



Proclaiming
THE KINGDOM

An Studyguide For Acts
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If we had individual copies of the 27 books which comprise the New Testament, we likely would arrange them a little differently. Perhaps we would arrange Paul's letters chronologically, rather than by length. We likely would group all of John's writings (1 gospel, 3 letters and 1 apocalyptic vision) together. Definitely, we would place Luke's two volumes side-by-side. That Luke intended his second letter to Theophilus to be a continuation of what he'd begun in the first is clear from his brief introduction (Acts 1.1-3).

Not much is known about the author. That Luke was a physician is known from Paul's words in Colossians 4.14. That he was an occasional traveling companion of Paul is revealed in the "we" sections of Acts (beginning with Paul's second missionary journey, 16.10, and going through Paul's stay in Rome, 28.16). That he would remain a close friend of Paul is seen in the fact that Luke alone remained with the apostle at the close of his life (2Timothy 4.11). Those are the facts we know about Luke's life, but one other truth can be gleaned about this brother: he thoroughly researched what he wrote!

Luke The Historian

Luke's method was revealed in his first letter to Theophilus (literally "lover of God"): "it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:3-4, ESV). Luke's careful research and orderly writing were done so that God's people can KNOW the truth of these events. Consider this: we owe our knowledge of Jesus' early life more to Luke than any other gospel writer. Could this have been because Luke spent years in Palestine while Paul was confined (see the "we" passages in Acts 21,27)? What was Luke doing during that time? It would seem likely that he used his time interviewing eye-witnesses of Jesus' life and ministry. Perhaps, he even interviewed Mary (see Luke 2.19,51).

That Luke was a first-rate historian was not always accepted. In the early 1800's scholars assumed that Acts was written in the mid to late 2nd century. The New Testament scholar, Sir William Ramsay, began his career laboring under this assumption. However, his research into the political boundaries of 1st century Asia Minor and sailing conditions on the Mediterranean convinced him that not only was Luke a 1st century eye-witness, but that he was a trustworthy chronicler of what he saw.

Commenting on Luke's knowledge of political boundaries in Asia Minor, Ramsay wrote, "The boundaries mentioned are true to the period in which the action lies: they are not placed through the mistaken application by a later author of ancient statements to a time when they ceased to be pertinent: they are based on information given by an eye-witness, a person who had been engaged in the action described. The

reader, if he reads the narrative rightly, can see with the eyes and hear with the ears of a man who was there and witnessed all that happened.” Even more significant was Ramsay’s conclusion on Luke’s trustworthiness: “There is a certain presumption that a writer who proves to be exact and correct in one point will show the same qualities in other matters. No writer is correct by mere chance, or accurate sporadically. He is accurate by virtue of a certain habit of mind. Some men are accurate by nature; some are by nature loose and inaccurate.” (see http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ramsay/ramsay_gasque.pdf)

Purpose Of Luke’s Second Letter:

What was Luke’s purpose in writing this second letter? Many correct answers could be given...

- » Luke was recording the early history of Christ’s followers, the church.
- » Luke was recording stories of conversions, showing how people could come to Christ.
- » Luke was recording the work of Jesus’ chosen messengers, hence the title we’ve given the letter, “The Acts of the Apostles”.
- » Luke was recording how the promised Spirit came and was active in the lives of the apostles and the church.

All of the above are true and will be considered during the course of our study. However, it would seem that Luke tells us his purpose for writing this second letter. Note these passages from the beginning and ending of the book:

“He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and *speaking about the kingdom of God.*” (Acts 1:3, ESV)

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

Both Jesus and Paul spent their time “proclaiming the Kingdom”. Thus, our approach to the study of Acts will focus on what it teaches us about the Lord’s Kingdom. But before we can do that, we first need to consider what the Old Testament scriptures and the gospel accounts tell us about the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God

Many are familiar with the prophecy found in Daniel 2. On that occasion Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a terrifying dream which only Daniel could interpret. The dream foretold of four world empires (historically Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome), but in the days of the 4th world empire “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2.44). With that prophecy in mind we might view Acts 2 as when God’s kingdom, the church, was established and move on. However, understanding the kingdom of God will require a more nuanced approach.

Most think of “Kingdom” as the realm of the King, i.e. the people who are ruled

by a King. Thus, while not inaccurate, when we speak about the Kingdom we typically mean the church, i.e. those who are in the Kingdom. But the primary idea of Kingdom isn't the ruled over, but the ruler. Thus, often times in the Scriptures the term "Kingdom" has in focus the rule or reign of the King. Let's briefly trace this concept through God's word.

God has ruled since Creation

1. Note how God gave man dominion over all of creation (Genesis 1.26,28), yet man was under the dominion of God (2.16-17).
2. God exercised His rule in punishing man for his sin (Gen. 3) and in destroying the earth in the flood (Psalm 29.10)
3. And God has remained sovereign over all of mankind (Daniel 4.17; Psalm 47.2,6-8; 96.10-13; 103.19).

However, God chose the Israelites to be His particular people, thus His Kingdom.

1. His mighty rule was seen in delivering His people (Exodus 15.1-18; 19.5).
2. His people would abide by His covenant Law (Exodus 19.5-6). As God's Kingdom, they existed to show others what it means to truly reverence Jehovah, to mold themselves after His holiness.
3. Sadly, we know that Israel failed in submitting to her King. They transgressed His will continuously and were punished for it (Isaiah 1). However, God promised the future coming of His Kingdom, when His rule was both enjoyed and respected by peoples of every nation (Isaiah 2.1-4).

Jesus & The Establishment Of God's Kingdom

1. When Jesus began preaching the gospel He proclaimed, "the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand..." (Mark 1.15). Jesus wasn't only looking at the approaching time when the church was established on Pentecost, rather that with His arrival the rule of God had come near to the people.
 - Thus, His miracles were a sign that the Kingdom of God had come upon them (Luke 11.20).
 - His teaching was a means by which the people were coming into the Kingdom of God (Luke 16.16).
 - His presence was the Kingdom in their midst (Luke 17.20-21).
2. Furthermore, Jesus promised that some would live to see the Kingdom come with Power! (Mark 9.1) While He did not specifically state what He meant, it seems likely that Jesus had in mind all of the events surrounding His death, resurrection and ascension, matters He had been discussing in Mark 8.31.
 - His death was the means by which He showed His power over sin. He was King on the cross (Matthew 27.11,29,37,42).
 - His resurrection was His victory over death, a victory that will extend to those in His Kingdom (1Cor. 15.20-23). His victory completed, He truly possessed all authority (Matthew 28.18).
 - His ascension was when He took the throne (Mark 16.19; Ephesians 1.20-23). Having ascended to the throne, He sent the Promised Spirit enabling His apostles to proclaim the gospel so that men and women could find salvation and

be made part of His Kingdom.

3. By His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, the Kingdom had come with power!

Acts, Proclaiming The Kingdom

Following His resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with His closest disciples. Luke records that during this time the Lord was “speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1.3). Furthermore, before His ascension Jesus told the apostles that they would “be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1.8). They would bear witness to the fact that Jesus is now Lord and Christ (Acts 2.36); they were “proclaiming the kingdom of God” (Acts 28.31). They would bear witness for the King in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12) and to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 13-28).

Our aim in this class is to follow Luke’s narrative, noting how the apostles fulfilled Jesus’ commission, how men and women were brought into the Kingdom and how the citizens of the Kingdom lived under the authority of their King. King and Kingdom are central to the narrative, so we will pay particular attention to what the text reveals about these matters. May our King bless our study of His word!



LESSON 2: THE KING'S WITNESSES (ACTS 1)

Acts 1 brims with anticipation. The chapter begins with Jesus working with his closest followers, but He would not remain with them for long. Furthermore, He instructed His followers to not “depart from Jerusalem” but to wait for the promised Spirit (vss. 4-5,8). Jesus’ ascension occurs in the middle of the chapter (vss. 9-11), but then His disciples returned to Jerusalem as He commanded, to await the promise and prepare themselves to carry out the mission of the King.

Notes from the text:

Vss. 1-8, Jesus prepares His witnesses

- » vs. 2, “had given commands through the Holy Spirit”: while great importance is placed upon the apostles receiving the Holy Spirit (vss. 4-5,8; 2.1-4), it’s significant here that Jesus’ instructions are also termed as the work of the Spirit. Jesus had been anointed with the Holy Spirit and power (Acts 10.38), thus His words can be termed as “through the Spirit.” Significantly, the apostles receiving the Holy Spirit would mean that their teachings were also “through the Spirit”.
- » vs. 3, this verse describes what Jesus did during the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension:
 - “presented himself alive... by many proofs” see Luke 24.36-43. These proofs convinced the apostles of Jesus’ resurrection, thus proved His claims. These proofs were essential to the apostles being able to bear witness.
 - “speaking about the kingdom of God” See the introductory lesson for more on this important concept.
- » vss. 4-5, the promise of the Holy Spirit
 - Jesus had spoken of this promise multiple times (see John 14.16-17; 15.26-27; 16.12-15; Luke 24.49).
 - John the baptist had pointed to Jesus who would “baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire,” (Luke 3.16-17). Jesus promises that His disciples would be baptized with the Holy Spirit “not many days from now,” (it would occur ~10 days after this promise in Acts 2.1-4).
- » vs. 6, “will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” This question has produced much speculation. Many assume that this is the last vestige of their earthly Kingdom aspirations, but nothing in Jesus’ reply or their subsequent actions suggest this. It is not surprising that their question came on the heels of Jesus’ promise of the Spirit in vss. 5-6 for the Old Testament prophets foretold that the giving of God’s Spirit would be when the fortunes of God’s people were restored and fulfilled (see Ezekiel 36.22-30; Joel 2.28-3.8). It could be that the apostles now understood that the spiritual nature of Kingdom, but what they would have

to grow in understanding was that “Israel” would incorporate both Jew and Gentile.

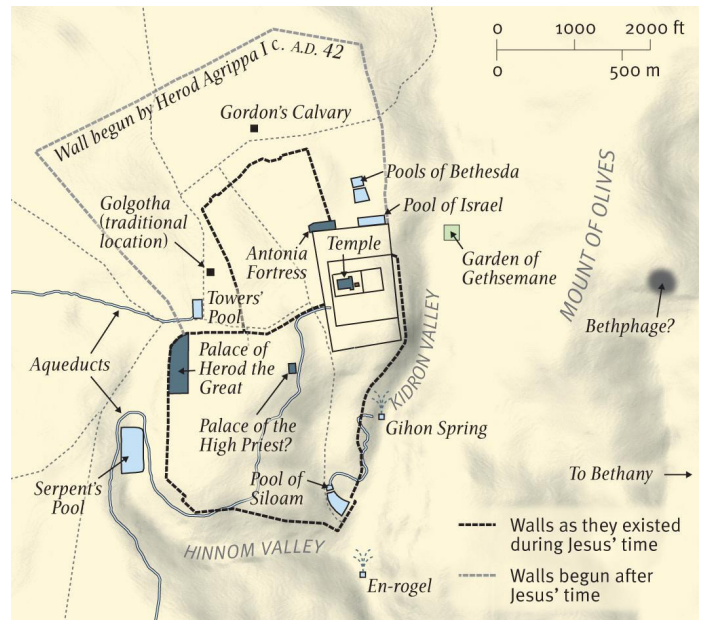
- » vss. 7-8, Jesus was not dodging their question, but redirecting their attention to what they needed to do. In other words, “let God take care of His business, you go and do what I tell you.” What they needed to do was wait for the promised Spirit so that they could carry out their mission of bearing witness for Jesus to the world!

Vss. 9-11, Jesus’ ascension

- » vs. 9, clouds are associated with Jesus’ glory on three occasions: His transfiguration (Luke 9.34-36), His teaching about His return (Mark 13.26; 14.62) and now with His ascension to heaven. For the significance of Jesus’ ascension see Daniel 7.13-14; Mark 16.19; Ephesians 1.20-23.
- » vs. 11, note Revelation 1.7.

Vss. 12-26, another chosen to witness

- » vs. 12, Jesus’ ascension took place in the region of Bethany Luke 24.50. We also note from Luke’s account that the disciples returned “with great joy” (Luke 24.52). Their Lord was gone, but He was now King!
- » vs. 14, the women followers of Jesus receive notable mention in Luke’s account (see Luke 8.2-3; 23.55; 24.10). Significantly, this is the last mention of Mary in Scripture.
- » vs. 15, remember that Jesus had on one occasion appeared to more than 500 of His disciples (see 1Corinthians 15.6)
- » vss. 16-20, recall that Jesus had spent 40 days opening their minds to the Scriptures (see Luke 24.44-48). Thus, it’s significant that in these verses Peter makes reference to two old testament prophecies. One, Psalm 69.25 had been fulfilled by Judas. The second, Psalm 109.8, now needed to be fulfilled.
- » vss. 21-22, these qualifications for an apostle were essential! Only one who had been with Jesus could truly bear witness to His resurrection. These verses argue against any notion of “apostolic succession”.
- » vss. 24-26, furthermore it was the Lord, not the apostles, who chose the replacement for Judas. The matter was taken to the Lord in prayer, and then lots were cast (see Proverbs 16.33).



Kingdom takeaways:

Jesus is now King.

In our introduction to Acts we noted how the Kingdom of God (i.e. His rule) is eter-

nal (see Daniel 4.17; Psalm 103.19; etc.). Furthermore, we noted that Jesus' life on earth was a manifestation of God's rule, of His Kingdom (see Luke 10.20; 17.20-21). However, it was when Jesus ascended into heaven, following His death and resurrection, that He was made King (vss. 9-11; Mark 16.19). God has always reigned, but a universal Kingdom comprised of holy people could not come about until after the sacrifice of God's Son. Thus, a new phase of God's rule came into being with the Christ reigning as King over all things, blessing those who submit to His reign (see Ephesians 1.20-23).

Witnesses are crucial to the growth of the Kingdom.

The apostles' role as "witness" is prominent in the book of Acts (see Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:2; 5:32; 23:11; 24:15-21). Much of what transpired in Acts 1 was preparation for the apostles role as witnesses:

1. They received proof of the resurrection and instruction from Jesus.
2. They witnessed His ascension.
3. They awaited the promised Spirit, who would remind them of Jesus' words and reveal truth to them (see John 14.26; 16.13). Only when they had received the Spirit could they bear witness of Jesus (vs. 8). They would have the threefold witness of 1)their personal testimony, 2)Scripture, 3)the Spirit.
4. They appointed one to take the place of Judas; another witness of Jesus' resurrection.

We are not witnesses in the same way as the apostles. We did not witness the life of Jesus and while we receive the Spirit in baptism, we are not baptized in the Holy Spirit in the way the apostles were (vs. 5). The apostles fulfilling their mission as witnesses of the Lord is why we can believe in Him today. We must now bear witness to the reign of our King through transformed lives and by pointing others to the testimony of the apostles, Jesus' chosen witnesses.



LESSON 3: WHO IS THE LORD? (ACTS 2.1-36)

Chapter 1 centered around the ascension of Jesus, the Son of God returning to the Father and being given dominion over all things as He sat at the Father's right hand (see Daniel 7.13-14; Mark 16.19; Ephesians 1.20-23). But even though Jesus had left this earth, He only did so after preparing the apostles to bear witness for Him. In this lesson we will examine how the apostles bore witness to the fact that Jesus is Lord.

Two passages stand out in the text. The first is the final portion of the quotation from Joel: "and it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2.21). The time of salvation was upon them, all they needed to do was call on the Lord! But who was the Lord? This is answered by the second passage: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2.38).

Notes From The Text

Vss. 1-4, The Promised Spirit Arrives

- » vs. 1, Pentecost: literally means "fiftieth" and refers to the Feast of Weeks which was celebrated 50 days after the Passover (see Leviticus 23.15-21; Deuteronomy 16.9-12). This was one of three annual feasts which Jewish males were required to attend (Deuteronomy 16.16), but in the 1st century as many Jews were still dispersed from Palestine, Pentecost was likely the best attended of all the feast days. It occurred in early Summer following the grain harvest, thus an easier time of year to travel and an occasion of thanksgiving. Later Jewish tradition associated the Feast of Weeks with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai.
- » Vss. 1-4, the Promise fulfilled:
 - There is some debate as to who the "they" in vs. 1 refers to: the 12 apostles or the 120 disciples (1.15). I am convinced that it was the 12. They were the ones Jesus made the promise to in 1.5,8. The antecedent of "they" is "apostles" in 1.26. It was clearly the 12 who spoke on the day of Pentecost (see 2.37). Furthermore, we do not read of any disciple other than the apostles performing miracles until the 7 men of Acts 6 are chosen and the apostles laid their hand on them. Also, they are referred to as "Galileans" in vs. 7, another indication that Jesus' 12 apostles are meant.
 - That the Spirit is likened to wind and fire in vss. 2-3 is significant. In Ezekiel's vision of the valley filled with dry bones, it is God's life-giving breath which arrives like the wind (Ezekiel 37.1-14; cf. John 3.8). God appeared in fire when He commissioned Moses to rescue His people (Exodus 3.2-5) and again when He descended on Sinai to enter into covenant with the people (Exodus 19.18).
 - Jesus had promised that they would receive power when the Spirit came upon them (Acts 1.8). In vs. 4 we see the effect of that power: the Spirit empowered

them to “speak in other tongues”, i.e. languages which they had never studied. That these were actual languages and not some “celestial tongue” is evident from vss. 6-8)

Vss. 5-13, The Multitude Gathers

- » Vs. 5, it is estimated that the population of Jerusalem would swell from 100,000 inhabitants to as much as 1,000,000 during a feast such as Pentecost.
- » Vss. 6-8, these Jews were from across the Roman empire (see vss. 9-11). Each area would have had its own regional language, and it is these which those assembled are hearing. Their marvel at the event was only increased by the fact that the speakers were from Galilee, a despised region (see John 7.52).

- » Vss. 9-11, compare this with Genesis 10-11. In Genesis 10 we have the list of nations which descended from Noah (representing many of the same areas found in this passage). In Genesis 11 the people are scattered when God confuses their language. Now, God is using their languages to bring salvation!



- » Vss. 12-13, two different responses are recorded. Some were amazed and wanted to know what this could possibly mean, others had already made up their minds and so could only mock. You will note that they are all described as “devout men” in vs. 5. The point: you can be devout and still miss it if you allow preconceived notions to cloud your mind, preventing you from listening to the message of God.

Vss. 14-21, Peter Explains What Has Happened

- » Vs. 15, “third hour of the day” = 9am. He was responding to mockery, not a real accusation. This response shows just how absurd their mocking was.
- » Vss. 16-21, Joel’s prophecy
 - Peter quotes from Joel 2.28-32. The context of Joel was of a great horde of locust which would devour all the produce of the land. The people are summoned to the Temple and called to repent (Joel 2.12-17) and in response the Lord would send healing rains (Joel 2.23). But a greater blessing was coming (Joel 2.28-32). The fact that this blessing was poured out on the day of Pentecost, when the people gave thanks for the harvest, was not by accident.
 - The “last days” is referred to throughout the Old Testament as the time when God’s plans are fulfilled (see Isaiah 2.2; Micah 4.1; Daniel 2.28,44-5). It is an accurate description for the epoch inaugurated by Jesus, an epoch that concludes with His return.
 - Apocalyptic language is used in vs. 19-21. While we are tempted to think of

the end of the world, such language was used in the Old Testament to refer to changes in world order (see Isaiah 13.10-13; Ezekiel 32.7). The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus brought about a total upheaval of the world order, so such language is fitting. If looking for a literal fulfillment of these signs, one might look at the events surrounding Jesus' death (see Matt. 27.51-53; Luke 23.44-45).

- Peter's point in using the prophecy is that God had promised to pour out His Spirit and that prophecy would result. Now, there are both limited and universal applications of this promise. As we will see, there is a sense in which every believer received the Spirit, but prophecy was never a guaranteed gift of any believer. As others have said, the GIFT of the Spirit must be differentiated from the GIFTS of the Spirit.
- It was the coming of the Spirit that signaled the great Promise of God could now be fulfilled. Now, all who call on the Lord (i.e. put their utmost faith and trust in Him) could be saved (vs. 21). Note that in the Hebrew text of Joel 2.32, "Lord" is the sacred name of God (Yahweh). Peter's sermon will prove that Jesus is, in fact, Lord!

Vss. 22-36, Peter Bears Witness For Jesus

1. Jesus' life and death (vss. 22-23)
 - 1. Vs. 22, Jesus' miracles were a means of God bearing witness (see Mark 16.20; Hebrews 2.3-4).
 - 2. Vs. 23, Jesus' death was not an accident but the fulfillment of God's purpose (see 1Peter 1.20). Note: this did not absolve the people of their guilt for rejecting Jesus (see vs. 36). "lawless men" could refer to the Romans or to the fact that the Jewish leaders circumvented the Law to condemn Jesus.
2. Jesus' resurrection (vss. 24-32)
 - vs. 24, "not possible for him to be held by it" because all occurred according to the definite plan of God (see vs. 23).
 - Peter's first proof for the resurrection of Jesus is from Scripture (vss. 25-31). He quotes from Psalm 16.8-11 and alludes to 2Samuel 7.12-16. The promise to establish David's kingdom wasn't fulfilled in Solomon, but in Jesus. His reign is eternal because He was raised from the dead, the very resurrection which David prophesied in Psalm 16.
 - Peter's second proof was their eyewitness testimony (vs. 32).
3. Jesus' ascension (vss. 33-35)
 - The pouring out of the Holy Spirit furnished Peter's first proof for the ascension of Jesus (vs. 33). Remember Joel's prophecy was that Jehovah would pour out the Spirit (see Joel 2.28-29; Acts 2.17-18). The fact that Jesus poured out the Spirit speaks to His exaltation!
 - Scripture once again provided proof for Jesus' exaltation (vss. 34-35; Psalm 110.1).
4. Conclusion: Jesus is Lord and Christ! (vs. 36)

Kingdom Takeaway: Jesus' Reign IS Good News!

While on the earth Jesus proclaimed “the gospel of the Kingdom” (Matthew 4.23). The gospel isn't simply that our sins are forgiven, it's that there is a King who reigns; a King who has power over sin and death. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost not only showed the people their guilt in rejecting the King, but heralded that both forgiveness from sin and the promise of the Spirit were now available. They're available because Jesus is King!



LESSON 4: CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD (ACTS 2.37-47)

Perhaps some 600 years before Jesus lived on the earth, the prophet Joel was commissioned by God to relay His word to the people of Judah. The people had suffered because of their sins and they would be punished further for their iniquities. Yet, there was hope! If the people would return to the Lord with all of their heart (Joel 2.12) they would be brought out of their captivity and their land would be healed (Joel 2.17-27). But an even greater blessing would be realized in the future (Joel 2.28-32)!

Acts 2 records how the blessing of Joel 2 was fulfilled. The promise began to be fulfilled when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.1-4). Yet, the prophecy spoke not only of miraculous works and signs that would accompany the pouring out of God's Spirit, but also the fact that the time had come when "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2.21). Under the guidance of the Spirit, Peter went on to explain to the assembled multitude that Jesus, the very man they had crucified 50 days before, had been made both Lord and Christ by the Father (Acts 2.36). Jesus is Lord, but how can we be saved?

Notes From The Text

Vss. 37-41, people are saved!

- » vs. 37, the message of the gospel, proclaiming that Christ is King, is more than mere words. This message cuts to the heart and forces man to make a decision: do I recognize Jesus as King or not? If I do, what must I do since I've rejected Him previously in my life? That was what the Jews assembled in Jerusalem were grappling with; they knew they had rejected Jesus, so what could they do?
 - Note: those who asked this question of Peter and the other apostles had been convicted of the fact that Jesus is the Christ. They BELIEVED the message, so if the doctrine of "faith alone" were true, they wouldn't need to "do" anything. Yet, we see that a response was necessary for them to truly "call on the name of the Lord".
- » Vs. 38
 - "repent": lives that have been spent in rebellion to God must be changed. Repentance was an essential part of Jesus' preaching while on earth (see Matthew 4.17; Luke 13.3).
 - "be baptized every one of you": as we will note in our study of Acts, the command to be baptized was not incidental, but the necessary response of those who believed the gospel message.
 - "in the name of Jesus Christ": recall that the promise in Joel 2.32 was that those who "call on the name of the Lord" would be saved. Jesus is Lord (vs. 36) and the implication here is that since baptism is in His name, refusal would be

tantamount to rejecting Jesus.

