



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 1

Chapter 1

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- The book is a special book in the New Testament
 - It's the historical account of the Apostles and the spread of the church outward from Jerusalem following Jesus' resurrection
 - As many have noted, it's probably misnamed
 - It's called the Acts of the Apostles, but it only covers the work of two principle Apostles, and then only a portion of their work
 - And it's more a focus on how Jesus works to build His church by His word and by His Spirit
 - The book is unique in many ways, some obvious and others surprising
 - It's the only New Testament narrative apart from the Gospels, and together with the four Gospels it completes the New Testament Pentateuch
 - It's the bridge between the life of Messiah and the New Testament epistles written by the Apostles
 - It's our only record of how a Gentile Church was birthed from Judaism
 - The author was Luke, the author of the third Gospel, and they were probably written as a single work
 - He probably wrote both over a series of years
 - Together they comprise 25% of the New Testament, and are the only books of the Bible written by a Gentile
- Speaking of the author, Luke is a fascinating study himself
 - He was the traveling companion, close friend and personal physician of the Apostle Paul
 - According to an early prologue to Acts written in the 2nd Century, Paul converted Luke during one of his early missionary journeys
 - Curiously, Luke writes the story of Acts in the third person until Chapter 16:8 when Paul reaches Troas, Greece (*Note: audio incorrectly states Chapter 8*)
 - Then in Chapter 16, Luke changes to the first person (we)
 - This has led many to assume that Luke was living in Troas when Paul converted him, and that he left Troas with Paul
 - Luke then accompanied Paul in all his journeys until Paul's death as a martyr
 - Luke remained unmarried without children in devotion to Paul's work
 - And he died at the age of 84
 - Without Luke's record in Acts, some of the things Paul wrote of himself in the epistles would be difficult to understand
 - Dating the letter is fairly easy
 - We know it captures most of Paul's missionary journeys but it's also notably silent on Paul's death or the destruction of Jerusalem
 - Therefore, it was likely written before Paul died somewhere around 60-62 AD
 - This means the book covers about 30 years of history of the early Church

- Finally, let's briefly consider the structure of the book itself
 - As I teach verse-by-verse, I always try to emphasize finding the structure of books and allowing that structure to guide our understanding
 - The Holy Spirit is the author of this book, and God is a God of order, so it's incumbent upon us to look for that order and understand it
 - The book of Acts has several different structural elements that work together to help us understand it
 - First, the book is a record of the outward movement of the Church during Luke's lifetime
 - From its beginning in Jerusalem to its eventual arrival in Rome
 - The plot-line of the book moves in a one-way arc from God's city to the enemy's city
 - There is a theme evident in that pattern, of the Kingdom of God moving steadily outward to overcome the kingdoms of the earth
 - Secondly, the story presents the Gospel taking root first among Jews, then Samaritans and finally Gentiles
 - Fulfilling Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4; that salvation is of the Jews but will unite Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles
 - Third, Luke focuses on the ministry of Peter in the first half of the book and Paul in the second half
 - Peter was the leader of the Jewish church and Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles
 - So Luke's two-part structure alludes to the eventual transformation of the Church from predominantly Jewish to one almost exclusively Gentile
 - Finally, Luke punctuates his narrative with triumphant statements emphasizing the true power driving the Church forward
 - The statements consistently highlight the power of God's word and the Spirit (John 4 again...worshipping in Spirit and Truth)
- Tonight we study the section of the book commonly called the introduction
 - It's the bridge between Luke's Gospel and the rest of the book of Acts
 - The introduction is Chapter 1

Acts 1:1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,

Acts 1:2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

Acts 1:3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me;

Acts 1:5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

- Luke wrote Acts to document the events after Jesus’ ascension, so Chapter 1 forms a bridge between the Gospel and what comes next
- Luke begins this book in the same way he began his Gospel
 - Writing to Theophilus, another Greek
 - His name means “loved or lover of God”
 - In the Gospel account, Luke calls him “most excellent”
 - This is a title of rank, probably a Roman official
 - Luke may have been commissioned to write these accounts by this official who apparently was a Christian
 - He likely was Luke’s benefactor who supported Luke’s ministry, and perhaps Paul’s as well
 - Josephus’ famous history of the Jews was written to the “most excellent Epaphroditus,” who was Josephus’ benefactor
- Concerning Luke’s purpose, he intimates that the Gospel was just the beginning of his record
 - Likewise, Jesus’ work in the Gospel was just the beginning
 - And Luke also notes that his first account ended when Jesus was taken up (v.2)
 - In Luke 24, Jesus is seen to depart in this way:

Luke 24:50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.

