian gods of sailors. Their constellation (Gemini) was considered good luck when seen in a storm.[1101]

Syracuse (28:12). The leading city of Sicily.

Rhegium (28:13). A town on the toe of Italy, very near Syracuse.

Puteoli (28:13). The main port for Rome at this time, and especially for wheat shipments. The cosmopolitan town included a community of Jews and one of Christians. It was still seventy-five miles south of Rome.[1092]
**Spend a week** (28:14). Luke doesn't say why the centurion was willing to let his prisoner visit with friends.

**Forum of Appius... Three Taverns** (28:15). Two little towns on the Appian Way, the road from Rome south to Rhegium. The former was forty-three and the latter thirty-three miles from Rome.

**Live by himself** (28:16). Since Paul was not charged with a political or other serious crime, he was not in a prison. He rented his own house or apartment, bought his own food, and was allowed to receive visitors and write letters. He was probably able to carry on his leatherworking as well, in order to support himself. However, he was under guard, perhaps chained, and could not leave his house. [1103]


2. What did Paul say and do during the trip to Rome?
   - 27:9-10
   - 27:21-26
   - 27:30-32
   - 27:33-36
   - 28:1-6
   - 28:7-10

3. Think about each of Paul's comments and actions. What do you learn about him (his gifts, character, beliefs, attitudes toward people, view of God, etc.)?

4. Paul's life was saved several times on this trip: land was sighted, the crew did not abandon the passengers, the centurion kept the soldiers from killing the prisoners; nonswimmers could float ashore even thought the ship ran aground; and the viper was somehow harmless.
   a. What did the Maltese natives conclude from all this (28:4-6)?
b. To what do you think Paul and Luke attributed these "lucky coincidences"?

5. Should we conclude from these events that God will always protect His servants—if not from hardship, then at least from death? If so, why? If not, why not, and what should we conclude?

Paul preaches in Rome (28:17-31)

Luke knew that Paul was not the first missionary to reach Rome (18:2; 28:14-15). However, he wrote almost nothing about other missionaries or Paul's relations with them, for he was trying to make a particular point in Acts by what he included and excluded.

Jew (28:17). The decree of Claudius in 49 AD had been allowed to lapse after his death in 54 AD, so the Jews were now back in Rome.

We have not received any letters from Judea (28:21). Paul's may have been one of the first ships to reach Rome since winter. However, it may also be that the Sanhedrin did not write to Rome. They had little chance of winning their case there (the emperor would not care about a Jewish squabble), and accusers who lost their cases were often punished for filing frivolous suits. Finally, the Jews had only recently been able to return to Rome, so they were not eager to stir up trouble.[104]

We want to hear what your views are (28:22). The Jews knew the dispute about Jesus (there were Christians in Rome), and they had probably heard of Paul. They wanted to hear him present his case for Jesus and explain why the leaders in Jerusalem were so mad at him.

6. Why did Paul address the Jews when he got to Rome? (Optional: See Acts 13:46; Romans 1:16; Romans 9:1-5; Romans 10:1; Romans 11:1-6, 11-16.)

7. What did he say to them first (28:17-20)?

8. When they courteously agreed to hear him further, what did Paul go on to discuss with the Jews (28:23)? What specific methods did he use to appeal to them?

9. What was the point of the prophecy from Isaiah that Paul quoted (28:25-29)?
10. How did Paul spend his time awaiting trial (28:30-31)?

11. What good examples does Paul set for all Christians in 28:17-31?

12. What aspect of 27:1-28:31 would you like to apply to your own life?

LESSON TWENTY

REVIEW

Now that you have studied all of Acts, do you remember the themes that run through the book, or are the early chapters already fading from your memory? A review can help you pull together what you've learned so that you can see the book as a whole. The best beginning for a review is to read the whole book again, just as you did in your overview. However, if you prefer, you can skim the book to find answers to the following questions. Your notes on the topics found in Acts and your answers in lesson one will also help you review.

1. From your study of Acts, what would you say the Church is?

2. What is the Church's mission?

3. In a few sentences, summarize the Christian message—who Jesus is what He has done, and how we should respond. (Try to avoid Christian jargon that an unbeliever wouldn't know.)

4. Who is the Holy Spirit?

5. What was His role in the events of Acts?

6. How have you experienced Him acting in your life recently?

7. In Acts, what kinds of things happened to believers when they tried to fulfill their mission and speak their message?

8. Describe some ways in which Peter, Paul, and other believers in Acts responded to opposition and persecution because of the gospel.
9. What is the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, according to Acts?

10. What has Acts taught you about Christian fellowship or partnership?

11. In question 7 of lesson one you wrote some of the themes of Acts, and you've been tracing them throughout the book. You may also have been working on an outline of Acts from the models in lesson one. Now, briefly summarize what you think the whole book is about—its main message, purpose, or theme. If you prefer, give the book a title.

12. Have you learned any other important lessons from Acts? If so, explain them here.

13. Have you changed in any ways (thoughts, attitudes, opinions, habits) as a result of studying Acts? If so, how?

14. Look back over the study at questions in which you expressed a desire to make some specific application. Are you satisfied with your follow-through? Or, are there new areas you would like to concentrate on? Pray about plans for further application, and write any notes here.

15. Look at the questions you listed at the end of lessons one through nineteen. Do any remain unanswered? If so, look for answers in some of the sources, restudy some passage, or talk to a Christian you respect. Record your questions here.