- “for the forgiveness of your sins” needless debate has long taken place over whether this statement means that baptism is “for” the forgiveness of sins or “because” sins have been forgiven. Note that every major English translation and every Greek lexicon of note translates the Greek *eis* as “for”. The only reason to argue otherwise is to justify an unbiblical theological position. Just as Jesus gave His life “for” the forgiveness of our sins (Matthew 26.28) so we must be baptized “for” the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2.38; 22.16).
- “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” we will examine this blessing at the end of the lesson, but note that Acts 2.38 continues the connection between purification via water and receiving the Spirit. This was pronounced in the prophets (Ezekiel 36.25-27) and by Jesus (John 3.5). The fact that baptism (water) and Spirit are connected in Peter’s response shows that access to the Kingdom was now available!
- » Vs. 39, “the promise is for you and...” Which promise was in view? Jesus had promised the Spirit during His earthly ministry (note Acts 1.4), but how many of the assembled multitude were familiar with this promise? It seems most likely that God’s promise to Abraham is in view (Genesis 12.3; see Acts 3.25). Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise, and He had poured out the Spirit (Acts 2.33). Note how Paul connects the promise to Abraham with the giving of the Spirit in Galatians 3.14.
- » Vs. 40, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” Jesus had frequently commented on the wickedness of his generation (see Luke 7.31-35; 9.41; 11.50-52, 29-32; 17.25). That generation would crucify the very Son of God (Acts 2.36). To obey the gospel is to escape the punishment in store for those who reject the rule of God (see Joel 2.32).
- » Vs. 41, “those who received his word were baptized” a multitude heard the message of Peter, but not everyone received or accepted the message. However, those that received the word were baptized. We cannot say that we accept any of Jesus’ teachings unless we follow them (see Matthew 7.24-27).

Vss. 42-47, a glimpse of the first citizens of the Kingdom

Vs. 41 states that on the day of Pentecost some 3000 souls “were added” (perhaps in reference to the 120 disciples mentioned in Acts 1.15). Vs. 47 states that “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” The saved in the passage are those who recognized the Lordship of Jesus and heeded His command to repent and be baptized. While Jesus’ rule is over all, it would be accurate to say those saved were “added” to His Kingdom as loyal citizens. This passage gives us a glimpse of what life was like for these first citizens of the Kingdom.

1. They recognized the authority of the apostles and their teachings (vss. 42-43).

Remember that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were meant to confirm the apostles as Jesus’ witnesses (vs. 43; Mark 16.20). Little wonder the early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”; the Lord was with these men, so

we must listen to them!

2. **Fellowship and worship were given priority (vss. 42,46).** The text speaks of their meeting together in the Temple and in smaller gatherings from house to house. There is some question on whether “the breaking of bread” in vs. 42 refers to the same activity in vs. 46. Many believe that the reference in vs. 42 is to the observance of the Lord’s Supper, while the reference in vs. 46 is to meals eaten by brethren. Such is possible, but I am of the opinion that while the whole church could meet in the Temple to hear the apostles’ teaching and to pray, the observance of the Lord’s Supper would have occurred in smaller venues like individuals homes. The point however is that they spent their time in worship by praying to the Father and remembering the sacrifice of their King.
3. **They loved each other (vss. 44-45).** Jesus said that love for each other would be seen in acts of service (see John 13.14; 15.12; etc.). The early church took this to heart by sacrificing their possessions to make sure every member was provided for. We will note further demonstrations of such sacrificial love as we proceed through Acts.
4. **They fulfilled their responsibility to shine the light of the gospel (vs. 46).** The Lord said our light was intended to bring others to the Lord (Matthew 5.16), which is exactly what happened as the early church lived lives which praised God. People are drawn to the truth of the gospel as it is held forth by people who’ve been transformed by the gospel.

The King & The Spirit

God promised through the prophet Joel to “pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2.17; Joel 2.28). Furthermore, Jesus had instructed His apostles to stay in Jerusalem because there they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1.4-5). It is without question that on the day of Pentecost the apostles received the Spirit in a way unlike any other (Acts 2.1-4), a point evident even at the conclusion of chapter 2. Note that while all who responded to the gospel call would “receive the gift of the Spirit” (Acts 2.38), only the apostles were doing “wonders and signs” (Acts 2.43). But were the apostles the only recipients of the Spirit? Is Acts 2.1-4 the only fulfillment of Joel 2.28?

The literary prophets of the Old Testament prophesied during dark times. Israel and Judah had departed from the ways of the Lord, had suffered the consequences of their actions and were being warned of further punishment if they continued in rebellion. But there was hope; repentance would lead to the captives returning home and to the land being replenished. But the true renewal and restoration of man would only come when God sent His Spirit:

- » Isaiah prophesied that true restoration would occur ONLY when the Spirit was “poured upon us from on high”. Then, both justice and righteousness would be restored. (Isaiah 32.14-18).
- » Through Ezekiel, God promised to restore His people from captivity. But this restoration would be more than a simple return to the promised land. God would

cleanse them with water and give them a new spirit... His Spirit! (Ezekiel 36.24-27; compare with Jeremiah 31.31-34).

- » As we've seen from Joel's prophecy, the pouring out of the Spirit would be accompanied by prophecy and visions. However, it is significant that the text DOES NOT say everyone who received the Spirit would prophesy or have visions, merely that those "gifts" would accompany the pouring out of God's Spirit. What would be available to everyone was salvation! (Joel 2.28-32).

When we come to the gospel accounts we see that the coming of the Spirit was anticipated. While the apostles would receive gifts of the Spirit unlike others (see John 14.26; 16.13; Luke 24.49; etc.), the blessing of the Spirit wasn't limited to them.

- » John the baptist foretold that the Christ would baptize with both the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3.16-17). The context shows judgment is in view: those baptized with the Holy Spirit are saved (wheat gathered into the barn), while those baptized with fire are condemned (chaff which is burned).
- » Jesus told Nicodemus that for one to enter the Kingdom he must be "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3.5), a clear reference to Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezekiel 36.25-27).

So, Acts 2 is the complete fulfillment of God's promise to pour out His Spirit. His chosen witnesses received special gifts of the Spirit, while those saved received God's promise of a new spirit, of His Spirit. This is the recreation the rest of the New Testament speaks of (see 2Corinthians 3.18; Ephesians 4.24; 2Peter 1.4; etc.) As another author put it, "The coming of the Spirit marked the beginning of the church. The presence of the Spirit is what makes a person a Christian." Note: those who receive the Spirit are "devoted to the apostles teaching" (Acts 2.38,42). Spiritual people live by the Spirit (Galatians 5) and the apostles' teaching came through the Spirit!

One final point: it is significant that the promised Spirit would not come until Jesus' exaltation (Acts 2.33; John 16.7). The pouring out of the Spirit was possible ONLY after Jesus' had made the one offering for sin; when He had entered into the most holy place to intercede on our behalf; when He sat down at God's right hand. The reign of the King inaugurated a new era, an era defined by true renewal and restoration; an era where the promise of God's Spirit can be experienced by all.



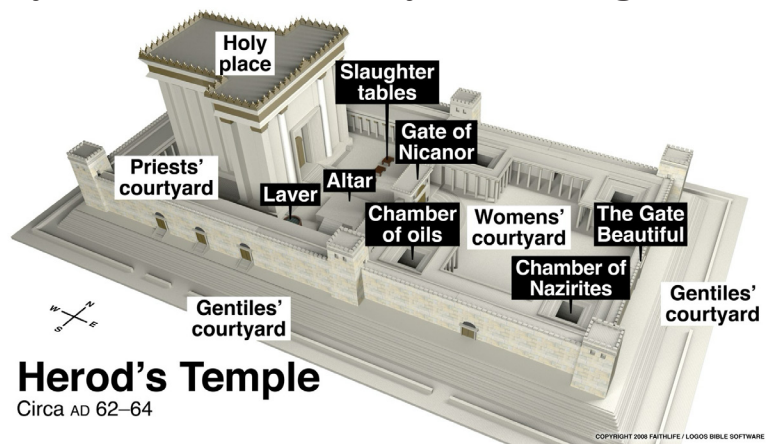
LESSON 5: IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST (ACTS 3)

Before His ascension Jesus promised that apostles that they would “receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1.8). They received the Spirit in Acts 2.1-4 and immediately received the power to “speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Furthermore, we read in Acts 2.43 that “many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” The apostles had received power, but they understood the power was not their own; they were just the vessels through which God was acting. As Acts 3 makes clear, their authority and power was in the name of Jesus Christ.

Notes From The Text

Vss. 1-10, a lame man walks

- » Vs. 1, the Law commanded that two offerings would be made each day (see Numbers 28.1-8). According to Josephus and other sources, those offerings were accompanied by singing and prayers. The “ninth hour” was 3PM, the customary time for the evening sacrifice.
- » Vs. 2, we see in Acts 4.22 that the man was over 40 years old. Regarding the Beautiful Gate, “This door or gate was sixty feet wide and seventy-five feet high, fashioned of Corinthian brass. Reputedly, it took twenty men to open it. If this entrance was located at the eastern side of the Court of Women (also called the treasury - Jn. 8:20)...then this man, a beggar, had shrewdly positioned himself so as to intercept those headed for the treasury with their gifts of money.” (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vss. 3-5, these verses are significant context to the miracle which was about to occur. The lame man had no expectation of being healed, rather he was hoping to receive money. Today, those who claim to have gifts of healing blame their failures on others lacking faith. But this lame man possessed no faith that he was about to be healed.
- » Vs. 6
 - Recall that the brethren had sold their possessions in order to provide for each other (Acts 2.44-45). Peter and the apostles had not turned this into a general benevolence fund.



- “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth”, we will discuss this more at the end of the lesson. Significant that while on earth Jesus was able to heal in His own name (see Luke 5.24; Mark 5.41). The apostles could not heal in their own name or power, only in the name of Jesus.

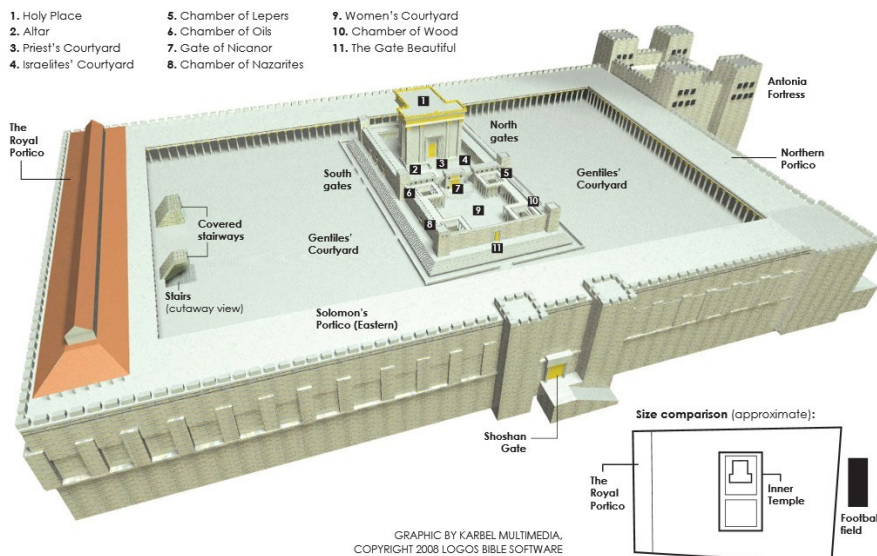
Vss. 11-26, Peter’s second sermon

Jesus’ power healed the lame man (vss. 11-16)

- » Vs. 11, “Along the whole eastern side of the temple enclosure was a porch or roof extending from the top of the wall back into the temple area. This roof was held up by two rows of columns, 37 feet high. The whole porch was 60 feet wide.” (Garreth Reese)

Herod’s “Second” Temple on the Temple Mount

King Herod the Great began renovations on the Second Temple approximately 20-19 BC. The entire temple expansion, including the massive Temple Mount, was not completed until approximately 62-64 AD, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.



» Vss. 13-15

- “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” see Exodus 3.6; Matthew 22.32.
- “glorified his servant Jesus” identifies Jesus with the “servant” of Isaiah 52.13-53.12.
- Whose power healed the man? The One they had rejected! Notice the contrasts Peter makes in these verses:

- Vs. 13: Jesus was glorified by God, the very one they had delivered up and denied before Pilate.
- Vs. 14: Jesus is the Holy One and just, but through injustice they had denied Him and asked for a murderer instead!
- Vs. 15: Jesus is the Author of Life, raised from the dead by God as witnessed by the apostles, yet they had killed him.
- » Vs. 16, as we noted in vss. 3-5, it does not seem that this man possessed any faith that he was about to be healed. So, why does Peter make such a big point about “faith” in this passage. Consider Matthew 17.19-21 where we see a time when the apostles failed to heal a man. Why did they fail? They lacked faith! Returning to Acts 3, the point is that the lame man was healed because Peter and his fellow apostles now had faith in Jesus. And as we move forward in the sermon, Peter’s point is that if the apostles’ faith in Jesus resulted in the lame man being healed, their faith in Jesus would result in their salvation!

They needed to respond (vss. 17-26)

- » Vs. 17, Peter states that both the people and their rulers crucified the Lord in igno-

rance. One might find this hard to believe, but we need to understand that they were not ignorant because they could not know, but because they chose not to know. The people were blinded by their reliance on their teachers, the rulers were blinded by their traditions. Scripture confirms that the people did this in ignorance, Luke 23:34; I Cor. 2:8.

- » Vs. 18, note that “mouth” is singular while “prophets” is plural. These multiple prophets spoke with one mouth.
- » Vs. 19, a likely parallel to Acts 2.38. Repentance demands a positive response, not simply ceasing from sin. Here the response is termed as the need to “turn back” (“be converted” in some translations. Baptism fits as the means of turning back.
- » Vss. 20-21, it is possible that the “times of refreshing” is analogous to the gift of the Spirit in Acts 2.38. However, it seems that Peter has a future event in view. The apostles knew that Jesus would return again (Acts 1.9-11). In my opinion, Peter is pointing to two blessings found only in Christ: “times of refreshing” now as they are in right relationship with God, the final “restoring” of all things at the return of Jesus.
- » Vss. 22-23, Peter quotes from Dt. 18:15-19, a prophecy the Jews recognized as being Messianic, cf. John 1:21ff. Jesus is the One that all must now hear, John 12:48.
- » Vss. 24-26, the people were faced with a choice. Moses and the prophets bore witness that Jesus is God’s chosen servant and prophet. The apostles bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus (vss. 14-15). The Father sent Jesus to bless all families, beginning with the Jews. Would they turn to Him or not?

“In the name of Jesus Christ”

When the Scriptures speak of God’s name, they speak of His power and authority. Thus the Psalmist says we are to “ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name” (Psalm 29.2) and that we should “sing the glory of His name” (Psalm 66.2). The various names of God in the Old Testament emphasize His power and authority. So, He is “God Almighty” (Genesis 17.1) and “Lord of hosts” (Psalm 24.10). Returning to Acts, Peter’s sermon on Pentecost began with quoting from Joel 2.28-32 where it was prophesied that “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2.17). Furthermore, responding to the gospel required being “baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ”. Salvation would not be obtained by man’s power, but by God’s power!

In Acts 3 we saw that a lame man was healed through faith in Jesus’ name (vss. 6,16). He was not healed by any power inherent in Peter or the other apostles, but by the power of Jesus as bestowed through the Holy Spirit. The man was healed because the apostles had faith that Jesus, the King, had the power to heal the man!

The name of Jesus Christ should be important to each of us for a couple of reasons. First, as we read in Colossians 3.17, all we do should be done in His name. Our lives should be lived in recognition of the power and authority of our King. But that’s not the only reason the name of Jesus is important to Christians. Jesus’ power and authority is why we can be saved, not just the initial forgiveness of our sins, but security from the evil one (John 10.27-28; Romans 8.31ff). Jesus is now our exalted King. Our lives should be lived in His name; our new life is possibly because of His name!



LESSON 6: WHY DO THE NATIONS RAGE? (ACTS 4; 5.17-42)

One thousand years before Jesus' life on earth, David penned these words: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed..." (Psalm 2.1-2). As we will see in this lesson, those words would form part of the apostles' prayer following Peter and John's trial before the Jewish rulers (Acts 4.25-26). They understood that the world's rebellion against God and His Anointed did not cease when Jesus was crucified. The Lord had even told them that "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:18-19)

So far in our study of Acts we have seen the tremendous success of the Kingdom. 3000 obeyed the gospel at Pentecost (Acts 2.41) and that number would quickly rise to 5000 (Acts 4.4). However, opposition wasn't far behind and Acts 4 marks the point in the narrative when Satan began exerting his power against God's people. Note, that in this lesson we are going to focus on two cases where the Jewish leaders sought to quiet the apostles. We are skipping over Acts 5.1-16 in this lesson, but will consider it in our next lesson as we consider another type of opposition.

Notes From The Text

4.1-4, Two Responses

- » Opposition from rulers (vss. 1-3)
 - "captain of the temple" likely referring to Levite sentinels who stood guard in the temple (cf. 2Chron. 16.1-19).
 - "Sadducees" possessed greater political power than the Pharisees as they more readily accepted the rule of Rome and the Herodian dynasty. They held that only the 5 books of Moses, the Torah, were canonical. They denied the existence of angels, of spirits and of the resurrection.
 - "arrested them", note this apparently included the man who had been healed (see vs. 14).
 - "for it was already evening", Jewish law forbade trials at night, which was ignored in the multiple trials of Jesus.
- » Acceptance by many (vs. 4)

4.5-22, Peter & John On Trial

- » Vs. 6, "Annas the high priest and Caiaphas" Caiaphas was the ruling high priest (Matthew 26.3,57), but Annas had served as high priest from AD 6-15 and remained very influential.
- » Vs. 7, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" See Acts 3.6,16.

- » Vs. 8, “then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit...”
 - Contrast Peter and John in this passage with the picture we find of the apostles in John 20.19. What could explain the transformation of men who had hidden in fear, but who would now boldly proclaim Jesus before the men they once feared? Only the resurrection of Jesus!
 - Note the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in Matthew 10.17-20.
- » Vs. 10, in essence the same message Peter and John had proclaimed in Acts 3.12-16.
- » Vs. 11, see Psalm 118.22; Matthew 21.42. That “builders” can’t recognize the “cornerstone” reveals just how spiritually blind they had become.
- » Vs. 12, “by which we must be saved”. “In the Greek, the ‘we’ is emphatic, since it is the last word in the sentence. It means we – whether we are priests, elders, scribes, fishermen, or ex-beggars – all of us must be saved by faith and obedience to Christ if we are going to be saved at all!” (Garreth Reese)
- » Vss. 16-17, compare with John 11.47-53.
- » Vss. 19-20, Peter and John provide the model for how we should respond in such situations: while they subjected themselves to man, their allegiance was to God and they could only do and teach what God had willed. Peter concluded by appealing to these judges to “judge”. What a dilemma the Sanhedrin were in.

4.23-37, Prayer & The Lord’s Response

- » Vs. 24, “they lifted their voices together to God and said...”
 - The answer to opposition is not to curse or rail, but to pray!
 - “Sovereign” = “despot”
 - Note that they address God as the Creator of all. The doctrine of creation is fundamental to our faith, for God’s role as Creator is what makes Him sovereign over all.
- » Vss. 25-26, see Psalm 2.1-2.
- » Vss. 27-28, Jesus’ death was foreordained by God (see Acts 2.23; 3.18). But Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and the Israelites all acted in opposition to God; they were the fulfillment of Psalm 2.1-2. Only Sovereign God could thus use the willful opposition of man to bring about His plan!
- » Vss. 29-30, note that they did not pray for deliverance, but for boldness! It was enough that God take note of the threats; they trusted that He would ultimately take care of that. What they needed was the boldness to continue His work in the face of opposition.
- » Vs. 31, this was God’s immediate response. The fuller response is found in vss. 32-37; God granted their request, and the Kingdom continued to flourish!
- » Vss. 34-37, we will consider these verses more in our next lesson as they furnish the context for the sin of Ananias and Sapphira.

5.17-26, The Apostles Arrested... Twice

- » Vs. 17, impossible to know how much time had elapsed. Perhaps a few months since Pentecost, but perhaps significantly longer. Note that the attitude of the

high priest and other rulers was quite different from the view of the people (vs. 13).

- » Vs. 18, “public prison” refers to the area of confinement where robbers and murderers would have been held.
- » Vs. 20, “all the words of this Life” i.e. eternal life (see Acts 11.18; 13.46).

5.27-40, Gamaliel’s Advice

- » Vs. 28, “you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us” Had they forgotten their own words? See Matthew 27.25.
- » Vs. 34, Gamaliel was Saul’s teacher (see Acts 22.3).
- » Vs. 36, according to Josephus, Theudas was a self-proclaimed prophet, Theudas promised to separate the waters of the Jordan river in order to afford his followers easy passage upon dry ground. The claims of Theudas quickly drew the attention of the Roman army, which managed to destroy the rebellion, to disrupt and capture many of the participants, and to behead Theudas himself.
- » Vs. 37, Judas led a rebellion in AD 6. It was also brutally put down by the Romans.
- » Vs. 40, he beating would have been 39 stripes as allowed by the Law (see Deuteronomy 25.3).

5.41-42, The Gospel Marches On

* Vs. 41, note Matthew 5.10-12. Suffering is not pleasant, but we are blessed because man’s opposition means we have a reward in heaven.

* Vs. 42, the apostles remained firm in their conviction that they “must obey God rather than men” (vs. 29).

Blessed Are Those Who Take Refuge In Him

Psalm 2:4–12 (ESV)

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.

5 Then he will speak to them in his
wrath, and terrify them in his fury,
saying,

6 “As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill.”

7 I will tell of the decree:
The LORD said to me, “You are my
Son; today I have begotten you.

8 Ask of me, and I will make the
nations your heritage, and the
ends of the earth your possession.

9 You shall break them with a rod of

iron and dash them in pieces like
a potter’s vessel.”

10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.

11 Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.

12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and
you perish in the way, for his
wrath is quickly kindled.

Blessed are all who take refuge in
him.

The nations are still raging against the Lord and His Anointed; the nations continue to persecute the citizens of the Kingdom. However, the opposition of Satan and his minions will not and cannot change the reality of the situation: God has established His Son as King, and those who take refuge in Him are blessed!



LESSON 7: THE TESTING OF GOD'S PEOPLE (ACTS 5.1-16; 6.1-7)

God had ransomed a people before. Israel had been brought out of Egyptian bondage by the mighty acts of God. Jehovah led them through the Red Sea, destroying their enemies in the process. He provided for their every need, supplying water where there was none and causing manna to appear every morning. And when hostile forces attacked, the Lord was on Israel's side (see Exodus 17.8ff). Israel was a redeemed and blessed people, yet as the apostle Paul wrote, "with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (1Corinthians 10.5). Paul went on to relate why Israel was overthrown: they sinned by violating the Lord's commands and they grumbled against the Lord and His chosen servant, Moses.

In our last lesson we noted how the apostles maintained their faith in the Lord even when confronted with persecution. But what would happen to the Lord's people, the Kingdom of God's Son, when faced with the same trials which waylaid Israel?

Notes From The Text

5.1-10, The Sins of Ananias & Sapphira

- » I find this note interesting regarding the inclusion of this episode in the history of God's people: "It is surely an evidence of Bible inspiration that the following narrative should have been included into Luke's glowing record of the growth, courage, unity, and generosity of the early church. A strictly human author, guided solely by biased, human impulses, might well have chosen to omit this unsavory episode." (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vs. 1, Ananias: a common name. Means "Jehovah has been gracious."
- » Vs. 2, The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not that they withheld a portion of what they sold, cf. vs. 4, but that they gave only part, while claiming that was the whole portion of what they had received. Perhaps they were hoping to receive the same praise as Barnabas (Acts 4.36-37).
- » Vs. 3
 - Remember that Peter had been filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.1-4). The ability to "discern between spirits" was a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12.10).
 - "Satan has filled your heart": Note that later Peter said "why is it that you have contrived the deed in your heart" (vs. 4). So, we see that Satan had planted the idea, or placed the temptation, but it was their choice to give in.
 - "lie to the Holy Spirit" the apostles were filled with the Spirit (Acts 2.1-4) and acted in the name of Jesus (Acts 3.6). Just as persecuting the church is the same as persecuting Christ (see Acts 9.4), so lying to the apostles was to lie to the Spirit that empowered them.
- » Vs. 5, why such a harsh punishment? Many reasons might be given, but it would

seem that the infancy of the church played a prominent role in the meeting out of swift justice. God's people, like Israel before them, needed to be impressed early on that the consequences of sin are severe (see Lev. 10.1-3). This was accomplished as we read "great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things" (vs. 11).