Luke 24:51 While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

Luke 24:52 And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

Luke 24:53 and were continually in the temple praising God.

- But as Luke shows now, there was a bit more involved in Jesus’ departure than Luke chose to cover in his first account
 - In v.2 we hear that Jesus conveyed orders to the Apostles prior to His ascension
 - And these orders were delivered by means of the Holy Spirit
 - What’s the significance of Luke explaining that Jesus delivered His instructions by means of the Holy Spirit?
 - Jesus spoke the words, so why did He need the Holy Spirit to be involved?
 - There is a Biblical principle that spiritual truth cannot be understood by flesh, by natural man
 - It can only be understood by means of the Spirit of God

1Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

1Cor. 2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- In other words, when we're exposed to spiritual truth, we must be taught what it means by the Spirit of God
 - Remember how often Jesus would teach the Apostles and yet His word were misunderstood?
 - It was a demonstration of this same principle
 - Jesus' words were a mystery until the Spirit was working to make them understandable
 - We see that moment after the resurrection in John 20

John 20:20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

John 20:21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

John 20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

- So Luke explains that the instructions the disciples received were delivered by the Holy Spirit
 - So we can know that the Apostles understood them And they were delivered during times when Jesus presented Himself alive as a proof of His power over death
 - These appearances lasted for 40 days and occurred in Jerusalem and Galilee and places in between
- Then in vs.4-8 Luke addresses the instructions that Jesus delivered to the Apostles
 - First, He told them not to leave Jerusalem until they received what the Father had promised to them
 - This was the promise from John's Gospel that the Father would send the Helper to the Church

John 15:26 "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me,

John 15:27 and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

- Jesus refers to this event as a baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Jesus emphasizes the greater nature of this coming baptism in comparison to the one done by John with water
 - This passage reminds us of the Biblical perspective of both baptisms
 - The water baptism is a picture of the real baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - We are saved by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but we use water to picture the event
 - In the case of the Apostles, the two events were reversed in sequence
 - The Apostles (and many of the first century believers) experienced water baptism first followed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
 - This reversal was purposeful in the first century, and we'll explore why as we reach those moments in the book
- Jesus' comments lead the disciples to ask an interesting question

Acts 1:6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”

- Why do the apostles ask this question at this point?
 - Luke begins the verse with the Greek adverb “*oun*” which means therefore
 - So this question came as a result of the instructions the disciples received
 - Specifically, the disciples had the kingdom of Israel on their minds
 - Remember, Jesus Himself mentioned the coming kingdom in v.3
 - And then He says they will all share in a baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Jewish disciples knew from their Old Testament that the arrival of the Messiah would be associated with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Israel
 - We covered this topic in detail during our Isaiah study, but you can review for yourself in Zechariah 12:10-13:1
 - So, the disciples know Jesus to be the resurrected Lord, the Messiah
 - And they hear Him speak of things concerning the Kingdom and of a baptism by the Holy Spirit
 - So the only logical conclusion for them to make is this is the moment when the Kingdom is established for the sake of Israel
 - But the baptism Jesus spoke about was a different event, one that brings individuals into the family of God
 - The baptism that awaits for Israel is the one that will eventually bring the nation as a whole into faith and into the kingdom
- Jesus answers the question in vs.7-8

Acts 1:7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;

Acts 1:8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

- Jesus says no, now is not that time
- And furthermore you aren't to know when that time will come
 - It is a time fixed by the authority of the Father
 - This is consistent with Jesus' statement in Matthew 24 when He said the time of His return is unknowable