5.11-16, Continued Growth

- » Vs. 12 "many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles." Remember that these signs were meant to establish the apostles as witnesses to Jesus' life, death and resurrection (see Acts 1.8). It is also significant that up to this point only the apostles possessed miraculous abilities.
- » Vs. 13, The phrase "none of the rest dared join them" is difficult. It cannot mean that no one else joined the church, for the next verse states otherwise. The phrase likely means that no-one of Ananias' character joined himself to the people of God.
- » Vs. 16, up to this point the apostles had only born witness in Jerusalem. However, news of the gospel and of the power of the Spirit had spread. This is a precursor to the spread of the gospel foretold by Jesus in Acts 1.8.

6.1-6, Threat of Division

- » Vs. 1
 - "complaint" is also translated as "grumbling" in Philippians 2.14; 1Peter 4.9. It's always a problem when those who've been delivered by God find reason for grumbling and complaining, see Exodus 16.7-9; Numbers 11.1).
 - "Hellenists... widows" the Hellenists refers to the Jews who grew up and lived outside of Palestine. These may have only spoken Greek and not Aramaic. They likely would have developed tastes different from their "Hebrew" kinsmen, but it is doubtful that there was any difference in devotion to God. Significantly, many Jews thought it virtuous to be buried in the land of Israel and would move there in their latter years. This left behind a large number of Hellenist widows.
 - "neglected" while we would hope that this was a mere oversight, the term used here implies intention. One well regarded lexicon suggests this reading of the text: "because when help was being given out each day, their widows got nothing." (Louw-Nida). The unity of God's people was threatened (see Acts 4.32)!
 - "daily distribution" there is evidence that Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had begun a daily and weekly distribution of food to needy Jews. It would seem that the early Christians had continued this practice for their needy members.
- » Vs. 2, Moses had also delegated important work to others so he could focus on teaching the people and interceding for them (see Exodus 18.19-21).
- » Vs. 3, note that the qualities are similar to those of the men selected by Moses (Exodus 18.21). "Full of the Spirit" would not seem to indicate that these men possessed miraculous abilities. We see no evidence that anyone other than the apos-

bles performed miracles and signs until after the apostles laid their hands on the 7 who were chosen (vs. 6,8; see Acts 8.18). It would seem that this is a statement of character, i.e. men who are truly spiritual and bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

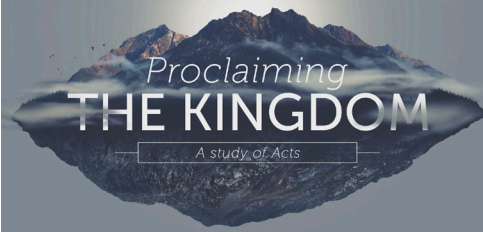
- » Vs. 4, taking care of these physical needs was important and vital to the unity of the early church. Yet, even then the apostles understood that it wasn't what was most important.
- » Vs. 5, each man listed had a Greek name, indicated they were selected from the ranks of the Hellenists. One was even noted as a proselyte, thus a Gentile by birth.
- » Vs. 6, Moses had also laid his hands on Joshua, imparting to him "the spirit of wisdom" (see Numbers 27.18,23; Deuteronomy 34.9).

6.7, Continued Growth

- » "a great many of the priests because obedient to the faith". It is estimated that at least 18,000 ordinary priests (who served in 24 rotations) served in the Jerusalem temple. It is unlikely that any of the chief priests responded to the gospel, given their earlier opposition to the apostles (Acts 4; 5.17ff).

The Kingdom Succeeds Where Israel Failed

Israel failed in the wilderness; they continued to sin and constantly grumbled. So, why did Christ's Kingdom succeed where Israel failed? First, remember God's promise that the citizens of the Kingdom would receive a new heart and spirit (Ezekiel 36.25-27; Jeremiah 31.31-34; Acts 2.38). However, there's more to it. We've previously noted how the early church was devoted to the teachings of the apostles (Acts 2.42; cf. Acts 2.46; 4.33; 6.2,4). Their teaching would have included the Lord's admonitions regarding holiness, contentment and love for each other. God's blessings result from spiritual people following spiritual teachings. That is what the apostle Paul meant when he said, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5.25). That is why the Kingdom succeeds where Israel failed.



LESSON 8: THOSE WHO REJECT THE KINGDOM (ACTS 6.8-7.60)

Over the last couple of lessons we've noted how the citizens of God's Kingdom dealt with opposition. Persecution from the Jewish leaders did not stop the proclamation of the gospel or hinder the growth of the Kingdom (see Acts 5.42). Nor did internal problems such as sin or even disharmony in the group (see Acts 6.7). But Satan wasn't through trying to derail the progress of God's Kingdom. The Lord had foretold that "the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God" (John 16.2). And who would commit such heinous acts against citizens of the Kingdom? Those who claimed to be the true people of God.

Notes From The Text:

6.8-15, Stephen Placed On Trial

- » Vs. 8, Stephen is the first person, outside of the apostles, mentioned as possessing miraculous abilities. Phillip will also use these gifts (see Acts 8.6). Recall that the apostles had laid their hands on both men (Acts 6.6; see 8.18).
- » Vs. 9, "freedmen" were emancipated slaves. This refers to Jews who had been set free and moved back to Jerusalem where they established a synagogue. There is some debate whether one synagogue is referenced in this passage, or four. Note that Saul/Paul was from the region of Cilicia, so likely a member of that particular synagogue.
- » Vs. 11, blasphemy was punishable by death, see Leviticus 24.16; Deuteronomy 13.6-10.
- » Vs. 13, they had charged Stephen with blasphemy. Now we see how they equated Stephen's message with blasphemy against God, for in their minds to "speak against" the Law of Moses and "this place" i.e. the Jerusalem Temple was to speak against God. The Jews held both as sacred. Keep this in mind as you read Stephen's defense in chapter 7.
- » Vs. 14, Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple (Matthew 24.1-2) and the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5.17-20).
- » Vs. 15, if a lame man walking could not move the hearts of the council, neither would Stephen's angelic face.

7.1-53, Stephen's Defense

Normally, when we think of a "defense" we think of someone giving proof of their innocence. However, in his defense Stephen turned the tables on his accusers. It was they, not he, who had rejected God and all of His messengers. The Jews had charged Stephen with speaking against Moses and the Temple. Stephen's recounting of Israelite history showed that 1) God's presence was not tied to the Jerusalem temple and 2) they had rejected Moses, and now they had rejected the very Son of God!!



- » Vss. 2-3, God appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans (see Genesis 12.1-3).
- » Vs. 4, God brought Abraham out of Haran (see Genesis 11.31-32).
- » Vs. 5, Even though Abraham was promised the land of Canaan, he never received any of it as his inheritance (note Genesis 12.7).
- » Vss. 6-7, God foretold that Abraham's descendants would live in a foreign land (see Genesis 15.13-14).
- » Vs. 8, the covenant of circumcision and the growth of Abraham's family (see Genesis 17).
- » Vs. 9, Joseph was sold into slavery into Egypt by his brothers. Note that Israel's rejection of God's chosen servants dates back to the time of the patriarchs!
- » Vs. 10, God heard and rescued Joseph while he was in Egypt (see Genesis 41).
- » Vss. 11-16, famine in the promised land led to Israel's relocation to Egypt. God provided for them in that land (see Genesis 42-45). Jacob (Israel) died in Egypt, but later his bones were taken to Shechem (see Genesis 49.33-50.14).
- » Vss. 17-22, God kept His promise to make Israel a great nation while they were in Egypt (see Exodus 1.7). While a new Pharaoh oppressed the people, Moses was born and rescued (see Exodus 1.8-2.10).
- » Vss. 23-29, Moses tried to rescue his brethren, but he was rejected (see Exodus 2.11-22). Israel continued to reject God's chosen servants.
- » Vss. 30-34, the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush at Mount Sinai. One of the holiest sites in Israel's history was well outside the borders of Canaan. God's presence was not limited to a glorious temple, but could also be found in a burning bush.
- » Vss. 35-41, Moses was God's chosen redeemer, performing both wondrous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the wilderness (Exodus 7-12). Moses also foretold that God would raise up another prophet after him (Deuteronomy 18.15-18). God

spoke to Moses, giving him the Law, but the people refused to obey him. They desired to return to Egypt and made an idol to worship (Exodus 32).

- » Vss. 42-43, the golden calf was just the first of many times when Israel turned to idols. Their idolatry would lead to Israel's exile in Babylon (see Amos 5.25-27).
- » Vss. 44-47, before the Temple, Israel had the tabernacle with them in the wilderness. The Temple was not constructed until Solomon was king. Stephen's point seems to be this: there had already been a change in the dwelling place of the Lord when the temple was constructed. God's dwelling place has changed again: He no longer dwells in the temple, but in His people, cf. Eph. 2:19-22; John 4:20-24.
- » Vss. 48-50, quotation from Isaiah 66.1-2. We need to understand what a shocking point Stephen was making. He was addressing the rulers of the people, those who were closely associated with the temple and who derived their power from its presence. Stephen had just declared that structure had no significance anymore. God did not dwell there, nor could He have ever been contained by it! Cf. 1Kings 8.27.
- » Vss. 51-53, Stephen had recounted how Israel always rejected God's messengers. Their ancestors had murdered the prophets, but they had murdered the very One the prophets spoke of! For the connection between angels and the Law see Galatians 3.19; Hebrews 2.2.

7.54-60, The Martyrdom of Stephen

- » Vs. 55, they had accused Stephen of speaking against the Temple, but Stephen was granted a glimpse of the true holy place (see Hebrews 8.1-2).
- » Vs. 56, see Daniel 7.13-14.
- » Vs. 58, stoning was the punishment for blasphemy (Leviticus 24.14-16). The garments being laid at the feet of Saul may indicate that he was taking responsibility for the proceedings.
- » Vss. 59-60, they had accused Stephen of blaspheming God, but he placed the utmost faith in God.



LESSON 9: THE WORD GOES FORTH (ACTS 8)

The Lord had told the apostles that they would “be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1.8). Jerusalem had been the setting of Acts 1-7, but beginning with chapter 8 we see the gospel starting to spread to surrounding areas. What was probably unforeseen by the apostles and saints in Jerusalem was that persecution would pave the way for the word to go forth into new areas.

Notes From The Text:

Vss. 1-4, The Disciples Are Scattered

- » Vs. 1
 - Saul/Paul would long remember the stoning of Stephen (see Acts 22.18-20).
 - Recall the Lord’s commission in Acts 1.8. The apostles had witnessed for the Lord in Jerusalem, now the gospel would go forth to Judea and Samaria.
- » Vs. 3, see Acts 26.10-11; Galatians 1.13.
- » Vs. 4, the saints did not flee in terror, but took the message of the gospel with them. Like the apostles, the saints maintained that “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4.20).

Vss. 5-25, Samaria

- » Vs. 5, the Samaritans were the product of Assyria resettling the territory of Israel with other displaced people (see 2Kings 17.24ff). They adopted Jehovah as their God, but did not worship at the Temple in Jerusalem or strictly follow the Mosaic Law (note Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4). There was mutual hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans (see John 4.9; Luke 9.51-54). It may be that the ancient capital of Samaria is intended, but some believe Philip went to Shechem which was then the chief city of the Samaritans.
- » Vs. 6, note that the signs prompted the people to pay attention to the message, cf. Mark 16.20.
- » Vs. 9, sorcery was and is forbidden by God (Exodus 22.18; Galatians 5.19-21). That Simon did not possess legitimate power was evident when his magic was compared with the signs performed by Philip.
- » Vs. 12, true belief compels one to follow the Lord’s commands. The Lord said those who believe AND are baptized will be saved (Mark 16.16). These Samaritans responded in faith just as those at Pentecost had done (Acts 2.38).
- » Vs. 13, Simon knew when something was fake, and clearly the wonders performed by Philip were real! This demonstration of God’s power prompted Simon to believe the message and to respond by being baptized. Sadly, those with Calvinistic views teach that Simon didn’t really believe, but was feigning sincerity. They read into the text what is not there and pervert the truth with their false teachings.

- » Vs. 14, recall that the apostles had remained in Jerusalem when the rest of the disciples scattered (vs. 1). The gospel being accepted by the Samaritans (who were not Jews) was a significant step in the broadening of God’s Kingdom, thus Peter and John were selected to visit these new disciples. Recall that both Peter and John had been in Samaria with Jesus (John 4) and that John had been one who wished to call down fire on the Samaritans who would not receive his Lord (Luke 9.54).
- » Vss. 15-17, I do not believe this is referring to the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (cf. Acts 2.38). To enter the Kingdom is to be born of both water and Spirit (John 3.5), and these believing Samaritans would have received the promised Spirit when they responded in faith by being baptized. I believe the apostles recognized the need for these Samaritan disciples to receive “gifts of the Spirit” (i.e. speaking in tongues, healing, etc.) in order to confirm that they too had been accepted by God. This they received through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, just as the seven had received gifts of the Spirit in Acts 6.6.
- » Vss. 18-19, Note: Philip had gifts of the Spirit, but could not impart them to others. Only the apostles could do so. Simon was now a Christian, but he was still susceptible to temptation. He had once enjoyed the praise and favor of others because of his “abilities”. He now wished to have the true ability and to receive favor because of it. Satan was still tempting him just as he always had.
- » Vss. 20-23, Peter did not say that Simon had never believed or that he was a complete reprobate. His heart was not right with God, but repentance was still open to him (cf. 1John 1.8-10)!

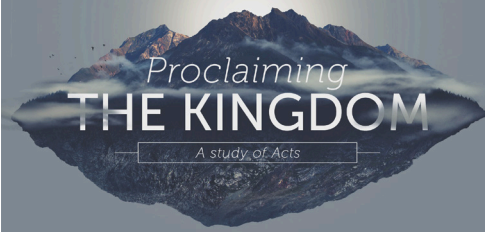


Vss. 26-40, A Eunuch From Ethiopia

- » Vs. 26, note that the Lord did not send an angel to the eunuch, but to Philip. The responsibility to proclaim the gospel lies with us “earthen vessels” (see 2Corinthians 4.7).
- » Vs. 27, Ethiopia is not the modern nation, but the ancient kingdom of Cush, lying just south of Egypt. The Romans believed it to be the southern boundary of the earth. This eunuch would have traveled several hundred miles to Jerusalem in order to worship. However, he would not have been able to enter the Temple (see Deuteronomy 23.1). But the Lord had promised a time when even a foreign eunuch would be accepted (see Isaiah 56.3-8).
- » Vs. 29, “His conversion took place through the agency of both an angel and the Spirit. But neither saved the Ethiopian by some direct, miraculous operation on his heart! Instead, both appeared to Philip, who in turn preached the gospel to the eunuch (cf. Rom. 1:16-17; 10:17).” (Robert Harkrider)
- » Vs. 31, his honesty is admirable. He was an important official, entrusted with the queen’s business. Yet, he did not claim to know what he did not understand. Likely his confusion stemmed from a failure to harmonize Isaiah’s words with the common conception of the conquering Messiah.
- » Vss. 32-33, see Isaiah 53.7-8.
- » Vs. 36, Philip had preached Jesus (vs. 35) and the message of the Kingdom would have included how one could enter the Kingdom: baptism.
- » Vs. 37, while this verse is not found in some manuscripts, the profession of faith in Jesus is central to the gospel (see Mark 16.16).
- » Vs. 38, the very word “baptize” argues for immersion in water, as does this passage. If sprinkling or pouring were baptism, there would be no need for both men to enter the water.
- » Vs. 40, Philip would remain in this area (see Acts 21.8).

Kingdom Takeaways:

1. **Power is in the word.** In this chapter we have seen the working of miraculous abilities, direct guidance from the Holy Spirit and even the intervention of angels. But none of these saved men and women. It was the “good news” proclaimed that led to faith and salvation (see vs. 12). We have the same opportunity as the early saints to “preach the word” wherever we go, for that contains the power of salvation (see Romans 1.16-17)!
2. **We all enter the Kingdom in the same way.** No one would have claimed that the Samaritans had much in common with the Jews. The eunuch from Ethiopia had even less in common. However, all responded in the same way to the gospel (Acts 2.38; 8.12,36-38). There’s only one scriptural way of entering the Kingdom, rebirth by water and Spirit (see John 3.5).



LESSON 10: THE LORD'S CHOSEN INSTRUMENT (ACTS 9.1-31)

The Lord promised that when His Kingdom was established, “all the nations shall flow to it” (Isaiah 2.2). While on the earth Jesus stated that “I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10.16) and commissioned His disciples to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28.19). What had not been revealed to the apostles and would come as a shock to the early saints in the Kingdom was that the Lord would choose the chief persecutor of the church as His “chosen instrument... to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9.15).

Notes From The Text

Vss. 1-9, On The Road To Damascus

- » Vs. 1, see Acts 8.1-3; 22.4.
- » Vs. 2,
 - Based on what Paul relates in Acts 26.11, Damascus was not the first city where Saul persecuted Christians. Damascus was the ancient capital of Syria and lay ~140 miles northeast of Jerusalem.
 - Christianity is frequently referred to as “the Way” in Acts (see Acts 19.9,23; 22.4; 24.14,22). It’s a fitting description as following Jesus is the ONLY Way to the Father (John 14.6; cf. Matthew 7.13-14).
- » Vs. 3, Paul later recounts in Acts 22.6; 26.13 that the great light occurred at noon and it was brighter than the sun.
- » Vs. 4, note that the Lord speaks in the present tense. To persecute His people is to persecute Him. He and His people are one (see John 15.1-6).
- » Vs. 5, the Lord’s question, “is it hard for you to kick against the goads” is not found in all manuscripts. However, it is found in vs. 14. To ‘kick against the goads’ is an expression derived from the action of a stubborn ox, which would hurt only itself when it would kick against the ox goad of its master.
- » Vs. 6,
 - Just as the angel appeared to Philip and not to the Ethiopian eunuch, so the message of what Saul must do would be proclaimed by another man, not by the Lord Himself.
 - Note Acts 26.16-18 which records more of the Jesus’ conversation with Saul.
- » Vs. 7, some see a contradiction between this verse and Acts 22.9. However, the words for “hear” are different. They “heard” the sound, but did not understand what they “heard”. Also significant that these men saw the light, but were not blinded like Saul. Saul’s vision of the glorified Lord must have been what blinded him.

- » Vs. 9, this verse describes a man whose worldview had been upended. He now understand that Jesus was in fact the Christ; what remorse he must have felt!

Vss. 10-19, Saul Finds Out What He Must Do

- » Vs. 10, note the description of Ananias in Acts 22.12.
- » Vs. 15, Saul had to choose whether he would believe and follow or not (note Acts 26.19). But the Lord in His foreknowledge knew what Saul's decision would be. Furthermore, consider that the Lord's choosing of Saul was not in regards to his salvation, but that Saul would be His instrument to carry the gospel to the Gentiles.
- » Vs. 18, to get a full picture we must consider Paul's retelling in Acts 22. There we see that Saul was commanded to "Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22.16).



Vss. 20-25, Saul's Early Work In Damascus

- » Vs. 20, note the immediate effect of Saul's conversion. He went to Damascus to persecute the saints, but instead he proclaimed Jesus to his fellow Jews. Conversion is more than being baptized for the remission of sins; conversion is giving oneself wholly to the Lord's cause.
- » Vs. 22, "The term 'proving' is interesting. It translates a compound Greek term which signifies 'to bring together'. Here, it would suggest that Saul combined OT prophetic information regarding the Messiah, with historical facts about Jesus. He then argued the case that the Lord was the fulfillment of those declarations." (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vs. 23, Saul spent 3 years in Damascus and Arabia (Galatians 1.16-18). Note that the governor of Damascus was also looking to apprehend Saul (2Corinthians 11.32).

Vss. 26-31, Saul's Return To Jerusalem

- » Vs. 26, Saul's return to Jerusalem is also recounted in Galatians 1.18-19.
- » Vs. 27, Barnabas was again living up to his name, Acts 4.36-37. Barnabas would be a co-worker with Paul in future endeavors, Acts 11.25-26; 13.2-3.
- » Vs. 29, these were possibly the very same Hellenistic Jews to whom Stephen had preached Jesus (see Acts 6.8-14).
- » Vs. 30, note Acts 22.17-21.
- » Vs. 31, compare with how the chapter began. Saul may have been "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord", but the Lord is greater. Not only would His people continue to thrive, but the persecutor would become one of the Lord's greatest ambassadors!

Kingdom Takeaways

1. **The Kingdom Is Open To All!** In his letters the apostle Paul would refer to himself as the "foremost" of sinners (1Timothy 1.15), unworthy to be called an apostle (1Corinthians 15.9) and "the very least of all the saints" (Ephesians 3.8). Yet even Saul/Paul could have his sins forgiven (Acts 22.16). Truly, God loved us even when we were His enemies! (Romans 5.8)
2. **Conversion Doesn't End At Baptism.** While the Lord desired that Saul be saved from his sins, He required more from him than being baptized; the Lord called on Saul to be His "chosen instrument... to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9.15). He required this of Saul, even though it meant he would "suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9.16). Saul's conversion required him to be fully obedient to the will of the Lord (see Acts 26.19). Likewise, our conversion requires that we walk in the good works God has prepared for His workmanship (Ephesians 2.10).



LESSON 11: WHAT GOD HAS MADE CLEAN (ACTS 9.32-10.48)

Every Jew was familiar with the regulations laid out in Leviticus 11, for that was where God laid out their dietary restrictions, defining what was clean and what was unclean. And why was God so concerned that His people be able to discern between clean and unclean? “For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 11.45) The Jews understood that the Lord was concerned with more than just the food they ate; He wanted a people who were holy and set apart from any defilement. One application the people readily made was in regard to other nations; if they were the Lord’s holy nation, then it stood to reason that other nations were unholy.

However, God’s promise to Abraham was that through him all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12.3). The Lord also revealed that His true servant, the Messiah, would not only restore Israel, but would be “a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49.6). While on the earth Jesus proclaimed that he had “other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10.16). And so His final commission to His disciples was to teach not just Israel, but the nations (Matthew 28.19-20; Mark 16.15-16; Acts 1.8).

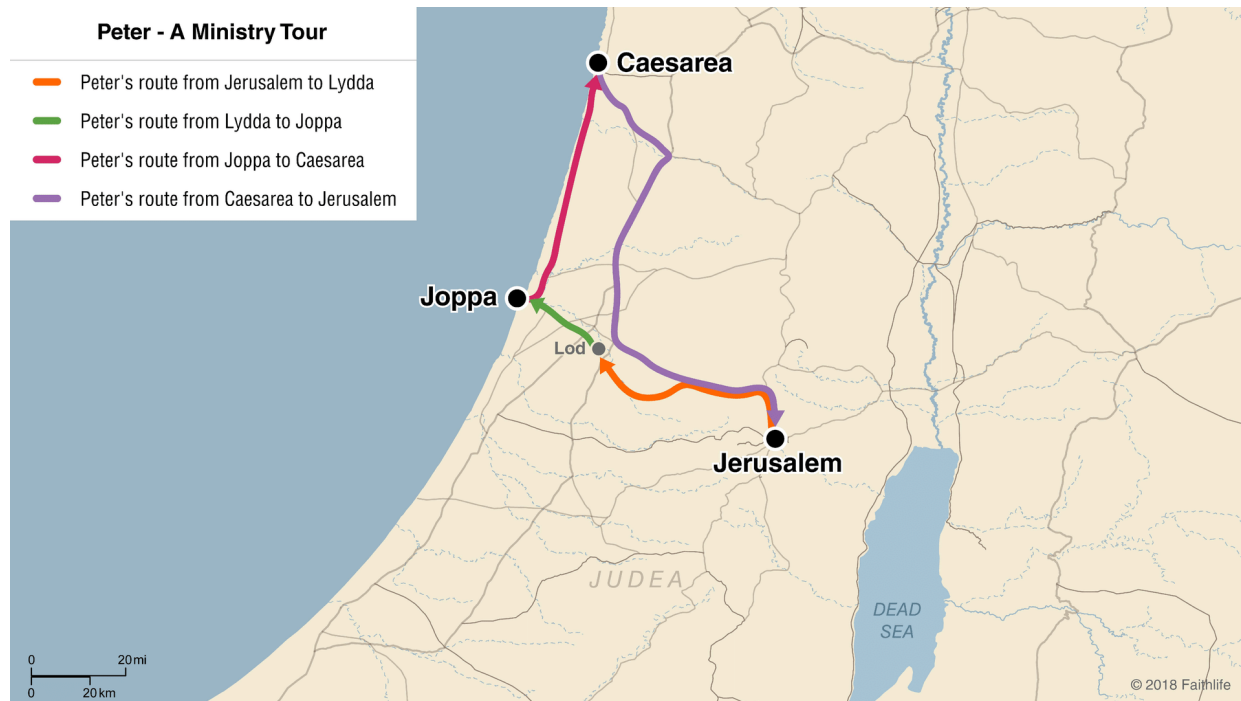
So far in our study of Acts we’ve noted how the gospel was proclaimed to those on the fringe of Jewish society. Proselytes were present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.11); Samaritans and worshipers from distant lands heeded the gospel call (Acts 8). But all of these had been affiliated with Judaism, even if only loosely. What about a true Gentile, a Roman no less? Was the gospel for him too?

Notes From The Text

9.32-43, Peter’s Travels

- » Vs. 32, Lydda was ~32 miles west of Jerusalem. Note there were already saints here, likely after the church in Jerusalem dispersed (Acts 8.1-4).
- » Vs. 35, Sharon was the coastal plain where the cities of Joppa and Caesarea were located.
- » Vs. 36, Joppa was located about 30 miles south of Caesarea and 35 miles NW of Jerusalem.
- » Vs. 37, common practice among the Jews was to bury the dead the same day they died. Their laying her in an upper room may indicate the hope that Peter would come and heal her.
- » Vs. 40, Peter’s actions were very similar to those of the Lord (see Mark 5.37-42).
- » Vs. 43, “The more scrupulous Jews regarded such an occupation as unclean, and avoided those who pursued it. The conduct of Peter here shows that he did not

carry his prejudices to that extent” (Hackett). One of the rabbis said: “It is impossible for the world to do without tanners; but woe to him who is a tanner.” A Jewess could sue for divorce if she discovered that her husband was a tanner. And yet Peter will have scruples on the housetop in the tanner’s house about eating food considered unclean. “The lodging with the tanner was a step on the road to eating with a Gentile” (Furneaux).” (Robertson’s Word Pictures)



10.1-8, The Lord’s Message To Cornelius

- » Vs. 1, Cornelius was a man of authority in that he was a centurion (over 100 soldiers) in the city of Caesarea, the Roman seat of power in Palestine. It has been reasoned that since Cornelius is a Latin name and Luke records that he was a part of the Italian regiment, that Cornelius was the head of all-Italian soldiers, one of the best the Romans had and probably the personal bodyguard of the Roman procurator of Palestine.
- » Vs. 2, the character of Cornelius
 - Devout. Note that this was how the Jews were described in Acts 2.5.
 - Feared God with all his household.
 - Gave alms generously to the people. “The people” would have been in reference to the Jewish people.
 - Prayed continually to God. The notion that God does not hear the prayers of sinners was spoken by the Pharisees (see John 9.31). No, God will not hear the rebellious, but He will answer those who are seeking (Matthew 7.7).
 - Yet, as good and devout as he was, Cornelius was not yet saved (note Acts 11.14).
- » Vs. 3, the ninth hour (3PM) was a traditional hour of prayer which accompanied the offering of the evening sacrifice (see Acts 3.1).
- » Vs. 4, “The word ‘memorial’ was used in the Old Testament of a vegetable sacrifice

which was burned on the altar together with frankincense and which produced a sweet, aromatic smoke which ascended toward heaven and, as it were, caught the attention of God and commended the worshiper's prayers to Him." (Garreth Reese)

- » Vs. 5, compare with Jonah 1.2-3. The prophet had been commanded by God to go and preach to the Gentiles, but he went to Joppa to flee from the Lord.

10.9-23, The Lord's Message To Peter

- » Vs. 9, the sixth hour was noon.
- » Vs. 12, note Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. According to the Law, these were unclean animals.
- » Vs. 15, the promise to Abraham was that all nations would be blessed through His seed, Gen. 12.3, and the prophets foretold that His Kingdom would be for all, Isaiah 2.2-3. Remember the commission of the Lord was that all were to be taught the gospel, Mark 16.15-16; Matt. 28.19; Acts 1.8.
- » Vs. 16, the repetition was to impress upon Peter that this was a message from God (see Genesis 41.32).
- » Vs. 22, note Acts 11.14.
- » Vs. 23, if Cornelius' servants were gentiles and not Jews, this action on Peter (and Simon's) part shows an expanding comprehension of God's acceptance of the nations.

10.24-33, Peter Arrives At Cornelius' Home

- » Vs. 24, Cornelius serves as an example to all of us. We should invite our friends and family to hear the word of God proclaimed.
- » Vss. 25-26, if Peter thought of himself as the first pope (as Catholics claim), why not accept worship? Worship is reserved for God alone (see Revelation 22.8-9).
- » Vs. 28, while the Law forbade intermarriage with the peoples of Canaan, the Law did not expressly forbid association with foreigners. However, that had become the general interpretation of conscientious Jews. While Peter's comprehension of God's plan was expanding, he did not yet fully comprehend that God was accepting the gentiles (note vss. 47-48).
- » Vs. 33, "Visions combined with the greatest preaching possible will not save one unless he has a responsive heart. God forces no one to be saved, although He wishes all would be (cf. 1Tim. 2.4; 2Pet. 3.9). We must condition our hearts that we listen to the gospel with 'readiness of mind' (cf. Acts 17.11; Rom. 6.17-18; James 1.21-25)." (Robert Harkrider)

10.34-43, Gentiles Hear Good News

- » Vs. 34, God shows no partiality, salvation is open to all (Romans 2.11). He expects us to emulate His character (James 2.1,9).
- » Vs. 36, Cornelius would have sworn allegiance to Caesar, acknowledging him as god. To believe the gospel, Cornelius would now have to acknowledge Jesus as "Lord of all".
- » Vs. 38, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism (see Matthew 3.16),

the event which confirmed He is God's anointed (see John 4.25-26).

- » Vs. 42, the good news of the Kingdom includes proclamation of Jesus as judge over all (see Acts 17.31; 2Timothy 4.1; 1Peter 4.5).
- » Vs. 43, see Acts 3.24; 1Peter 1.10-12.

10.44-48, God Accepts The Gentiles

- » Vss. 44-46, contrast with Acts 8.17-18. This was the way which the apostles received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.1-4).
- » Vs. 47, this was God's acknowledgment that Gentiles were accepted by Him (see Acts 15.7-9). This instance and the occurrence at Pentecost (Acts 2.1-4) are the only examples in Scripture of the Holy Spirit falling on men. Its uniqueness is evident in Peter's remark that the Gentiles "received the Holy Spirit just as we have".
- » Vs. 48, Cornelius and his family were baptized in the Holy Spirit, not as a means of salvation, but as a means of confirming that Gentiles are eligible for salvation. This is exactly the purpose it served, Acts 15.7-9; 11.15-17. That baptism in water was then commanded is clear proof that remission of sins can come only through baptism. "Isn't it strange that modern preachers tell us that baptism is not necessary, but the inspired apostle commanded baptism?" (Robert Harkrider)



LESSON 12: TRIUMPH OF THE KINGDOM (ACTS 11-12)

Throughout history, the Kingdom of God has been challenged on various fronts. In this class we will note how the Kingdom triumphed over two very different challenges: 1) the saints misunderstanding God's purpose in redeeming the Gentiles and 2) secular persecution of the church.

Notes From The Text

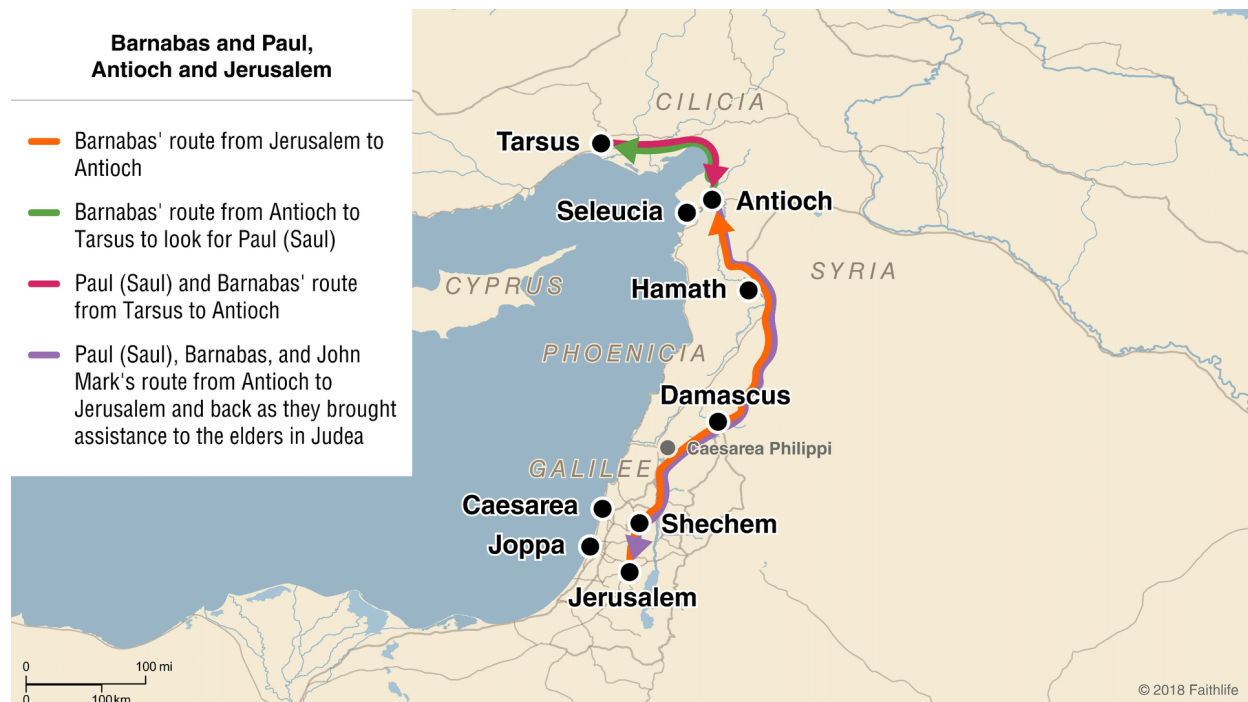
11.1-18, Peter Defends Going To The Gentiles

- » Vs. 1, recall that Cornelius had asked Peter to remain with him for some days (10.48). Peter must have done so because word had traveled ahead of him back to Judea.
- » Vs. 2, "the circumcision party" refers to a segment of Jewish Christians, those with the least understanding that the Old Law was passing away. Such a segment would continue to cause problems in the church (Acts 15).
- » Vs. 3, recall that Peter had the same misunderstanding (see Acts 10.28).
- » Vs. 12, these six brethren would provide valuable confirmation of all that transpired (see Acts 10.23).
- » Vs. 14, these words were not recorded in Acts 10.4-6. They are of extreme importance as they clearly show Cornelius was not saved, even though he was sincere and devout.
- » Vs. 15, see Acts 2.1-4. The uniqueness of the event is clear because Peter could not appeal to any other event than the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
- » Vs. 16, see Matthew 3.11; Acts 1.5.
- » Vs. 17, "the implication was clear. The Jewish brethren must cease at once their contention over what had happened at Caesarea. God had settled the matter. The Gentiles were to be granted status in the church, and that without submitting to elements of the Mosaic law. Additionally, there is this thought. If refusing baptism to the Gentiles would have been withstanding God, what is a person doing who refuses this divine ordinance for himself?" (WJ, 134)
- » Vs. 18
 - These Jewish brothers overcame deep prejudice because they were committed to finding the truth. When God's will was presented to them, they submitted themselves to that will.
 - True repentance does indeed lead to life (see 2Corinthians 7.10).

11.19-30, The Church In Antioch

- » Vs. 19
 - See Acts 8.1-4.
 - All three areas mentioned were heavily Greek, and each was represented on

the day of Pentecost, 2:9-10. The main point of the passage is to show that up until news of Cornelius' conversion spread, evangelistic efforts were focused only on the Jews and not the Gentiles.



- » Vs. 20
 - Antioch was located ~300 miles north of Jerusalem and was the third largest city of the Roman empire, boasting a population of 500,000 people.
 - Some translations say that they spoke to Greeks (non Jews) while other translations say they spoke to Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews). Context favors that they spoke to Greeks (non Jews).
- » Vs. 21, note that belief preceded turning to the Lord. The doctrine of “faith only” demands that salvation occurs at the moment when one believes. This passage only confirms what we’ve found throughout Acts. Those who believe must act on that belief: they turn to the Lord.
- » Vss. 22-24, fits what we know of Barnabas’ character (see Acts 4.36-37; 9.27).
- » Vs. 25, Tarsus was about a 100 mile journey by boat, more by land. Barnabas recognized that the Lord needed more workers in the field of Antioch, so he did not hesitate to go and get Saul.
- » Vs. 26, Antioch was the first church comprised of Jews AND Gentiles. It was now clear that the disciples were no longer a sect of Judaism, but something completely different. Thus they were called Christians, i.e. those associated with Christ.
- » Vs. 28, Claudius “reigned from A.D. 41-54. The historians Suetonius, Tacitus, and Josephus all mention famines during this period. Suetonius speaks of the reign of Claudius as being characterized by ‘continual scarcity’ (Claudius, 18), and Josephus describes a famine in which many people in Jerusalem died for lack of food (Antiquities, 20.2.5).” (Wayne Jackson)

- » Vs. 29, see 1Corinthians 16.2; 2Corinthians 8.1-6.
- » Vs. 30, this is the first mention of elders in the book of Acts. Their importance in the early church is apparent from what we read in Acts 14.23. Note that the famine was universal (vs. 28), but the church (as a collective body) was only sending to their fellow saints. This does not argue against a Christian's responsibility to help any and all who are in need. However, this does indicate that the church's responsibility is to aid other saints.

12.1-25, Herod Vs. The Church

- » Vs. 1, while the church had already faced persecution from the leaders of the Jews, but this marks the first time that a secular leader persecuted the church. Who was this Herod?
 - A grandson of Herod the Great. Aristobulus, whom Herod had killed, was his father.
 - Agrippa was a good friend of Gaius (Caligula), who became emperor in AD 37.
 - Agrippa was first given the territory that his uncle Philip had ruled (Iturea and Tracoonitis). He was given the territory that his uncle Antipas ruled in AD 39 (Galilee and Perea). Agrippa was proclaimed king instead of ethnarc.
 - Gaius (Caligula) died in AD 41 and was succeeded by Claudius. Claudius not only confirmed Agrippa in his kingdom, but added Judea and Samaria to his kingdom. Agrippa ruled over all this territory from AD 41-44.
- » Vs. 2, note the words of Jesus in Mark 10.35-40.
- » Vs. 3, Josephus confirms that Agrippa was "very ambitious to please the people" (Antiquities 19.7.3). The days of Unleavened Bread occurred immediately after Passover (see Exodus 12.14-18).
- » Vs. 4, Each squad consisted of 4 soldiers. The squads would watch over Peter in shifts, 2 guarding him in the cell and 2 standing outside the door (vs. 6). Why were such measures taken to guard one man? Recall what happened the last time Peter was imprisoned (Acts 5.17-21). Note: Passover (Greek pascha) was tragically translated as "Easter" in the KJV. This has led to much confusion over the years. However, there is no Scriptural evidence that the church celebrated any special day or holiday, aside from their weekly worship on the first day of the week.
- » Vs. 11, "There is the tone of a personal remembrance in these words, as though Luke has learned these details from Peter himself. There he was, at night, free, standing in the open street. He thinks about it for a moment. He is not dreaming! It has actually happened, and he is on the outside of the prison, a free man." (Garreth Reese)
- » Vs. 15,
 - Did they have no confidence in the prayers they were constantly offering (see vs. 5)?
 - It was a popular notion among the Jews that each person had an angel. It appears that some of the early church held to this concept. The Bible does not teach that every person has their own "guardian" angel, as is popularized in the

religious world, but it does teach that angels do minister to the saints (Hebrews 1.14).

- » Vs. 17, James the brother of Jesus (see Matthew 13.55; 1Corinthians 15.7).
- » Vs. 19, Roman law required that guards receive the same punishment that escaped prisoners were due to receive.
- » Vs. 20, Tyre and Sidon were in the Roman province of Syria, and thus not under the control of Herod. It may be that they taxed his goods in their seaports, thus incurring his wrath.
- » Vs. 22, Herod was familiar enough with the God of the Jews and their laws to understand that this kind of adulation was not fit for a man. However, he allows his ego to be stroked, thus incurring the wrath of God.
- » Vs. 23, Josephus recorded this event, stating that Herod died in five days. The year was AD 44.
- » Vs. 24, Herod had tried to stamp-out Christianity, but his efforts were futile. God prevailed, and His Kingdom continued to expand.
- » Vs. 25, John Mark was first introduced in vs. 12.



LESSON 13: TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH (ACTS 13)

“and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1.8 ESV) Chapter 13 begins the fulfillment of the third part of Jesus’ plan: spreading the gospel to the end of the earth. Luke prepared us for this moment by recording the conversion of Saul (Acts 9) the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10) and the work of Barnabas in Saul in Antioch (Acts 11,19-30; 12.25). Paul/Saul will be the primary focus of Acts 13-28 as he takes the gospel through much of the known world.

Notes From The Text

Vss. 1-3, Barnabas And Saul Set Apart

- » Vs. 1, “Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch” This was the same man who beheaded John the Baptist (Luke 9.7-9) and mocked Jesus (Luke 23.8-12). He, who was once a lifelong friend of a butcher, was now “brother” to the King of Kings!
- » Vs. 2, see Acts 9.15. The Lord revealed to Saul at his conversion the work he would be called to do.

Vss. 4-12, On The Island Of Cyprus

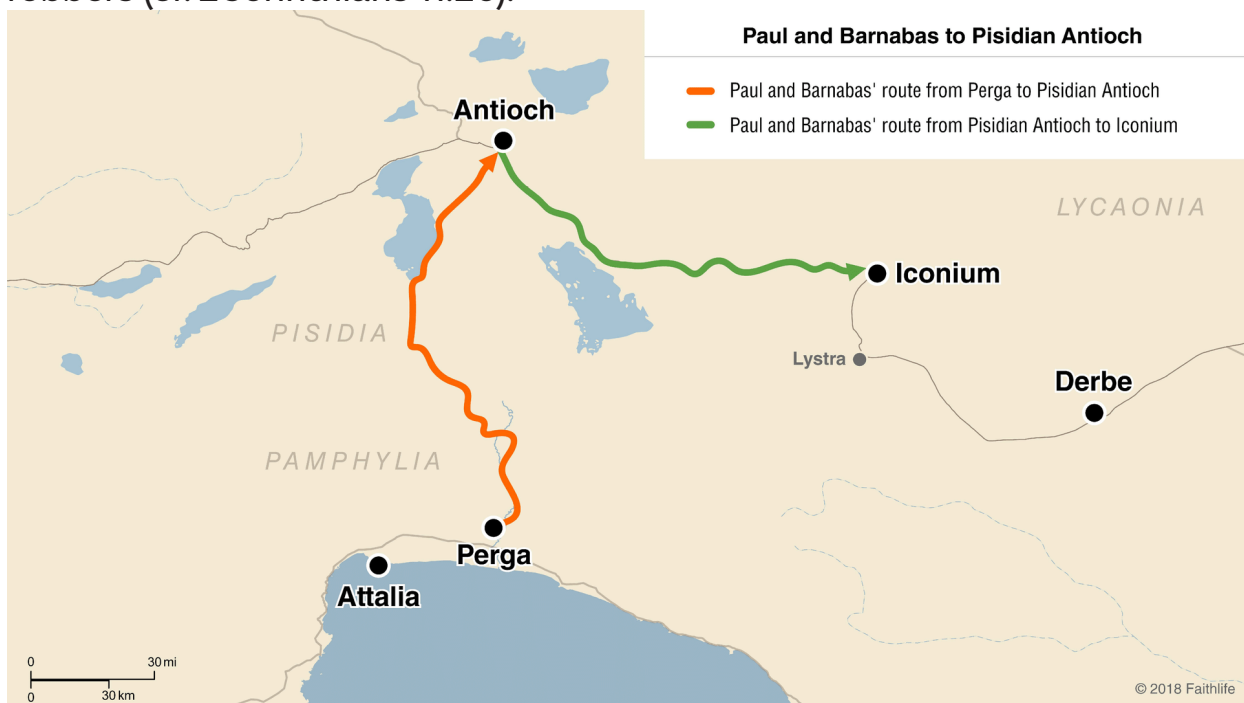
- » Vs. 4
 - Seleucia was the seaport of Syrian Antioch.
 - Cyprus: the homeland of Barnabas (see Acts 4.36).
- » Vs. 5
 - We will see that Saul/Paul made a habit of first preaching in the synagogues wherever he journeyed. While the gospel was to “the Jew first” (Romans 1.16), the synagogue would also provide Paul opportunities to read God-fearing Gentiles.
 - John’s role as “assistant” may very well have involved helping with menial tasks, but very likely included his preaching and perhaps sharing eyewitness testimony (note that the same word is found in Luke 1.2).
- » Vs. 6
 - Paphos was the headquarters of Roman rule on the island of Cyprus.



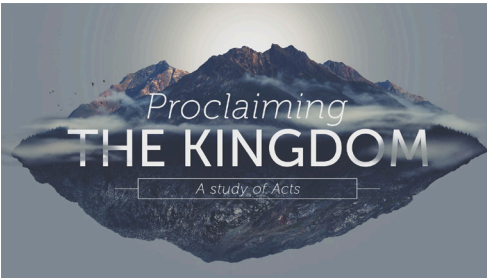
- “magician” = magus, the same word used to describe the “wise men” from the East in Matthew 2. “Bar-Jesus” simply means “son of Jesus/Joshua”.
- » Vs. 7, the Roman governor (proconsul) was described as a man of intelligence. He was intelligent enough to know truth when he finally heard it from Saul and Barnabas. So, he “sought to hear the word of God.”
- » Vs. 9, “It was customary to have a given name, in this case Saul (designating a Hebrew with a Jewish background), and a later name, in this case Paul (denoting a Roman with a Hellenistic background).” (Archaeological Study Bible)
- » Vs. 10
 - “you son of the devil” recall that Jesus had also referenced the spiritual heritage of his opponents (see John 8.44).
 - “will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?” Contrast with Malachi 3:1. Elymas was seeking to make it more difficult to follow the Lord. What a sad comment that is true of many who claim to be teachers of the Lord.
- » Vs. 11, “The teacher who had led so many into darkness now himself wandered around, trying to find someone to lead him by the hand.” (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vs. 12, The miracle had the intended effect! Sergius Paulus, when he saw the miracle, could only believe the amazing truth of God being delivered by Paul and Barnabas. (see Mark 16.20; Heb. 2.3-4)

Vss. 13-52, At Pisidian Antioch

- » Vs. 13, We are not told why John left, but we do know that Paul was upset by it and it was the source of a later dispute between Paul and Barnabas (see Acts 15.37-40).
- » Vs. 14, the trip from Perga to Antioch was ~100 miles and required trekking over the Taurus mountains. The road was notoriously dangerous, frequently harried by robbers (cf. 2Corinthians 11.26).



- » Vs. 16, “you who fear God” referenced Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism.
- » Vss. 17-41, Paul’s sermon at Antioch is one of the longest we have recorded from the apostle. His main points are as follows:
 - Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s dealings with Israel (vss. 17-26).
 - The Jews rejected Jesus, but ultimately fulfilled God’s purpose (vss. 27-29).
 - God fulfilled His promise to the fathers by raising Jesus from the dead (vss. 30-37).
 - Forgiveness and justification, which the Law could not provide, are available to all who believe in Jesus (vss. 38-39).
 - Beware lest you reject God’s promise (vss. 40-41).
- » Vs. 20, “The most common view currently is that this span includes about 400 years in Egypt, forty in the wilderness, and some ten years in the conquest of Canaan.” (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vs. 22, see Psalm 89.20-21; 1Samuel 13.14.
- » Vs. 23, the promise of the coming Messiah is throughout the Old Testament (see Gen. 3.15; 12.3; II Samuel 7.12; Isaiah 11.1; etc.)
- » Vs. 33, see Psalm 2.7.
- » Vs. 34, see Isaiah 55.3.
- » Vs. 35, see Psalm 16.10.
- » Vs. 40, see Habakkuk 1.5. “As punishment came ultimately upon the Hebrews in the form of the Babylonian captivity, so similarly God’s wrath finally will be visited upon those who reject the gospel. A temporal punishment came upon the Jews in A.D. 70, with the Roman invasion of Palestine; an ultimate judgment will occur at the second coming of Christ.” (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vs. 43, why would anyone need to be urged “to continue in the grace of God” if grace is irresistible as some teach?
- » Vs. 46, note that by rejecting the gospel one judges himself “unworthy of eternal life”. God does not predestine us to either salvation or condemnation; we choose for ourselves.
- » Vs. 47, see Isaiah 49.6.
- » Vs. 48, Recall that the Jews had thrust the word aside, and thus judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (vs. 46). The opposite occurs here: they glorify the word of the Lord and were thus “appointed to eternal life”.
- » Vs. 51, see Luke 9.5. Iconium was ~75 miles from Antioch.



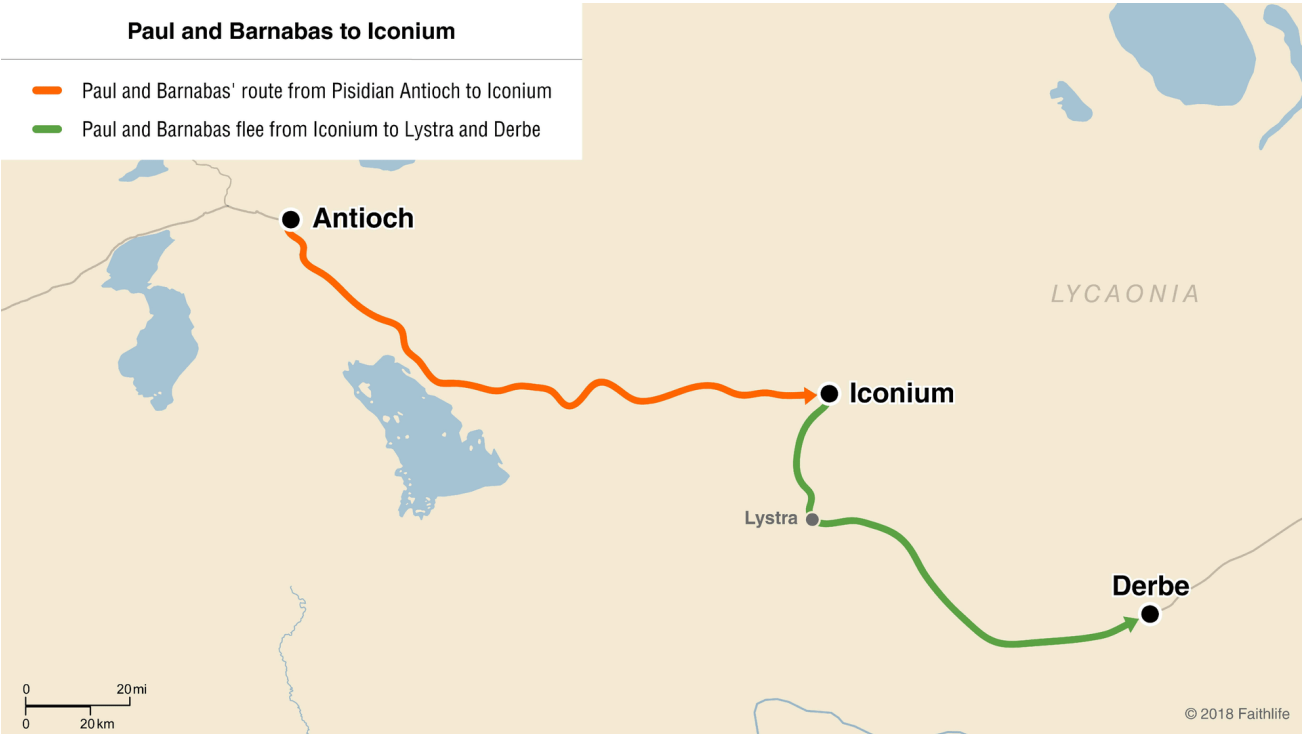
LESSON 14: THROUGH MANY TRIBULATIONS (ACTS 14)

On the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed that Jesus was crucified, then raised and ultimately exalted (Acts 2.23,32-33). Paul proclaimed the same when he proclaimed the gospel at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13.28,32-33,37). Jesus is now the exalted King, but His exaltation came through suffering. Significantly, while on this earth Jesus told His disciples that they too would be persecuted, but would then inherit eternal life (Mark 10.30).

In our study of Acts we've already noted how the disciples suffered for the cause of Jesus (see Acts 5.40-41; 8.1-4). In this lesson we will note how Paul also suffered the cause of Christ. But, that is of no concern to the faithful, because it is "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14.22).

Notes From The Text: Vss. 1-7, At Iconium

- » Vs. 1, Iconium was located ~75 miles from Pisidian Antioch and was one of the chief cities of Galatia. Two important trade routes passed through the city and it lay on the road leading to Ephesus.
- » Vs. 2, "unbelieving" is literally "disobedient". To truly believe as those in vs. 1 will result in obedience. To not believe the message always results in disobedience.



- » Vs. 4, the gospel message always results in division between those who will believe and those who will not (see Matthew 10.34; Luke 12.53). Note: the word

“apostle” means “one sent”. Paul and Barnabas were both sent out by the Holy Spirit on this work (see Acts 13.4). The word does not necessarily mean that Barnabas was counted as one of the apostles.

- » Vs. 6, Lystra was located 18 miles from Iconium and Derbe was some 60 miles further. “The province generally was backward, its inhabitants still speaking a vernacular language during the first century A.D. In this verse it is implied that one crossed a frontier in passing from Iconium to Lystra.” (Archaeological Study Bible)

Vss. 8-20, At Lystra

- » Vss. 9-10, while this man’s faith played a role in his healing, it is evident in Scripture that the faith of the recipient was not a requirement for healing (see Acts 3.3-6). That said, the man is an example of obedient faith. He believed so much that when Paul commanded him to “stand upright on your feet”, he immediately “sprang up”.
- » Vs. 11, their speaking in Lycaonian explains why Paul and Barnabas did not realize what they were doing (vs. 14).
- » Vs. 12, “the local Zeus, Zeus Ampelites, was portrayed on reliefs as an elderly bearded figure, and because he is sometimes depicted with a young male assistant. The identification by the people of Lystra of Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes “as he was the bringer of the word” suggests that they thought that the two men were functioning in the way that they envisaged their own gods as acting: the bearded Zeus was the initiator of the action and Hermes was his agent in carrying out the action.” (Anchor)
- » Vs. 13, “The response of the Lystrans may be traced to the following legend: Zeus and Hermes once visited the Phrygian hill country, disguised as ordinary men. They were turned away from a thousand homes but finally were welcomed into the humble abode of an elderly couple. The gods turned that house into a temple and destroyed the houses of all who had rejected them.” (Archaeological Study Bible)
- » Vs. 14, contrast with Herod in Acts 12.22-23.
- » Vs. 15, “On the one hand was a God who was the maker of all things and who was all powerful, and on the other hand the gods who had been made by the hands of men, and who were powerless.” (Garreth Reese)
- » Vss. 16-17, God may have allowed the nations to go their own way, but His desire for their salvation was apparent by His leaving witness. Significantly, Paul and Barnabas credited Jehovah God with the very blessings associated with Zeus.
- » Vs. 19, the Jews from Antioch would have traveled close to 100 miles to reach Lystra. Note: a young Timothy may have witnessed the stoning of Paul (see Acts 16.1; 2Timothy 3.11).

Vss. 21-28, Return To Antioch

- » Vs. 21, from Derbe they could have traveled east to Tarsus and then on to Syrian Antioch. However, they saw their responsibility to further strengthen the disciples recently won over to Christ.

- » Vs. 22
 - The life of a disciple can truly be described as “continuing in the faith” (cf. Ephesians 1.1).
 - Paul had earlier proclaimed that Jesus’ crucifixion led to His exaltation (Acts 13.28-30). Disciples of His will follow the same pattern; rejection by this world, but exaltation with God in His Kingdom await! (Mark 10.30; John 15.20; 1Peter 5.10).
- » Vs. 23, some find it remarkable that elders could appointed so soon, especially given the qualifications laid out in Titus 1 and 1Timothy 3. It should be taken into consideration that this first journey of Paul’s likely lasted some four years (~ AD 44-48). Also, many of the first converts would have been either Jews and/or God-fearers (i.e. Gentiles who worshiped Jehovah). They would have already been well on the way to meeting the requirements of shepherding God’s people.
- » Vss. 26-27, note how God was credited for all that had been accomplished. In Antioch they had been “commended to the grace of God” for the work they would do. When they returned “they declared all that God... how He had opened a door of faith” Truly, “we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2Corinthians 4.7).



LESSON 15: DISCERNING THE WILL OF THE KING (ACTS 15)

As we've already noted, there was some opposition to taking the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter had been criticized by the "circumcision party" for eating with uncircumcised men (Acts 11.1-2). However, once the apostle reported how the Lord had given the Holy Spirit to Cornelius and his family, these traditionalists "glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life'" (Acts 11.18) It was now firmly established that Gentiles were accepted by God!

However, a significant issue remained: were Gentiles supposed to become like their Jewish brethren by being circumcised and keeping the Mosaic Law? After all, since the gospel is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Acts 3.25-26; cf. Genesis 12.3), wouldn't it follow that all who receive the promise also receive the sign of the covenant (Genesis 17.10,13-14)? And that is the issue at the heart of this chapter and of many of Paul's letters: can one be justified merely through faith in Christ, or must one also keep the Law (cf. Romans 3.28-31; Galatians 5.2; etc.)?

Perhaps complicating the issue was that Jesus had not spoken regarding the future of circumcision. He had foretold that "other sheep" would be part of His flock (John 10.16) and had commanded His apostles to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28.19-20; Mark 16.15-16), but did not reveal what obligation the nations would have to the Law. Yes, Jesus fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5.17), but did that mean the sign of the covenant was no longer needed? How could the church discern Jesus' will on this matter? This chapter serves an essential function in the life of the church as we see how they reached a conclusion on what was the will of the King. We would do well to follow their example we continue to discern the will of the King in our lives.

Notes From The Text: Vss. 1-5, Trouble Arises

» Vs. 1

- The issue was not whether one could be circumcised... or keep any other aspect of the Mosaic Law for that matter. We've already noted how Peter and John would go to the Temple at the hour of prayer (Acts 3.1). Later in our study we will note how Paul undertook a vow (see Acts 21.20-24,26-27). Significantly, Paul would also have Timothy circumcised in order to defuse Jewish bias (Acts 16.3). But none of these acts of devotion were added to the gospel; none were bound on others as matters of salvation. However, these Jewish brothers were perverting the gospel by tying salvation to observance of the Mosaic Law rather than faith in Christ. Unfortunately, this issue would trouble the church for years to come (cf. Romans 3.21-31; Galatians 5.2; etc.).

- We should note that the significance of circumcision had only grown in the centuries before Jesus’s birth. Greek rulers, most notably Antiochus IV, had outlawed circumcision in an effort to blend the Jews in with the rest of the Greek empire. After the successful revolt led by the Maccabees, circumcision “became the principal symbol of being a Jew. This attitude is well illustrated in the book of Jubilees (c. 180–170 B.C.): ‘Anyone who is born whose own flesh is not circumcised on the eighth day is not from the sons of the covenant which the Lord made for Abraham since he is from the children of destruction. And there is therefore no sign upon him so that he might belong to the Lord because he is destined to be destroyed and annihilated from the earth and to be uprooted from the earth because he has broken the covenant of the Lord our God.’” (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
- » Vs. 2, Paul, Barnabas and the others did not go to Jerusalem because the congregation in Antioch was answerable to them, rather because the issue came from Jerusalem. Furthermore, the counsel of all the apostles would be of value (see John 16.13).
- » Vs. 3, it was approximately 300 miles from Antioch to Jerusalem. Luke’s comment that this news brought great joy implies that the churches in question probably took the same attitude to circumcision as Paul. These congregations would have been composed of Jewish Christians (see Acts 11:19), but they were not tradition bound like some of the Jerusalem Christians.
- » Vs. 4, there is some question how this trip relates to the one recorded in Galatians 2.1-10. Some believe they are the same trip while some believe Galatians 2 refers to a prior trip. It is impossible to know which view is correct, but neither passage conflicts with the other.
- » Vs. 5, Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law (see Matthew 5.17). However, these brethren still labored under the notion that the Mosaic Law was binding, therefore circumcision was required (see Galatians 5.3).

Vss. 6-21, Discerning The King’s Will

- » Vs. 6, This (and vs. 2) is the first mention of elders in the Jerusalem church, but their presence is unsurprising.
- » Vs. 7, note Acts 10; 11.14.
- » Vs. 8, see Acts 10.44-48; 11.15-17.
- » Vs. 9, Cornelius was an uncircumcised Gentile who received the Holy Spirit. His heart was cleansed by faith as opposed to any work of the Law (vss. 1,5).
- » Vss. 10-11, “The Mosaic system had been a ‘yoke’ because: 1) It required perfect obedience (Gal. 3:10), and no one (except Christ) had kept it in that fashion. 2) The Jews had encumbered it with many traditions (Mt. 15:6), which burdened the people. It was unreasonable, therefore, to urge the Gentiles to place themselves under the law of Moses. It is only through the new system, as an expression of Christ’s favor, that anyone is saved. In the final analysis, both Jew and Gentiles are saved ‘in like manner.’” (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vs. 12, see Acts 14.3,8-10. God bearing witness before uncircumcised Gentiles

demonstrated His acceptance of them.

- » Vs. 13, James was the half-brother of Jesus (see Matthew 13.55) but did not accept Him as the Messiah during His life (Mark 3.21). However, he did believe after seeing the resurrected Jesus (1Corinthians 15.7).
- » Vs. 14, the Jews gloried in their status as the Lord's people (Deuteronomy 14.2), but the Lord foretold that the day was coming when the nations would become His people (Zechariah 2.11).
- » Vss. 15-18, quotation from Amos 9.11-12. The tent of David had been rebuilt (see Acts 13.22-23), so it was the fulfillment of prophecy that the Gentiles would now be called by God's name.
- » Vs. 19, note vs. 28. This wasn't simply the matter of man's judgment, but judgment guided by the Spirit.
- » Vs. 20, the Gentiles would not be bound by the Law, but neither could they adhere to pagan practices. The items listed here were forbidden in the Law (Leviticus 17-18) and were common pagan practices.
- » Vs. 21, the meaning of this verse is unclear. One possibility is that the Gentile believers must not willingly offend the Jews who live in their communities.
- » Before we move on, let's consider what we've learned about **how to discern the King's will**:
 - They took in ALL that God revealed about the matter. That included specific scriptures, such as Amos 9.11-15, but also included the actions of God: He had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles and had performed "signs and wonder" among the Gentiles. If we are going to discern the will of the King we must take in ALL that He has revealed. That will include specific commands in Scripture, but also examples of how His followers lived out the faith and even principles laid out in Scripture.
 - Once all that God has revealed has been taken in, conclusions are reached which are in accordance with revelation. So, while Jesus had never stated that Gentiles must not be circumcised, the early church was able to discern that this was not a requirement. God had revealed in prophecy that the day was coming when the nations would be called by His name, and He had visibly shown His acceptance of the Gentiles without their being circumcised. Thus, they could formulate a "judgment" that could rightly be said to come from the Holy Spirit (see vss. 19,28).
 - Simply stated, the process is the same for us when considering any matter where the Lord did not give specific commands (How should we worship? What responsibility does the church have in benevolence? How should a saint dress? Can a saint drink alcohol?) We take in ALL that the Lord has revealed and then reach a conclusion consistent with revelation.

Vss. 22-35, Letter To The Gentile Disciples

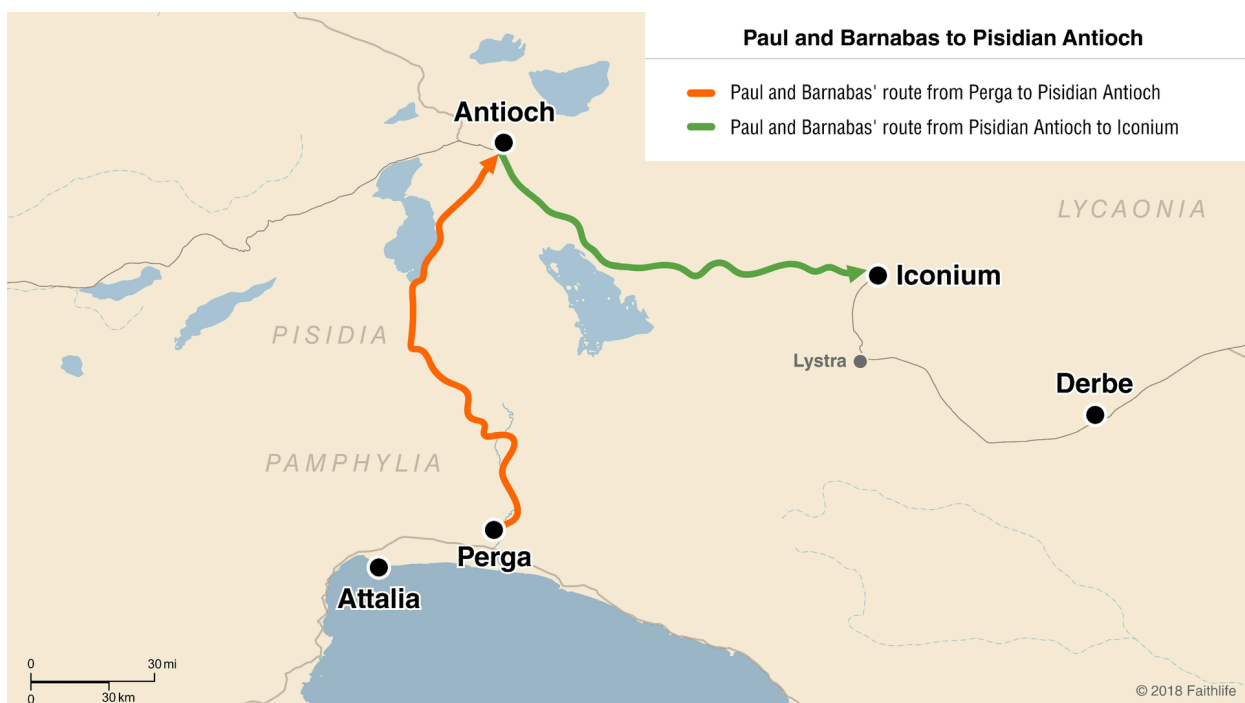
- » Vs. 22, it was brethren from Judea who were the source of the problem (vss. 1,5). The fact that the "whole church" accepted the decision means that all were will-

ing to be guided by truth and not their traditions or preconceived beliefs. Sending Barsabbas and Silas would confirm that this matter had been resolved in the minds of the saints in Jerusalem.

- » Vs. 23, note that Paul would also deliver this message to the churches established on his first journey (Acts 16.4).
- » Vs. 28, compare again with vs. 19. The conclusion was reached by men, but could be attributed to the Holy Spirit because these men relied on God's revelation.
- » Vs. 33, Silas would accompany Paul on his next journey (vs. 40). So he either did not return to Jerusalem, or made the trip and then returned to Antioch.

Vss. 36-41, Paul And Barnabas Separate

- » Vs. 36, "Their evangelistic zeal was not limited to baptizing the lost. They wanted to make sure these saints continued to obey the commands of the Lord (cf. Matt. 28.20).
- » Vs. 38, see Acts 13.13.
- » Vs. 39
 - Barnabas was related to John Mark (Colossians 4.10) and his actions are consistent with his character (Acts 4.36; 9.27).
 - John Mark would be a reliable companion of Paul in the future (see Colossians 4.10; 2Timothy 4.11).
 - Who was right? Perhaps both were. Mark needed to be rebuked for deserting them, but he also needed encouragement. He received both, a needed rebuke from Paul and encouragement to do better from Barnabas.
- » Vss. 39-41, while their disagreement was regrettable, the result was that more territory could be covered. Barnabas took Mark and returned to his homeland while Paul took Silas and went overland toward the regions he previously visited on the first journey.





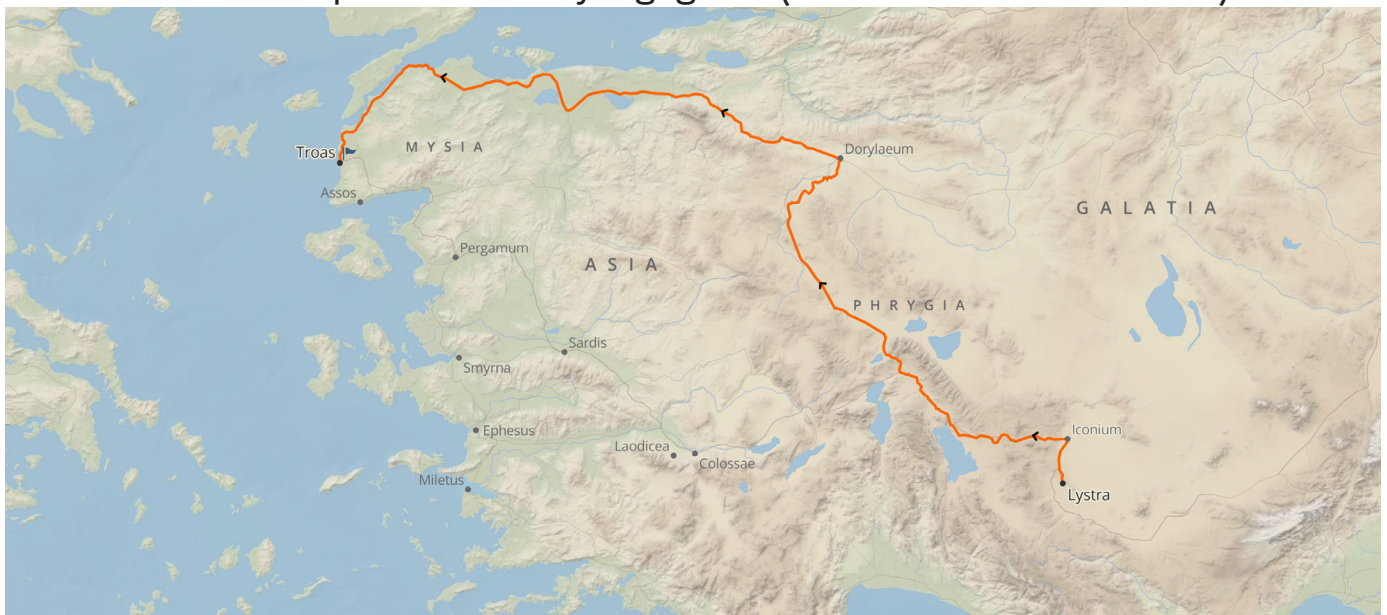
LESSON 16: "COME OVER... AND HELP US" (ACTS 16)

Throughout history kingdoms have sought to expand. Often their conquests have resulted in the deaths and enslavement of those in conquered territory. But sometimes the conquerors are viewed as liberators. Our study of Acts has seen the Kingdom established and expand through the proclamation of the gospel. But others still needed liberating; they needed the good news to reach them (vs. 9).

Notes From The Text:

Vss. 1-10, The Macedonian Call

- » Vs. 1, The name Timothy means "one who honors God." It is very likely that he, or at least his mother, was converted during the 1st missionary journey (cf. 14.8-23; 2Tim. 3.11). He may have been one of the brothers who witnessed the stoning of Paul. We know that both his mother and grandmother were believers (see 2Timothy 1.5). His faith was spoken of as far away as Iconium, 40 miles to the north of Lystra.
- » Vs. 3, "Paul had stoutly resisted circumcision in the case of Titus, a pure Greek (Galatians 2.3, 5), because the whole principle of Gentile liberty was at stake. But Timothy was both Jew and Greek and would continually give offence to the Jews with no advantage to the cause of Gentile freedom. So here for the sake of expediency, "because of the Jews" (*dia tous Ioudaious*), Paul voluntarily removed this stumbling-block to the ministry of Timothy. Otherwise Timothy could not have been allowed to preach in the synagogues." (Robertsons Word Pictures)



- » Vs. 6, The province of Asia would include cities like Ephesus, Smyrna, and Sardis, large cities with significant populations of Jews. Paul will work in this region at the

end of this journey and during the 3rd missionary journey.

- » Vs. 7, note that even though Paul was an apostle, this did not mean that the Lord gave him specific details or instructions whenever a choice must be made. Paul intended to preach in these areas, but it was only when he arrived that the Lord made it clear to him that He had other purposes.
- » Vs. 10, Note that Luke has joined the party in Troas. He is referred to as the “beloved physician” Col. 4.14. Some speculate that he was from Antioch, others that he was from Philippi. We do not know. He will be present with Paul off and on throughout the remainder of Acts 16.10-17; 20.5-21.25; 27.2-28.16.

Vss. 11-15, The Gospel Spreads To Philippi



- » Vs. 12, Philippi named after Philip of Macedon. Also the site of Octavian's victory over Brutus and Cassius. For a city to be deemed a colony meant that the rights of Rome were given to that city.
- » Vs. 13, The lack of a synagogue would indicate that fewer than 10 Jewish males lived in the city. Bodies of water were common places of prayer since they provided water for ceremonial cleansing.
- » Vs. 14,
 - Thyatira was in the Roman province of Asia, so in the very area where Paul had been forbidden to proclaim the gospel (vs. 6).
 - Purple was an extremely valuable dye. It took ~8000 mollusks to produce one gram of the dye.
 - “Worshiper of God” would place her in the same category as Cornelius (Acts 10.2).
 - “opened her heart”, “i.e., she understood the significance of the message (cf.

Lk. 24.45; Acts 26.18) ...The order of occurrence in the events is crucial. Calvinism asserts that one cannot give an honest hearing to the gospel until after the Lord has opened the heart by means of a direct operation of the Spirit. In this case, though, Lydia first willingly heard, and her heart was opened thereby...Note how giving heed is used in contrast to disobedience elsewhere in the New Testament (Heb. 2.1-2).”

- » Vs. 15, not only would blood relatives be part of a household, but also servants and slaves. Those wishing to justify the practice of infant baptism appeal to this passage. However, the text in no way intimates that there were any infants in Lydia’s household. The necessity of belief for salvation (see vs. 31) eliminates the possibility of infants being baptized.

Vss. 16-24, Paul & Silas Imprisoned

- » Vs. 16, “a spirit of divination”, “Lit., a spirit, a Python. Python, in the Greek mythology, was the serpent which guarded Delphi. According to the legend, as related in the Homeric hymn, Apollo descended from Olympus in order to select a site for his shrine and oracle. Having fixed upon a spot on the southern side of Mount Parnassus, he found it guarded by a vast and terrific serpent, which he slew with an arrow, and suffered its body to rot (puqeiv/n) in the sun. Hence the name of the serpent Python (rotting); Pytho, the name of the place, and the epithet Pythian, applied to Apollo. The name Python was subsequently used to denote a prophetic demon” (Vincent)
- » Vs. 17, note how demons also proclaimed the truth about Jesus (see Matthew 8.29; Mark 1.24; 3.11).
- » Vs. 18, the power of God is greater than the power of Satan or of any demon (see 1John 4.4).
- » Vs. 19, the phrase “was gone” is the same Greek as translated “came out” in vs. 18. The spirit was now gone from the slave girl, but all her owners could see was that their profits were gone.
- » Vs. 20, Jews and then Christians were assailed as “atheists” because they believed in one God rather than a pantheon of gods. Casting out a spirit associated with Apollo would be seen as an attack on popular religion.
- » Vs. 22, Paul would later recount this beating, 1Thess. 2:2 cf. 2Cor. 11:25. Romans were not bound to the Jewish law of 40 stripes. Significantly, Roman citizens were not allowed to be beaten (vs. 37).

Vss. 25-40, Conversion Of The Philippian Jailer

- » Vs. 26, “It is hardly relevant to comment that this region was known for earthquakes. This was a providentially directed, highly selective quake. It involved precise timing and a specialized focus. The roof did not cave in; the walls did not crumble. The effect simply was to free the prisoners – doors unlocked, bands off! And yet there was not the slightest injury to anyone. Truly amazing.” (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vs. 27, Roman law required the death of one who allowed prisoners to escape.

- » Vss. 31-33, salvation is truly for those who believe in Jesus (see John 3.16). But in order to believe in Jesus, one must hear the good news about Him (vs. 32). And if one truly believes in Jesus, he will obey His commands without hesitating (vs. 33).
- » Vs. 37, “The apostle’s demand was not merely a question of pride; rather, it doubtless was for the benefit of the new congregation that would be left behind as Paul, Silas, and Timothy would soon move on.” (Wayne Jackson)



LESSON 17: TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN (ACTS 17)

Hundreds of years before Jesus lived on the earth, the Lord foretold that His Kingdom was going to be established (see Psalm 2; Isaiah 2.1-4; etc.) However, there have always been numerous kingdoms on the earth at any time, so what's one more? But the Lord declared to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar that when His Kingdom was established, all others would crumble! "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever," (Daniel 2:44, ESV)

So far in our study of Acts we have seen the Kingdom expand as men and women heard the gospel message of Christ, placed their faith in Him and obeyed His commandments. However, there was always going to be resistance to the Kingdom (see Psalm 2.1-3). Acts 17 records how the Lord's Kingdom was opposed by three forces: civil authorities (vss. 8-9), religious error (vss. 5,13) and worldly philosophy (vs. 32). However, no force could stop the Kingdom from turning the world upside down (vs. 6)!

Notes From The Text Vss. 1-9, Thessalonica



» Vs. 1

- Amphipolis was 30 miles away from Philippi, Apollonia another 35 miles away, Thessalonica another 37 miles away.

- Thessalonica: “Chief city of Macedonia and the seat of Roman administration in the century before Christ. In addition to having a magnificent harbor, Thessalonica had the good fortune of being located on the overland route from Italy to the East. This famous highway, called the Egnatian Way, ran directly through the city.” (Tyndale Bible Dictionary)
- » Vs. 2, note that preaching the gospel involves reasoning. Yes, the Lord opens the heart (16.14) but this does not eliminate the need for man to understand the truth of the gospel.
- » Vs. 3, “That Messiah would suffer was a side of the Messianic prophecies that the Jews missed or ignored. They saw only the verses that spoke of Messiah being a glorious king like David or Solomon, and could not harmonize with this idea the verses that spoke of a suffering servant. Verses about the suffering of Messiah were a stumbling block to the Jews.” (Garreth Reese)
- » Vs. 4, the aim of “reasoning” (vs. 2) is to “persuade”.
- » Vs. 5, because of persecution Paul and his companions could stay in Thessalonica for only a short time. Paul would soon write to the saints of the city and would speak of how they endured persecution (see 1Thess. 1.5-10; 2.13-16).
- » Vs. 7, the proclamation of Jesus as king was a direct challenge to Caesar. The lordship of Jesus was a prominent part of Jesus’ teaching (see 1Thessalonians 4.14; 5.2,23; 2Thessalonians 1.7-8; 2.1-12).
- » Vs. 9, according to Roman practice, Jason would be bound to make sure Paul departed the city and not return. It’s impossible to know exactly how long Paul stayed in Thessalonica, but it was long enough to receive financial assistance from the saints at Philippi on two occasions (see Philippians 4.15-16).

Vss. 10-15, Berea

- » Vs. 10, Berea was ~40 miles southwest of Thessalonica, but was about 30 miles off of the main highway. Cicero referred to Berea as an “out of the way town”.
- » Vs. 11, Berea was an insignificant town compared to Thessalonica, but the Jews of this city proved themselves to be of more noble character. Wayne Jackson lists 6 notable characteristics of the Bereans:
 1. They were honest in that they “received the word with all eagerness”
 2. They had confidence in the integrity of the Old Testament scriptures as an inspired revelation from God.
 3. They were scholarly in that they “examined the Scriptures”.
 4. They were diligent because they examined the Scriptures “daily.”
 5. They were discriminating; they wanted to know if the preaching was “so,” obviously recognizing that not all teaching is.
 6. These students were independent; they based their convictions upon deductions drawn from their own study, rather than swallowing the dogmatic decisions of an august body of clerics.
- » Vs. 14, from Berea to Athens was a trip of 250 miles by land, but was only a 3 day journey by sea.

Vss. 16-34, Athens

- » Vs. 16, the city of Athens had declined in significantly in political power from its heyday, but remained a center of culture and influence. It is estimated that the city of Athens may have had a population of only 10,000 inhabitants, but according to Pliny was home to over 30,000 idols.
- » Vs. 18
 - Epicurean: founded by Epicurus (342-270 BC). Major tenets were 1) pleasure is the highest attainment in life, 2) the word was created from eternal atoms, 3) the soul is not eternal, 4) there is no future judgment with rewards and retribution and 5) the gods exist, but are not interested in human affairs.
 - Stoic: founded by Zenos (? - 264 BC). Major tenets were 1) the world was created by Zeus, but governed by the Fates, 2) self-denial is man's highest purpose and 3) the soul is not eternal.
 - "babblers", literally "picker of seeds". "Stoics and Epicureans alike, much as they might differ from each other, agreed at least on this: that the new-fangled message brought by this Jew of Tarsus was not one that could appeal to reasonable people. They looked on him as a retailer of secondhand scraps of philosophy, 'a picker-up of learning's crumbs.'" (FF Bruce)
- » Vs. 19, Areopagus (Hill of Mars) was the seat of the ancient Athenian court that discussed and decided questions of religion. Those who ruled on such matters were called Areopagites (see vs. 34).IMAGE
- » Vs. 22, "very religious" literally translates to "fear the gods"
- » Vs. 23, "Pausanias, a Greek geographer who visited Athens in the 2nd century A.D., saw such altars. He wrote: 'The Temple of Athene Skiras is also here, and one of Zeus further off, and altars of the Unknown gods'... The apostle is not suggesting that they legitimately revered the true God, and that the Creator honored their piety. One cannot genuinely worship in ignorance. Worship must be according to the truth (Jn. 4:24), and will-worship is void (Col. 2:23). Rather, he is simply suggesting this: 'As a safety measure, you direct worship toward a god who is unknown to you. Well, there is, in fact, a God whom you do not know; I want to tell you about Him.'" (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vss. 24-25
 - Remember, Epicureans viewed the world as created by atoms, the Stoics by Zeus.
 - He is Lord of heaven and earth, showing His activity. Remember, the Epicureans held that the gods were unconcerned with man and the world; the Stoics



held that everything was controlled by the Fates.

- God cannot be contained in houses made by human hands (cf. 2Chron. 2:6) nor does He need us to serve Him. “In paganism, the images of the gods were clothed in splendid garments, and offered food. The true Lord needs no such therapy! He is the Sustainer, not the sustained.” (WJ, 214)
- » Vs. 26, see Deuteronomy 32.8; Job 12.23; Daniel 2.21; 4.17.
- » Vs. 27, remember that Epicureans taught that pleasure was the highest good and Stoics taught that self-denial was the highest good. The highest good is neither, rather the highest good is to seek after God!
- » Vss. 28-29, Paul quotes from Epimenides, Aratus and Cleanthes. And if we are God’s offspring, how could we possibly think of God in terms of gold, silver or stone?
- » Vs. 30, God overlooking man’s ignorance does not mean that they were guiltless (see Romans 1.21-32). Rather, God had not brought divine retribution on them (cf. Acts 14.16). Repentance is required of all (see Luke 13.1-3).
- » Vs. 31, repentance is necessary because judgment has been fixed! And Christ’s resurrection is the proof that this judgment will occur!
- » Vs. 32, the Greeks believed that Apollo once proclaimed, “Once a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection.” That was the general sentiment among the Greeks. Even those who believed in the immortality of the soul scoffed at the idea of the body having any future after death.



LESSON 18: "I HAVE MANY IN THIS CITY" (ACTS 18)

Most of us wouldn't think of Las Vegas as being a city primed to receive the gospel. After all, who in "sin city" would be interested in repentance and holiness? Likewise, who in Manhattan would forsake the pursuit of material gain and "hunger and thirst for righteousness" instead? Or what citizen of Tehran would forsake Islam in order to submit to Jesus Christ? Just as we can think of any number of reasons why various groups of people would likely reject the gospel, Paul could have thought the same about the city of Corinth. Commercially vibrant, pagan to the core and given over to immorality. Yet, the Lord declared to His apostle, "I have many in this city who are my people" (Acts 18.10).

Notes From The Text: Vss. 1-17, Corinth



» Vs. 1

- Corinth was located on the narrow isthmus that bridges mainland Greece to the Peloponnese and separated the Saronic and Corinthian Gulfs. Its location made it the commercial capital of Greece as it controlled the overland between the mainland and the Peloponnese as well as the sea trade between Italy and Greece. Ships would be brought overland across the narrow isthmus rather than sail the 200-300 miles around lower Achaia.
- The city was the Roman capital of Achaia and boasted a population of roughly

500,000.

- The immorality of the city was known throughout the Mediterranean world. A temple to Aphrodite commanded the heights outside of the city and there 1000 temple prostitutes “served” the deity. So debauched was the city that “Corinthian girl” became a common way of referring to a prostitute.
- » Vs. 2, Claudius was Caesar from A.D. 41-54 and at this time there were an estimated 20,000 Jews living in Rome. The historian Suetonius states that “the Jews were in a state of constant tumult at the instigation of one Chrestus”. It is possible that “Chrestus” was a reference to Jesus Christ. Suetonius states that the edict was made in AD 49.
- » Vs. 5, see Acts 17:15.
- » Vs. 6, Paul’s responsibility was to proclaim the gospel. If people rejected the message, they were responsible for their own blood (see Ezekiel 3:18ff; 33:4-8).
- » Vs. 7, Paul choosing to teach in the house of Titius Justus might indicate a willingness that any honest Jews still have the opportunity to hear the truth, since his house was next to the synagogue.
- » Vs. 8, Crispus was personally baptized by Paul (see 1 Corinthians 1:14).
- » Vs. 9, the NASB reading is preferable: “Do not be afraid any longer”. We would reason that Paul’s fear was justified given his experiences at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea.
- » Vs. 11, during this stay Paul wrote two epistles to the brethren in Thessalonica.
- » Vs. 12, Gallio became proconsul in AD 51. The very tribunal mentioned in this verse was discovered in 1935.
- » Vs. 13, Judaism was a recognized, and therefore legal, religion by the Romans. The Jews argument in this passage was that Christianity was not Judaism, thus not a legal practice.
- » Vss. 14-15, Gallio clearly did not buy the Jews’ argument. At this point Christianity would be viewed by the Romans as a sect of Judaism, thus have legal protection.
- » Vs. 17, we are not told who beat Sosthenes. It may have been the Jews who were upset out the outcome, but the more likely explanation is that the Greeks beat him out of animosity for the Jews. Sosthenes may have become a Christian (see 1 Corinthians 1:1).



Vss. 18-23, Return To Antioch

- » Vs. 18, We are not told what vow Paul made, although it could have been a Nazarite vow (see Numbers 6:18). Paul clearly still practiced some of his faith according to the Law, but he would not have said that doing so was related to his

salvation.

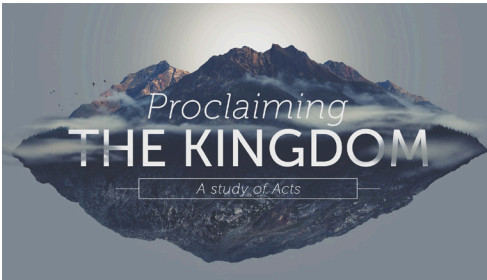
- » Vs. 19, Ephesus was the chief city of the province of Asia, boasting a population of ~200,000.
- » Vs. 21, Paul had come to understand that his plans were subject to the will of God (see Acts 16.6-7).
- » Vs. 23, this would have been the beginning of Paul's third journey.



Vss. 24-28, Instructing Apollos

- » Vs. 24, Alexandria was founded by Alexander in 332 BC. It was perhaps the foremost center of learning in the Roman world.
- » Vs. 25, John baptized for the remission of sins (Luke 3.3), but proclaimed that Jesus would “baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3.16). Only Jesus would usher in the time when the promised Spirit would be given (Ezekiel 36.25-27), and thus baptism was now for repentance and the forgiveness of sins, but also to receive the promised Spirit (Acts 2.38).
- » Vs. 26
 - Both husband and wife instructed Apollos, and the mention of Priscilla first may indicate that she took a lead. Yes, women are prohibited from exercising authority over a man (1Timothy 2.12-15) and from teaching in the assembly (1Corinthians 14.34), but to say that they cannot teach a man is simply unscriptural.
 - The proper response to doctrinal error isn't to belittle or argue, but to “explain... the way of God more accurately”.
 - Apollos, though an educated and eloquent man, was willing to accept instruction from lowly tent makers. We would all do well to heed his example of taking instruction from whomever has the word of God to share.

- » Vs. 27, remember that Corinth was the capital of Achaia. We know that Apollos spent time with these brethren (see 1Corinthians 1.11).
- » Vs. 28, Apollos put his great talents to good use (vs. 24)



LESSON 19: TRIUMPH OVER THE GODS (ACTS 19)

In the Old Testament many battles were waged between Jehovah and the false gods worshipped in the ancient near east. The Lord triumphed over the gods of Egypt during the Exodus, over the Philistine gods when the ark was captured and over Baal during the days of Elijah. However, as the gospel ventured into new territory, Jehovah and His Anointed Son would be pitted against new gods, new belief systems and new superstitions. As we will see in this chapter, the Lord would triumph over them all!

Notes From The Text:

Vss. 1-7, Instructing Twelve Disciples

- » Vs. 1, Ephesus was known as “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia”. It served as the seat of Roman government in the province for 150 years and boasted a population of ~ 250,000 people. The milestone markers on Roman roads in the province would be numbered from the city of Ephesus.
- » Vs. 2
 - The disciples mentioned had likely been taught by Apollos (see Acts 18.24-25).
 - Based on vs. 6, Paul’s question may have been concerning miraculous gifts from the Spirit. If they were disciples of Christ they would have already received the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2.38).
 - Their statement, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” presented a serious issue. God had promised spiritual renewal (Ezekiel 36.25-27) but they were unaware that this promise had been fulfilled in Jesus (cf. Luke 3.15-16).
- » Vs. 3, the importance of baptism is made abundantly clear in this verse. Paul had asked if they had received the Holy Spirit and when they professed ignorance of the Spirit his first question was in regards to their baptism, for baptism involves the receiving of the Spirit (John 3.5; Acts 2.38).



- » Vs. 5, their previous baptism was invalid not because it had been done by the wrong person or church; their baptism was invalid because it wasn't in the name of Jesus, i.e. by His authority and for His purposes. Baptism in the name of Jesus is the result of faith in Him (Mark 16.16), accompanied by repentance, done for the forgiveness of sins and in order to receive the promised Spirit (Acts 2.38).
- » Vs. 6, it would seem that Paul's original question (vs. 2) was with the aim of imparting special abilities of the Spirit to them. Only the apostles had the ability to impart these abilities through the laying on of their hands (see Acts 8.17-18).

Vss. 8-10, The Gospel Spreads Through All Asia

- » Vs. 8, Paul's total time in Ephesus would have been approximately 3 years (see Acts 20.31). Note again that proclaiming the kingdom of God involves both "reasoning" and "persuading". No-one enters the kingdom by accident, rather men and women consciously choose to submit to the reign of God and Christ.
- » Vs. 9, hostile Jews from Ephesus (Asia) would pose a problem for Paul in the future (see Acts 21.27). At this point it would seem that they were content that Paul no longer taught in the synagogue, although they would try to use a later episode of unrest to their advantage (vss. 33-34).
- » Vs. 10, this would include cities such as Colosse, Pergamum, Sardis and Philadelphia.

Vss. 11-20, Triumph Over The Occult

- » Vs. 11, note that God and not Paul was credited as the source of the miracles (see Mark 16.20).
- » Vs. 12, this likely mimicked some of the magical practices common in the city. Note that Paul did not initiate the practice, but it would seem that the Lord worked in this way to impress upon the people of Ephesus that true power came from Him and not the occult.
- » Vs. 13, across the Mediterranean world the Jews had a reputation for being able to cast out unclean spirits. Various incantations and exorcism formulas had been compiled into a document known as The Testament of Solomon. Jesus may have referenced this in Luke 11.19.
- » Vs. 14, There is some question whether Sceva was of the priestly family, or if he was perhaps a heathen priest, or if he only claimed a priestly background.
- » Vs. 19
 - "Ephesus was renowned as being something of a center for magical practices in the Mediterranean world. The practice of magic was everywhere—it was part of the fabric of common "folk belief"—but Ephesus acquired a significant reputation for it. This reputation was perpetuated, in part, by the so-called "Ephesian Letters" (Ephesia Grammata). These were actually six names—askion, kataskion, lix, tetrax, damnameneus, and aisia—thought to be laden with protective power for warding off evil demons." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
 - 50,000 drachmas would have equated to the wages for 50,000 days of labor.

Note that the believers in Ephesus weren't content to merely stop practicing this evil themselves, they didn't want anyone else to have access either!

Vss. 21-41, Triumph Over The Mother Of The Gods

- » Vs. 21, one reason for Paul's return to Jerusalem would be to deliver aid from the predominantly Gentile churches to their needy Jewish brethren (Romans 15.25; 1Cor. 16.1-3; 2Cor. 8-9). When Paul arrived in Achaia he would write to the saints in Rome, again expressing his desire to visit them (Romans 1.15; 15.23). Paul would make it to Rome, but not in the way he envisioned.
- » Vs. 22, Erastus may have been the city treasurer of Corinth (see Romans 16.23). During this time Paul would have penned his first letter to the Corinthians (see 1Corinthians 4.17).
- » Vs. 24, While the chief goddess of Ephesus is here called Artemis (or Diana), she was not the same goddess as worshipped by the Greeks and then Romans. She is more closely identified with the Lydian goddess, Cybele, who was venerated as the mother of the gods. Her great temple was viewed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and during the Spring pilgrimage was made to Ephesus by all of her worshippers.
- » Vs. 25, note that the chief concern of Demetrius was economic. Interesting that the man who made the silver shrines saw them as economic gain, and not as imbued with any mystical properties.
- » Vs. 26, see Acts 17.29.
- » Vs. 27, the temple of Artemis/Diana took over 200 years to complete and according to Pliny was 425 feet in length, 220 feet wide and supported by 127 columns each of which were 60 feet high.
- » Vs. 29, the theater of Ephesus could seat some 25,000 spectators. Gaius may have been a convert from Corinth (see 1Cor. 1.14), Aristarchus was from Thessalonica (see Acts 20.4).
- » Vs. 30, Paul had moments of fear (Acts 18.9), but his trust in the Lord was greater.
- » Vs. 31, the "Asiarchs" were ten officers elected by the cities of the province. The gospel had certainly influenced all of Asia (vs. 10)! This may have been the occasion when Priscilla and Aquila "risked their necks" for Paul (see Romans 16.3-4).
- » Vs. 33, given that the Jews, like the Christians, were monotheists and opposed to idolatry, Alexander may have been trying to defend the Jews against the outcry. This may be the same Alexander of whom Paul would warn Timothy (2Timothy 4.14).



- » Vs. 35, myth had it that the image of Artemis which was located in the great temple had fallen from the heavens.
- » Vs. 37, “Paul and his preacher friends had not used harsh, reproachful, or scurrilous language as they spoke of the folly of religions such as Ephesian Artemis. They had indeed opposed idolatry; they had reasoned against it; they had performed miracles which showed it to be second rate when compared to Christianity; they had endeavored to turn the people from it. Instead of naming names and ridiculing by name, he drove home principles (‘gods made with hands are no gods at all’) which undermined the very foundations of such pagan religions.” (Garreth Reese)
- » Vs. 40, rioting was a capital offense under Roman law.

Postscript: this is all that remains of the great temple of Artemis. Yet, the word of the Lord continues “to increase and prevail mightily” (vs. 20). Jehovah continues to triumph over all challengers!





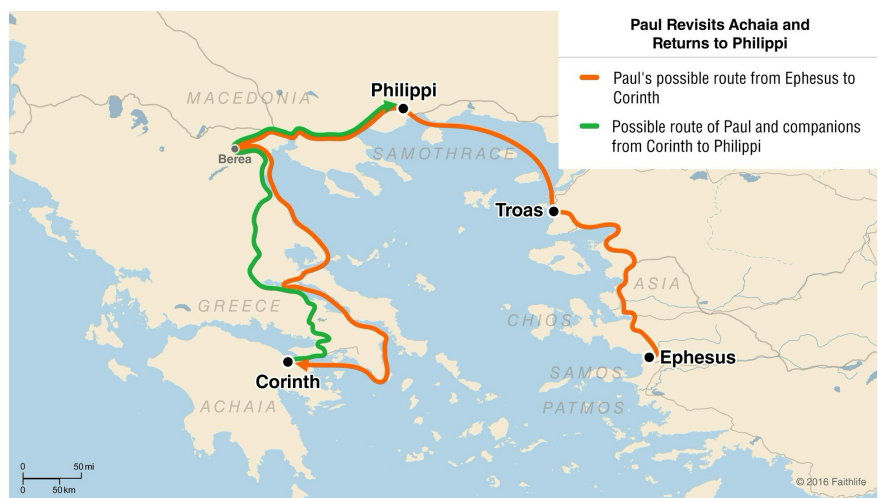
LESSON 20: LEADERSHIP IN THE KINGDOM (ACTS 20)

One of the great “I am” statements of Jesus is His proclamation that “I am the good shepherd” (John 10.11). As our shepherd He knows us (vs. 14), gives us direction (vs. 27), gives us security (vs. 28), and He gave His life for us (vs. 11). He remains our good shepherd! However, before His exaltation into heaven, Jesus asked Peter to “feed” and “tend” His sheep (John 21.15,16,17). Jesus wasn’t singling Peter out to the exclusion of others, for the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that many other leaders/shepherds would exist in the Lord’s church (see 1Peter 5.1-4). What Jesus did make clear was that His people would continue to need good leaders after His departure; shepherds would be needed who would feed and tend His sheep. In this chapter we see some of qualities needed for these Kingdom leaders.

Notes From The Text:

Vss. 1-6, Travels Through Greece

- » Vs. 1, Paul wrote 1Corinthians at some point before leaving Ephesus. There he made his intentions known that he would remain in Ephesus until after Pentecost (1Cor. 16.5-9). However, the riot may have prompted Paul to leave earlier than planned (see 2Cor. 1.8). Upon leaving Ephesus, Paul first traveled to Troas where



- he hoped to find Titus with news from Corinth. When he did not find Titus, Paul set sail for Macedonia (see 2Cor. 2.12-13).
- » Vs. 2, While in Macedonia, probably at Philippi, Titus came to Paul and informed the apostle of how the Corinthians favorably received the first epistle (2Cor. 7.5-7). Paul then penned 2 Corinthians and sent it by Titus and two others. Paul then arrived in Greece (i.e. the region of Achaia and the city of Corinth).
- » Vs. 3, during this 3 month stay, Paul wrote a letter to the saints in Rome (see Romans 16.23).
- » Vs. 4, recall that Paul was raising funds for the needy saints in Judea (1Cor. 16.1-4; 2Cor 8-9; Romans 15.25-27). The men listed in this passage were likely sent by each church who had helped in providing this relief.
- » Vs. 6

- Luke’s historical accuracy is shown in this passage where the journey against the wind took five days, whereas the journey with the wind only took two days (see Acts 16.11).
- In vs. 16 we will note that Paul would not take the time to visit Ephesus because he was in such a hurry to reach Jerusalem. However, Paul was willing to tarry in Troas for seven days. The only explanation that fits the context is that Paul viewed worshipping with the saints on the first day of the week to be of such importance that he delayed his trip.

Vss. 7-12, At Troas

- » Vs. 7, “to break bread” is representative of celebrating the Lord’s Supper (see Acts 2.42; cf. 1Cor. 10.16). That Christians met on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord’s Supper is also established in 1Cor. 16.2; 11.20.
- » Vs. 10, Paul’s words here do not mean that Eutychus did not die, because Luke clearly states that he did in fact die (vs. 9). Rather, Paul spoke with the same assurance as Jesus did that through God’s power, life would be restored (see Matthew 9.23-25).

Vss. 13-38, Meeting The Ephesian Elders At Miletus



- » Vs. 17, “elders” (presbuteros) were first mentioned in Acts 11.30 and we noted how they were appointed in Acts 14.23. Their qualifications are given in 1Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Note that they are also called bishops/overseer (episkopos) who do the work of shepherding in vs. 28.
- » Vs. 19, Paul did not approach the gospel as a cold academic, but as a sinner transformed who understood how much all people need Jesus. Thus, his whole being, including his emotions, were tied to his labors (see vs. 31; 2Cor. 2.4; Phil. 3.18).

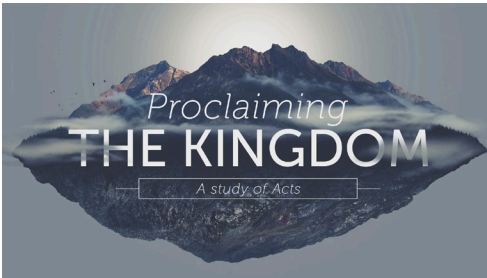
- » Vs. 21, it is interesting to note how Paul summarized the gospel in his preaching (cf. Acts 24.24-25). On this occasion, the apostle summarized the message as 1) repentance toward God and 2) faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Both are essential, neither is profitable without the other.
- » Vss. 22-23, note that while Paul was “constrained by the Spirit” (“bound” or “compelled” in other translations), the same Spirit warned Paul of what awaited him (Acts 21.4,11).
- » Vs. 24
 - For Paul’s attitude toward his life see Philippians 1.21-24. “finish my course” makes use of one of Paul’s favorite metaphors: an athlete competing for the prize (see 1Cor. 9.24-27; Phil. 3.14; 2Timothy 4.7).
 - Compare this with vs. 21; “the gospel of the grace of God” does not exclude the necessity of repentance and faith.
- » Vs. 25, it would seem that Paul would again visit Ephesus (see 1Timothy 1.3; 3.14; 4.13). Paul probably took the Spirit’s warnings (vs. 23) to mean that he would die in Jerusalem, thus his belief that they would never see his face again.
- » Vs. 26, note Ezekiel 33.
- » Vs. 27, “for I didn’t shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know” (NLT). Paul’s aim wasn’t to simply communicate the basics of the gospel, but ALL that the Lord commanded (see Matthew 28.20).
- » Vs. 28
 - Elders (vs. 17) have the task of overseeing the flock and provide all the care a shepherd would provide for the sheep (compare with Matthew 2.6).
 - Note that when Paul spoke of “the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood”, he wasn’t speaking of the universal church, but the church at Ephesus which these overseers were called to care for. Can anyone possibly argue that the local church is unimportant?
- » Vss. 29-30, Paul’s words were proven to be true when perhaps 30 years later the church at Ephesus would be described as having left their first love (Revelation 2.1-7).
- » Vs. 32, “To ‘commend’ is literally ‘to place beside, to entrust.’ The apostle had done what he could; he ‘deposits’ them with God.” (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vss. 33-34, depending on the circumstance, Paul would often work in order to provide for himself (Acts 18.3; 1Cor. 4.12). However, on other occasions he would be supported by generous brethren (Philippians 4.14-18). He would argue that those who proclaim the gospel have the right to support for this work (see 1Cor. 9.9ff).
- » Vs. 35, these words are not recorded in the gospel accounts, but are similar to Matthew 10.8.

Leadership In The Kingdom

When Paul met with the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he spoke to these shepherds as one who himself loved the people of God. There are several points we can take away

from this passage about what true leadership in the Kingdom should look like; lessons not just for elders in the local church, but for all of us.

1. **Leading is serving (vs. 19).** Paul termed everything he did while in Ephesus as “serving the Lord”. This was true because He had commissioned Paul to this work (Acts 9.15), but also because all service done to the Lord’s people is done for Him (see Matthew 25.40).
2. **Leadership takes an emotional toil (vss. 19, 31).** When recounting his many hardships, Paul stated that “apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (2Cor. 11.28).
3. **Leadership requires teaching ALL of the Lord’s will (vss. 20,27).** The “whole counsel of God” must be proclaimed because it is all “profitable” (cf. 2Timothy 3.16-17).
4. **Leadership requires sacrifice (vs. 28).** Paul was willing to sacrifice his life to complete the work the Lord had given him (vs. 24) and implied in his exhortation was that the Ephesian elders would also sacrifice much as they tended the Lord’s sheep. But all of our sacrifices pale in comparison to the one our Lord made for us, for we were “obtained with his own blood”.
5. **God is with His leaders (vs. 32).** No greater aid could be given than our God and “the word of His grace”. It is He who builds us up, who sanctifies us and who gives us an inheritance.



LESSON 21: PEACE IN THE KINGDOM (ACTS 21)

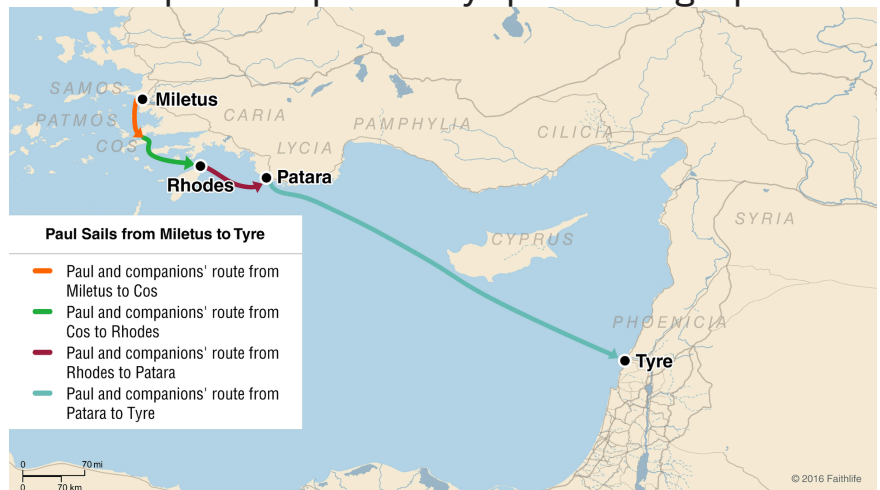
“You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” (Acts 11.3) Such was the criticism aimed at Peter when he preached the gospel to the Gentiles, and while he was able to help his critics understand and accept God’s plan (Acts 11.18), a divide would remain between Jew and Gentile converts. That came to the forefront in Acts 15 when some Jewish brethren were declaring that Gentile converts must be “circumcised according to the custom of Moses” in order to be saved (Acts 15.1). However, after all of God’s revelation was examined, the conclusion was reached that all (Jew and Gentile) are “saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15.11). It was firmly established that Jew and Gentile were one in Christ!

But attitudes are often hard to change, and centuries of mistrust between Jews and Gentiles would continue to have ramifications in the church. Acts 21 is a chapter focused on making peace between these two parties. First, Paul’s purpose in going to Jerusalem was to take a collection from predominantly Gentile congregations to their needy brethren in Judea (1Cor. 16.1-4; 2Cor. 8-9; Romans 15.25-27). Paul’s hope was that this contribution would be “acceptable to the saints” in Judea (Romans 15.31); i.e. he hoped it would promote unity in the church. As we will see, Paul’s work would find acceptance, but more was required to help bring peace in the Kingdom. Rumors had circulated about Paul’s work and his apparent disregard for Moses and the Law. Paul would be asked to help make peace, even though it would cost him dearly.

Notes From The Text: Vss. 1-16, Warnings On The Way To Jerusalem

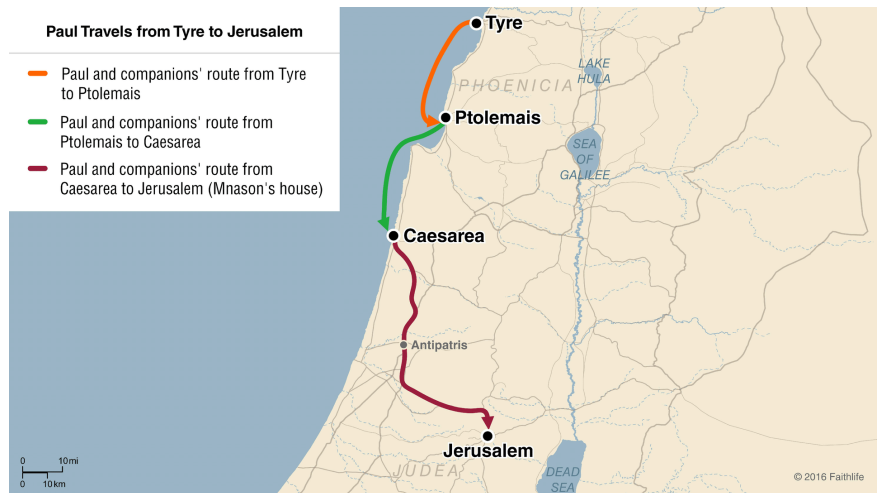
» Vs. 4

- The language indicates that Paul did not know the disciples in Tyre, so he had to search for them. Recall that disciples had previously spread the gospel in Phoenicia (see Acts 11.19; 15.3).
- It would seem that the Holy Spirit revealed to these disciples what awaited Paul in Jerusalem (see Acts 20.23). It would seem that they interpreted the Spirit’s message to mean that Paul should not proceed, however he was bound



by the Spirit to proceed with his journey (Acts 20.22).

- » Vs. 8, see Acts 6.5; 8.5ff.
- » Vs. 9, there were prophetesses in the Old Testament: Miriam (Exodus 15.20), Deborah (Judges 4.4), Huldah (2Kings 22.14) and women would continue to exercise prophetic gifts (see 1Cor. 11.5). Luke may have included the note here to demonstrate the continued fulfillment of Joel 2.28.
- » Vs. 10, Agabus had previously prophesied regarding the famine in Judea (see Acts 11.28).
- » Vs. 11, this visual method of prophesying was often used by the Old Testament prophets (see 1Kings 11.29ff; Jeremiah 13.1-11; 27.2; Ezekiel 4.1-6; 5.1-4).
- » Vs. 13, see Acts 20.24.
- » Vs. 16, those traveling with Paul were Gentiles, so Mnason's willingness to open his home to Paul and his companions demonstrated his faith and character.



Vss. 17-26, Efforts To Make Peace

- » Vs. 17, Paul had requested that the brethren in Rome would pray that his service would be well received by the saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15.30-31). Those requests were granted!
- » Vs. 18, Note that the apostles are not mentioned. Presumably, they had all left Jerusalem.
- » Vs. 20
 - Paul would have rejoiced over the news that so many Jews had put their faith in Christ (see Romans 9.3; 10.1).
 - They were zealous for the law in terms of their heritage. Not implying that they were still adhering to the Old Law as a means of salvation. If this were so, Paul would not have agreed to the following measures.
- » Vs. 21, "there is a vast difference between saying 'it is not necessary' (which he did say), and saying 'you must not do it!' (which his enemies accused him of saying)." (Garreth Reese). Recall that Paul had Timothy circumcised as a matter of expediency (Acts 16.3). But Paul would not have bound the Law as a matter of salvation. The "conference" of Acts 15 made it clear that the works of the Law were not necessary to salvation.
- » Vs. 22, during this time period, local Roman rulers had done much to provoke the Jews. This resulted in heightened Messianic expectations, active resistance to the Romans and increased zeal for the Law. This may help explain why James and the elders were so sensitive to attitudes regarding the Law.

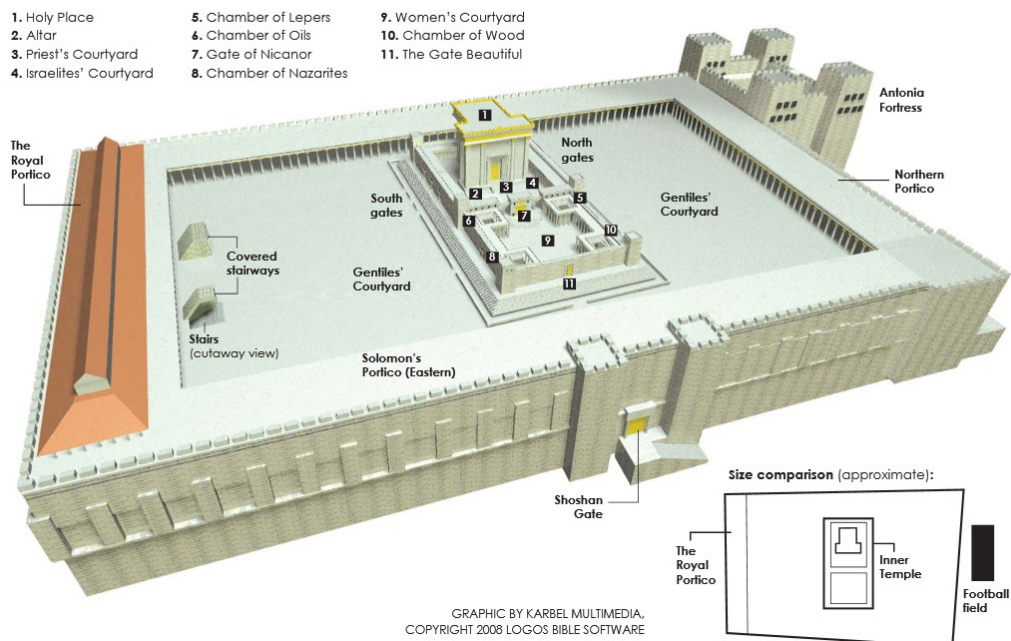
- » Vss. 23-24
 - This was the Nazarite vow (see Numbers 6.9-12). Various offerings were required at the conclusion of the vow, and those were the expenses Paul would have paid for.
 - “Paul’s seven-day purification rite, with washings on the third and seventh days, is consistent with a Jewish understanding that a Jew who took a trip outside of the Holy Land and into Gentile territories would become ritually impure. Such a cleansing was essential for Paul, according to Jewish tradition, since he would be entering the temple to assist with the Nazirite ceremony. He apparently times the final sprinkling on the seventh day of his purification so that it would coincide with the completion of the Nazirite vows of the four men.” (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
 - Paul’s actions here demonstrate his willingness to become “all things to all men” (see 1Cor. 9.22-23).
- » Vs. 25, James is confirming that there was no expectation that Gentile converts would keep the Law (see Acts 15.19-20).
- » Vs. 26, the purification process took seven days (note vs. 27).

Vss. 27-40, Rescue From The Mob

* Vs. 27, recall that Paul spent 3 years in Ephesus (Acts 20.31) and during that time “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19.10). These Jews were likely from Ephesus, maybe even some of the ones who “spoke evil of the Way” when Paul was there (see Acts 19.9). They would have recognized Paul and Trophimus (vs. 29; cf. Acts 20.4).

Herod’s “Second” Temple on the Temple Mount

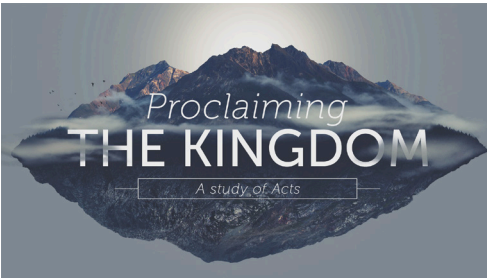
King Herod the Great began renovations on the Second Temple approximately 20-19 BC. The entire temple expansion, including the massive Temple Mount, was not completed until approximately 62-64 AD, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.



- » Vs. 28
 - Note that the charges are similar to those leveled against Stephen (Acts 6.11-13).
 - The charge that Paul took a Gentile into the temple was based on supposition and not fact (vs. 29), but it was perhaps the most serious of the charges. Inscriptions were placed on the gates leading from the court of the Gentiles into the court of women which read, “No man of alien race is to enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for the penalty of death that follows.”
- » Vs. 30, Paul was likely in the Israelite’s Courtyard when he was attacked by the mob. He was likely dragged into the Gentiles’ Courtyard (not strictly a part of the Temple) and in view of the Roman garrison in the Antonia fortress.
- » Vs. 31, the Antonia fortress was originally built by John Hyrcanus, but was rebuilt by Herod the Great and named after Mark Antony. A Roman garrison was permanently stationed in the fortress, which looked down on the temple courtyards, but was strongly reinforced during feast days. The tribune (chiliarch) was a man named Claudius Lysias (see Acts 23.26) and he would have commanded 1000 men plus 120 cavalry.
- » Vs. 32, Paul had requested that the Roman brethren pray for his deliverance from the “unbelievers in Judea” (Romans 15.30-31). He likely did not expect that prayer to be answered in this way.
- » Vs. 36, note the similarities to the cries at Jesus’ trial Luke 23.18; John 19.15).
- » Vs. 37, the commander had already made assumptions about Paul’s identity (vs. 38) and was thus surprised when Paul spoke to him in Greek.
- » Vs. 38, Josephus records this about the Egyptian: “There came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem, one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the mount of Olives, as it was called, which lay over against the city and at the distance of five furlongs. He said further, that he would shew them from hence, how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised them that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down. Now when Felix was informed of these things, he ordered his soldiers to take their weapons, and came against them with a great number of horsemen and footmen, from Jerusalem, and attacked the Egyptian and the people that were with him. He also slew four hundred of them, and took two hundred alive. But the Egyptian himself escaped out of the fight, but did not appear any more.” (Antiquities XX. VIII. 6)
- » Vs. 39
 - “Citizenship in a Greek city gave one higher status than the many who were merely “residents” of the city (who were in turn considered above transients and rural people). One became a citizen only by birth in a citizen family or as a grant from the city authorities. City pride and rivalry were fierce in antiquity, especially in Asia Minor, and Tarsus was a prominent city. It was one of antiquity-

ty's chief educational centers. Rome had made Tarsus a "free" city, the highest honor a city in the empire could receive next to being a Roman colony. Tarsus's citizens were not automatically Roman citizens (it was not a Roman colony), but dual citizenship was allowed in this period. Paul saves his disclosure of Roman citizenship as a trump card in case he needs it later." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)

- This mob had beaten Paul so severely that he had to be carried by the soldiers who rescued him (vs. 35). Yet, Paul loved his countrymen so much that he wanted to speak to them about Christ (see Romans 10.1-2).
- » Vs. 40, Aramaic is likely what is meant by "the Hebrew language". Pure Hebrew was typically used only in the Synagogue when the Law was read, while Aramaic was the common language on the street. Speaking to the people in their own tongue allowed Paul to connect with them (see Acts 22.2).



LESSON 22: DEFENDING THE KINGDOM, PART 1 (ACTS 22)

When the Jews from Asia first seized Paul in the temple, they made three charges against the Lord's apostle: they said he spoke against 1) the people, 2) the law and 3) this place (see Acts 21.28). In Acts 22 we see Paul make his defense (apologia) before the mob who had just tried to kill him. In fact, this was just the first of a series of defenses which Paul would make as he testified before the Jewish council, Roman governors and ultimately appealed his case all the way to Caesar. His defense was more than a denial of the charges, but a testimony of what Jesus had done for him and the mission he'd been given by the Lord. Paul was defending the very Kingdom of God.

Notes From The Text:

Vss. 1-21, Paul's Defense Before The Mob

Vss. 1-5 appear to be Paul's defense against the charge that he spoke against the Law. Paul had been educated in the Law and was very zealous for the Law. If Paul was so zealous for the Law, but had converted to Christ, then shouldn't they want to understand why?

» Vs. 1

- Paul addressed those who had just tried to kill him with familial regard. He loved them and desired that they would be saved (Romans 9.1-3).
- The word for "defense" is apologia, the basis for our word apologetics. Christianity can be intellectually defended.

» Vs. 3

- We are not told when Paul moved from Tarsus to Jerusalem. Speculation is that he would have moved after the age of 13 when he assumed the full obligation of the Law.
- Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel who held that tradition was superior even to the Law of Moses. Gamaliel would be regarded as one of the seven greatest teachers in all of Judaism. See Acts 5.34ff.
- Paul had also been zealous, yet without knowledge (see Romans 10.2).

» Vs. 5, "This bringing of the Christians to Jerusalem implied that the offence, since it was against the Holy Place and against the Law, was beyond the jurisdiction of the local courts that met in the synagogue buildings, and must be reserved for the Sanhedrin. After a trial before the Sanhedrin, the prisoner was freed, or beaten and freed, or killed." (Garreth Reese)

Vss. 6-16 is Paul's defense that he had spoken against "this place" (i.e. the temple). Paul's recounting of seeing the Lord on the road to Damascus was meant to convey more than why Paul was now a Christian. The Jews viewed the temple as a holy place because that was where God dwelt among the people. However, Paul had seen the

glorified Jesus far outside of Jerusalem. So, what did that mean for the temple; was this truly a holy place?

- » Vs. 9, some see a discrepancy with Paul's words in Acts 9.7. However, the words are different in the passages. They heard the sound, but did not understand or comprehend the message.
- » Vs. 11
 - Note that the others had seen the bright light (vs. 9), but they were not blinded. It was the glory of Christ that blinded Paul.
 - Paul was so helpless that he had to be helped into the city. Quite different from the way he had set out for Damascus (see Acts 9.1).
- » Vs. 12, Ananias' Jewish credentials would have struck a chord with the mob.
- » Vs. 13, Since the Jews know that only God can generate a miracle (cf. John 3:2), if Ananias was able to restore Saul's vision, this must signify that this entire event had been divinely orchestrated. Paul is laying a solid foundation to demonstrate that his conversion to Christianity was not alien to the will of the God they all loved.
- » Vs. 14, Ananias referring to "The God of our fathers" showed the continuity between the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with those who now put their faith in Jesus Christ.
- » Vs. 16, this passage, and many others, make it clear that sins are not forgiven until one is baptized (see Mark 16.16; Acts 2.38; Romans 6.3-4; 1Peter 3.21). However, baptism must not be divorced from faith in Christ, even as this passage makes clear. Paul was to be baptized, "calling on" Jesus' name.

Vss. 17-21 is Paul's defense against the third charge; that Paul had spoken against the people. Paul desired to proclaim the gospel among his Israelite kinsmen, but the Lord had other plans for him; he would be sent "far away to the Gentiles". If the Lord was sending Paul to the Gentiles, what did that mean for Israel's standing as the people of God? Could it be that the Lord had redefined who exactly qualified as His people?

- » Vs. 17, Paul's return was not until 3 years later.
 - Spent time with disciples in Damascus (Acts 9.19).
 - Trip to Arabia (Gal. 1.17-18).
 - Return to Damascus (Gal. 1.17-18).
 - Return to Jerusalem (Acts 9.23-26; 22.17).
- » Vs. 18, Paul's shift at this point may have been to suggest to the mob that they were also rebelling against the Lord.
- » Vss. 19-21
 - Paul thought that his credentials would make him the ideal candidate to proclaim Jesus to the Jews, but the Lord had other plans for him (see Acts 9.15).
 - If there were any questions about why Paul had spent so much time away from Jerusalem (remember the charge that Paul spoke against "this place" in Acts 21.28), the answer was that the Lord who saved Paul sent him "far away to the Gentiles".

Vss. 22-29, Paul And The Roman Tribune

- » Vs. 22, remember that the charges were that Paul taught against “the people and the law and this place” (Acts 21.28). Paul’s defense had shown that those charges were baseless, but reason would not triumph over their hatred of the Gentiles.
- » Vs. 24, the tribune did not speak Hebrew, so he did not know what the accusations were against Paul. The Roman scourge was an instrument of immense torture (see Matthew 27.26) which often resulted in death (Tacitus records that 7 out of 10 men would die when scourged).
- » Vs. 25, Roman law (both the Valerian and Porcian laws) forbade Roman citizens from being beaten. Such unlawful punishment could even result in the death of the one who ordered the beating.
- » Vs. 28
 - Purchasing citizenship was not strictly legal, but during the reign of Claudius it was well known that citizenship could be purchased if the correct bribes were paid to the right people. The commander’s name, Claudius Lysias (see Acts 23.26) likely indicates that he purchased his citizenship during his reign.
 - The tribune may have divulged how he purchased his citizenship as an insult to Paul, i.e. anyone could be a citizen these days. However, Paul’s birth as a citizen placed him in a completely different category. Being a resident of Tarsus did not confer Roman citizenship, so we do not know how Paul’s ancestors obtained Roman citizenship. Slaves freed by Roman masters were granted citizenship, so if Paul’s ancestors had been taken captive that could have explained how Paul was a Roman citizen.

Vss. 30, Paul’s Defense Before The Sanhedrin

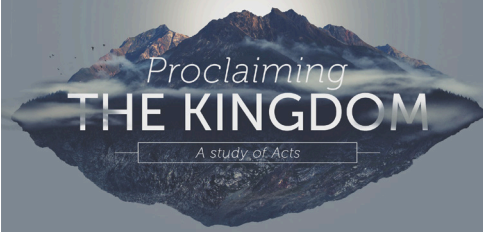
- » Vs. 30, “He still thought that Paul was a criminal of some sort, but he could not learn of what crime he had been guilty; he could not properly continue to hold him if there was no charge against him. But on the other hand, to release him would seriously endanger Paul’s own life if the Jews got hold of him again. Rome would not look with favor on any such breach of the peace as an assassination of a Roman citizen.” (Garreth Reese)

Defending the Kingdom:

1. **Give good arguments, not insults.** We would not blame Paul for being angry. After all, the mob he was addressing had just tried to kill him. However, Paul loved his enemies and desired that they would be saved (Romans 10.1-2). So, Paul did not hurl insults, rather he gave reasons arguments for why his kinsmen should put their faith in Christ.
2. **Give the information necessary to reach the right conclusions.** Paul didn’t give a series of doctrinal statements and then tell the assembled people to take it or leave it. He could have truthfully said that the temple had been replaced by God’s true temple the church or that the Jews were no longer the special people of God, rather it was whoever put their faith in Christ. But such declarations would only inflame the audience, so Paul made his defense by laying out his case so that

hopefully at least some could reach the correct conclusions.

- 3. Remember that Jesus is the judge, not the audience.** Paul did not win over the audience, their prejudice was too great to give the apostle a fair hearing. But Paul had been faithful to his Lord, and that was all that mattered.



LESSON 23: DEFENDING THE KINGDOM, PART 2 (ACTS 23-24)

Paul had defended the Way before his countrymen (Acts 22), but more trials were in store. In this lesson we will see Paul defend the Way before a Roman governor, all in prelude to his eventual journey to Rome itself. “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.” (Acts 23.11)

Notes From The Text:

23.1-11, Before the Council

- » Vs. 1
 - Paul had been very wrong, but had not violated his conscience... The Jews could be equally wrong and not realize it!
 - A literal translation of “conscience” is “with knowledge”. Paul had not violated what he knew about God’s will, but since he didn’t yet know the truth about Christ, he was still wrong.
- » Vs. 2, this Ananias was high priest from AD 48 - AD 59 and was extremely corrupt. He likely had Paul struck for having the audacity to claim a good conscience when in their minds he was clearly a criminal.
- » Vs. 3
 - “God will strike you”, According to Josephus, in the attack of the Sicarii upon Jerusalem (67 A.D.), he was dragged from his hiding-place, in a sewer of the palace, and murdered by assassins.
 - “Whitewash wall” see Matt. 23.27
 - “contrary to the Law” see Deut. 25.1-2.
- » Vs. 5, there had been no fewer than 28 different high priests from AD 37 - AD 70, so Paul very well might not have known who was the high priest. Or Paul may have been stating that he no longer recognized a high priest other than Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 7).
- » Vs. 6, this is a true statement because Christianity rests on Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (see Acts 13.32-33).
- » Vs. 9, “The word “evil” must be understood in a very restricted sense. They found plenty wrong in Paul. It was just that in the matter of the resurrection they found his teaching consistent with the Old Testament scriptures. The fact is, they were not nearly as sympathetic to the apostle as they were hostile toward their old enemies, the Sadducees. Their defense of Paul was a matter of convenience.” (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vs. 11, note Romans 1.10; 15.30-32.

23.12-22, Plot of the Jews

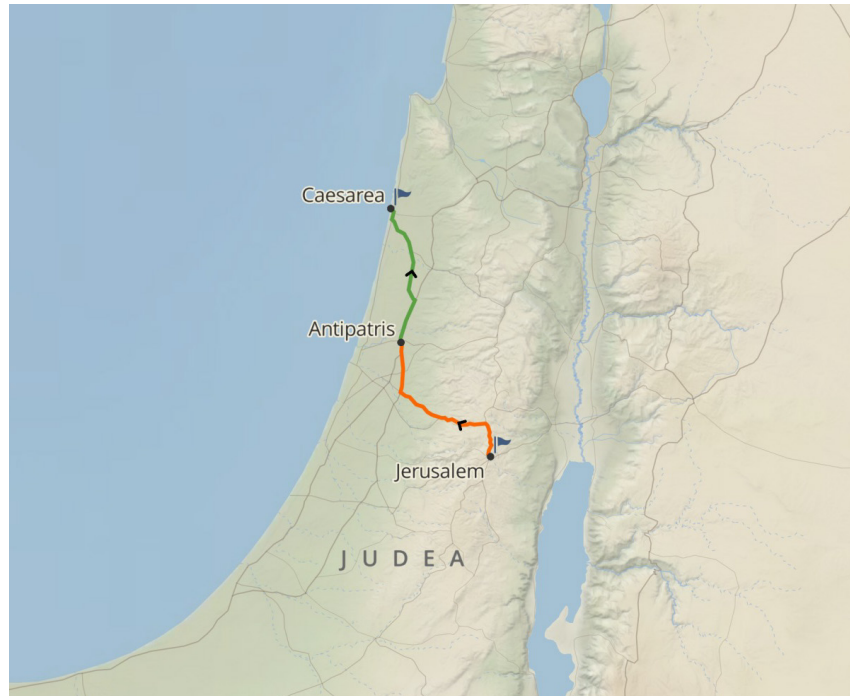
- » Vs. 14, “It speaks volumes about the chief priests to consider that the conspira-

tors felt quite sure of a hearty concurrence when they present the assassination plot to them.” (Garreth Reese)

- » Vs. 16, we have no other knowledge regarding Paul’s family in Jerusalem. Paul’s Roman citizenship afforded him the privilege of receiving visitors.

23.23-35, Move to Caesarea

- » Vs. 23, Caesarea was 60-70 miles from Jerusalem.
- » Vs. 24, Felix the governor
 - Beginnings: He and his brother, Pallas, had been slaves in Rome in the home of Claudius, before he became emperor. Pallas had obtained favor with Claudius, so when he became emperor, Pallas became an advisor and influenced Claudius to appoint Felix to this position, probably in 52 A.D. Called back to Rome to stand trial in 60 A.D.



- Notoriously cruel. Tacitus described him as having “The power of a king in the mind of a slave.” He had Jonathon, the high priest, murdered by the Sicarii (a band of murderous men who carried concealed daggers, killing all who offended them).
- He was married to three women. His first wife was Drusilla, the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. We do not know the name of his second wife. His third wife was also named Drusilla. She was the daughter of Agrippa I. Would have been about 20 years old when Paul stood trial. She was seduced away from her first husband by Felix.
- » Vss. 26-30, the tribune’s letter
 - Note that the tribune lied about rescuing Paul after learning he was a Roman (vs. 27). He also conveniently failed to mention that he was going to scourge Paul before learning of his citizenship.
 - The tribune also affirmed that Paul had not violated any Roman law (vs. 29).
 - Vs. 31, Antipatris was ~ 26 miles south of Caesarea. It was known as Aphek in the Old Testament, the site where the Philistines captured the ark (1Samuel 4).

24.1-21, Paul’s trial before Felix

- » Vss. 2-4, note the flattery of the Jews. It was insincere, for they loathed Felix.
- » Vss. 5-6, the Jews made three charges against Paul
 - Stirs up riots, a capital offense under Roman law

- Ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, i.e. an unsanctioned religion
- Tried to desecrate the temple
- » Vss. 11-13, answer to the first charge. Where's the proof that Paul stirred riots?
- » Vss. 14-16, answer to the second charge. The Way was not a sect, but the fulfillment of the Jews' hope.
- » Vss. 17-21, answer to the third charge. No evidence of Paul defiling the temple. In fact, Paul's accusers of this were not even present.

24.22-27, Paul & Felix

- » Vs. 22, Felix had been governor of this province for 6+ years, and before that he had been governor of Samaria. He would have come into contact with, and would have heard of many Christians during that time.
- » Vs. 24, Drusilla: Great granddaughter of Herod the Great. Great and niece of Herod Antipas (who beheaded John the Baptist). Daughter of Agrippa I (who martyred James). Sister of both Herod Agrippa II and Bernice (see 25:13).
- » Vs. 25, this message is tailor made for Felix.
 - Righteousness demands right behavior toward God. Felix was unaccustomed to submitting to any authority other than that of Rome.
 - Right behavior toward God demands self-control, but Felix' whole life had been one of unrestraint.
 - Felix was occupying the judgment seat in Paul's trial, but Paul knew that all men would be judged by the Lord
- » Vs. 26, bribery violated Roman law. Felix likely remembered Paul's mention of alms (vs. 17) and hoped this meant Paul's friends had access to more money.
- » Vs. 27
 - "There was racial strife in Caesarea b/w the Jewish and Gentile factions, and every time Felix could capture the leaders of either side, they were scourged. But these methods did not quell the strife over equal citizenship rights, and on one occasion of riot, Felix had sent in the troops (who were friends of the Gentile faction); there was much bloodshed among the Jews, and the soldiers plundered many of their homes for their riches. The strife continued, so Felix ordered leaders from both sides to Rome to argue their cases before Nero. At this point Nero recalled Felix, and some of the principal Jewish leaders of Caesarea went to Rome to accuse Felix. Felix's brother Pallas interceded on Felix's behalf, and thus Felix barely escaped execution." (Garreth Reese)
 - Festus would have wanted to placate the Jews knowing they had been successful in having Felix recalled.



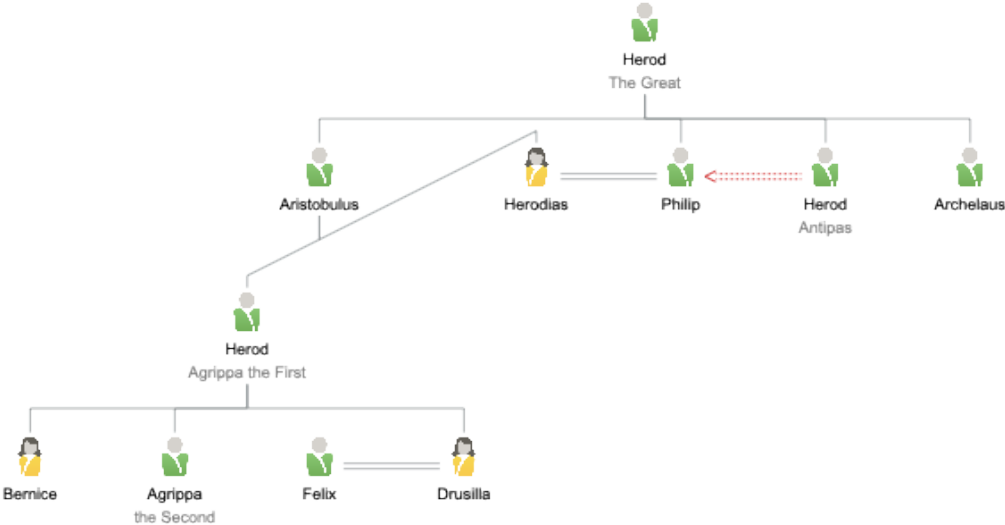
LESSON 24: DEFENDING THE KINGDOM, PART 3 (ACTS 25-26)

When the Lord instructed Ananias to go to Saul, He revealed that this former persecutor of the church would “carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9.15). Paul had spent years fulfilling the Lord’s words, until he arrived in Jerusalem and was attacked by a Jewish mob. But the Lord had more work in store for His apostle: “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome” (Acts 23.11). As we continue our study of how Paul defended the Kingdom, we will see how he testified before kings and how it was that he would make his way to Rome.

Notes From The Text: 25.1-22, Paul appeals to Caesar

- » Vs. 1, Remember that the Jews had been instrumental in having Felix recalled by Nero, who barely escaped the death penalty. Festus probably felt it was necessary to go to Jerusalem and meet with the Jews in order to placate them.
- » Vs. 3, We see from vss. 15-16 that the Jews had also asked Festus at this time for a judgment against Paul, i.e. they wanted Festus to have Paul executed before he was tried.
- » Vs. 7, by looking at Paul’s response in vs. 8, we can deduce that the Jews laid similar charges to those made by Tertullus in Acts 24:5-6.
- » Vs. 8, Apparently an abbreviated version of Paul’s defense. Very similar to the defense made in ch. 24.

Herod the Great's Family Tree



- » Vs. 9, recall that Festus was under immense pressure to placate the Jews.
- » Vs. 11, “Once a prisoner had made an appeal to Caesar, the judge to whom the appeal was made was obliged to stop all proceedings in the case immediately, and to send the prisoner, together with his accusers, to Rome to be tried there with Caesar himself sitting as judge.” (Garreth Reese)
- » Vs. 13
 - Herod Agrippa II
 - Son of Agrippa I (Acts 12) and great-grandson of Herod the Great.
 - 17 years old when his father died and was living in the Imperial household in Rome. Because of his youth, the emperor Claudius was dissuaded from appointing him to the throne of his father.
 - He was the last Jewish “king” in the land. His headquarters were at Caesarea-Philippi.
 - He was 31 years old.
 - Bernice: “first married to her uncle, Herod, ruler of Chalcis, who died soon afterward. She was so much with her brother Agrippa II, that she was suspected of living in incest. She tried to allay the scandal by a marriage with Polemo, king of Cilicia; but she soon tired of him, deserted him, and returned to be with her brother. She afterward became the mistress, first of Vespasian, then of Titus (both emperors).” (Garreth Reese)
- » Vs. 25, Festus conveniently left out how he was going to send Paul (an innocent man) to Jerusalem in order to stand trial again.
- » Vs. 26, “Roman law seemed to require that when a case was appealed to Caesar, the lower courts were to send along a full report of the legal proceedings which had preceded the appeal.” (Garreth Reese)

25.23-26.32, Paul’s testimony to Agrippa

- » Vs. 1, Paul’s defense before King Agrippa fulfilled Jesus words in Acts 9.15.
- » Vss. 6-8
 - “The hope ultimately was to be realized in the resurrection from the dead, to be effected by the Lord. Those who repudiate the resurrection, therefore, have cast off the hope! The apostle affirms he has not abandoned the religion of ‘our fathers.’ Rather, he has had his eyes opened to the true purpose and ultimate fulfillment of that system.” (Wayne Jackson)
 - The resurrection was central to Paul’s message. (See Acts 13:30-32; 24:14-15)
- » Vs. 11
 - In his letter to the emperor Trajan (c.A.D. 112), Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, said that those who were brought before him, who “cursed Christ,” were released; but he observed that “those who are genuine Christians cannot be induced to do” this (Wayne Jackson).
 - “Cities”, we only read of Paul persecuting Christians in Jerusalem and Damascus, but this verse shows that he had persecuted Christians in many cities.
- » Vss. 13-18, 5 details are found in this account which are not found in Acts 9 or

Acts 22.

- Light was brighter than the sun (vs. 13).
 - The light shone around Paul and those who journeyed with him (vs. 13).
 - All fell to the ground (vs. 14).
 - Jesus spoke in Hebrew (vs. 14).
 - Contains the fullest account of what Jesus said (vss. 14-8).
- » Vs. 19
- Note that while Paul had been appointed as a “servant and witness” by the Lord (vs. 16), it was still his choice to obey or not.
 - Paul’s obedience did not end at his going into Damascus and there being baptized (see Acts 22.10,16), but would require him to testify to both Jews and Gentiles in the hope that they would put their faith in Christ. Paul had not disobeyed the Lord’s call.
- » Vs. 23, the prophets had foretold Jesus’ death (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; etc.) and resurrection (Psalm 16.10). Furthermore, they proclaimed that He would be a light not only to the Jews, but to the nations (Isaiah 49.6).
- » Vss. 24, one can imagine Paul quoting numerous OT prophecies as he laid out his case, and his rich knowledge of Scripture may have been what Festus meant by “your great learning is driving you out of your mind.”
- » Vs. 27, “With Paul, to believe the Prophets was the logical step toward believing in the One of whom they spoke. There was no logical alternative.” (Garreth Reese)
- » Vs. 28, there is some debate over whether Agrippa’s statement was sincere or not. Based on his life before and after his encounter with Paul, it would seem that Agrippa was not seriously entertaining any notion of following Jesus.



LESSON 25: DEFENDING THE KINGDOM, PART 4 (ACTS 27-28)

Let's return to the beginning of Acts for just a moment. Luke was writing to Theophilus (literally "lover of God") and reminded him of "the first book... (that) dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up..." (Acts 1:1-2). That "first book" referred to what we now call the book of Luke, a book written for a specific purpose: "it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:3-4, ESV) Luke's thorough and detailed recording of events continued as he penned the events found in Acts. Ever since Paul arrived in Jerusalem in Acts 21 we've focused on how the apostle defended the faith before his countrymen and before Gentile rulers. In this last lesson let's note how Luke's account helps us defend the Kingdom.

27.1-44, The Testimony of Luke's Accuracy

Chapter 27 is a VERY detailed account of Paul's trip from Caesarea to Rome. While the account furnishes further proof of Paul's dedication to the cause of Christ, the account has also proved to be a valuable apologetic. "Luke's account of the voyage and shipwreck of Paul, who he accompanied from Caesarea to Rome, has been minutely investigated by an experienced Scottish seaman (commodore James Smith), and establishes the remarkable fact that Luke, though not a professional seaman, was a close and accurate observer of the winds and storms, and the management and movements of ship. He furnishes more information of ancient navigation than any single document of antiquity." (Wayne Jackson). We won't consider all of the details Luke provided, but these should suffice to show that Luke was a reliable witness to what he saw.

From Caesarea to Fair Havens (vss. 1-12)

- » Vs. 2, Adramyrium was a harbor on the coast of Mysia, known for its shipbuilding. This was a coasting vessel which would stay near to shore, stopping at various ports on its voyage.
- » Vs. 4, "At some other time of year, when the prevailing winds blew from a different direction, they might have sailed directly from Sidon to Mysia, leaving Cyprus on the right. During this time of year (it was getting late in the



sailing season) the prevailing winds, called Etesian winds, blow from the west and northwest. As they sail northward, they would sail past the east side of Cyprus, and while near Cyprus they would be sheltered from the prevailing winds making sailing somewhat easier.” (Garreth Reese)

- » Vs. 6, About 300 years earlier, Egypt had become the bread basket of Rome. The grain grown in Egypt had to be shipped to Rome, so a whole fleet of ships was devoted to this trade. It is clear from verse 38 that this Alexandrian ship was one of the grain ships.
- » Vs. 7, The shoreline of Asia Minor from Myra westward tends in a more northwesterly direction, and so the sailing was slow because they would have less shelter from the northwest wind.
- » Vs. 9, the Day of Atonement took place in September, a time of year designated as the “dangerous season” by sailors on the Mediterranean. Navigation practically ceased from November to March.
- » Vs. 12, Phoenix was about 40 miles to the west of Fair Havens.

From Fair Havens to Malta (vss. 13-44)

- » Vs. 13, If the south wind lasted just three of four hours, they could sail the distance and put the ship in the harbor for the winter.
- » Vs. 14, we get our word “typhoon” from the Greek word translated as “tempestuous wind”.



- » Vs. 17, the Syrtis were vast beds of sand driven up by the sea, and constantly shifting position so that it could not be known with certainty where the sandbars were under the surface of the shallow water.
- » Vs. 23, the Lord had stood by Paul on two previous occasions (see Acts 18.9; 23.11).
- » Vs. 27, here the “Adriatic Sea” refers to the central part of the Mediterranean.
- » Vs. 28, a fathom was about 6 feet.
- » Vs. 39, “Malta was an island well-known to experienced seamen, the bay (now known as St. Paul’s bay on the northeastern side) was not the main harbor on this island. It is not unusual, therefore, that this particular spot (of the eighty-five mile shoreline) was not recognized by the sailors.” (Wayne Jackson)
- » Vs. 42, Roman soldiers would pay the penalty due the prisoner if the prisoner escaped (see Acts 12.18-19; 16.27).

28.1-10, The Testimony of The Lord’s Signs

Paul and his travel companions would spend the rest of the winter (when sailing was impossible) on the island of Malta. While we do not have any record of Paul preach-

ing while on Malta, some notable miracles were performed. Recall that the purpose of miracles was to show God's approval (see Mark 16.20; Hebrews 2.3-4). While we may not have been there to witness the miracles, the response of those who did witness these signs provides further confirmation that the apostles were God's chosen messengers.

- » Vs. 4, in their mythology, "Justice" was the daughter of Jupiter, the goddess who insured criminals were punished for their crimes.
- » Vs. 5, fulfillment of Mark 16.18.
- » Vs. 7, "chief man" was an official designation and has been found on at least two inscriptions at Malta.

28.11-16, The Testimony of Caring Brethren

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35, ESV) The care which God's people show for each other has always served as a testimony of the transformation that occurs in Christ. The final leg of Paul's journey to Rome provided the powerful testimony of brotherly love.

- » Vss. 13-14, Puteoli was the harbor where the grain ships were unloaded. It was deep enough to accommodate the deep draft of these large and heavy vessels. We know nothing about the brethren except what we read about them here; they'd never met Paul, but they were willing and eager to host him and his companions.
- » Vs. 15, the Forum of Appius was 45 miles from Rome, while Three Taverns was 33 miles from Rome. These brethren provided the encouragement Paul was needing!



28.17-31, The Testimony of the Gospel Message

Luke's account ends with Paul in Rome for two years, doing exactly what he'd done ever since the road to Damascus; bearing witness for the Lord. Both Paul's message and his love for souls testifies to the truth of the gospel.

- » Vs. 20, Paul had earlier testified that promise Israel hoped to attain was related to the resurrection from the dead (see Acts 23.6; 26.6-8). The hope of Israel is the resurrection of Jesus.
- » Vs. 23, Paul was doing for them exactly what Jesus had done for the apostles (see Luke 24.44-47).
- » Vss. 24-28, this passage encapsulates Paul's entire ministry. He desired the salvation of his kinsmen, but most would reject the gospel. However, the Lord sent him to preach to the Gentiles, where he found a much more receptive audience.
- » Vs. 31, the book began with Jesus "speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1.3)

and it is fitting that it should end with Paul “proclaiming the kingdom.” The Kingdom of the Lord is glorious and it is real.