Matt. 24:36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

- But then Jesus turns to the substance of their concerns
 - The disciples were seeking reassurance that Jesus' authority would overcome and triumph in the world
 - They expected it would come in the form of the promised kingdom
 - And it will eventually, but Jesus says in the meantime you will receive power to establish a different kind of kingdom
 - The kingdom they will establish will start in Jerusalem, then extend to all Judea, then Samaria and finally to the entire Gentile world
 - This simple statement becomes the marching orders of the Church for the time until Jesus' return for His Bride
 - This statement is the theme statement of the book of Acts
 - The book chronicles how the Apostles received power in a specific sense
 - Power to bring the Gospel to the world and impress its truth upon many people
 - Power to perform miracles and teach with authority
 - It's also important to note that this statement is highly contextual
 - It was spoken to a specific group of men
 - And it came in conjunction with a very specific commission
 - It shouldn't be assumed to apply to every believer or every circumstance
- And then Luke records Jesus' ascension, something he didn't describe in His Gospel

Acts 1:9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Acts 1:10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

Acts 1:11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

- The moment of the ascension must have been bitter sweet for the disciples
 - They watch their beloved Lord leaving in glory
 - Specifically, Jesus was lifted up (the Greek word means to be caught up)
 - And He entered the clouds and was out of sight
 - This explains why the disciples kept gazing after Jesus was gone
 - Perhaps they wondered if He would re-emerge from the clouds
 - But He's gone
 - And all that remains are 11 men standing in the middle of the road silently staring at the sky
 - And apparently God felt like they needed a little nudge or they might just stay there all day
 - The Greek word for gazing means a fixed stare into space
 - They must have been some sight
 - The angels ask, why keep looking for Jesus in the sky?
 - Don't worry...He'll return in the same way one day
 - Because He still has a Kingdom to rule over
- The next brief passage records the Apostles obeying Jesus' command to remain together in the city

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

Acts 1:13 When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.

Acts 1:14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

- They had been with Jesus on the Mount of Olives
 - And now they walked back into the city, about 3/4 of a mile which is the "sabbath's day walk"
 - And they return to the upper room, probably the same place as the last supper some six weeks earlier
 - The same place where Jesus appeared after His resurrection
 - It's become something of a home base for the Apostles
 - And then we see the 11 disciples listed
 - But with them are Mary and His brothers
 - The mention of His brothers is significant
 - In John 7:5 we learn that His brothers weren't believing in Jesus prior

to His death and resurrection

- But now they have joined the faithful
 - And their time was spent in unified prayer, most likely prayer dedicated to the instructions Jesus gave them
 - Calling for the Spirit to come
- Finally, the introduction ends with the selecting of a replacement Apostle

Acts 1:15 At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said,

Acts 1:16 “Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

Acts 1:17 “For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry.”

Acts 1:18 (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out.

Acts 1:19 And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Acts 1:20 “For it is written in the book of Psalms,

‘LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE,
AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT’;

and,

‘LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.’

Acts 1:21 “Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us —

Acts 1:22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

Acts 1:23 So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias.

Acts 1:24 And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen

Acts 1:25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

Acts 1:26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

- First, note that Peter takes the initiative and calls the group to address an obvious problem in the group
 - Once there were 12 apostles, but there were only 11 now
 - Peter says to this group that a 12th was necessary
 - As there will be 12 apostles ruling over the 12 tribes of Israel in the Kingdom

(Matt 19:28)

- Peter reminds this group that the 12th died
 - And Peter mentions graphically the manner of that death
 - Judas was thrown down (headlong) and his intestines burst out
 - Why be so graphic?
 - And how do we reconcile this with Matthew 27 where we're told Judas hanged himself?
 - The answer is that Judas did hang himself
 - But by hanging himself on Passover, his dead body was a risk to anyone who came into contact with him
 - He defiled the city
 - So likely the priests had Gentiles carry the body outside the city and cast it onto the burning trash heap outside the city
 - It was located in the Valley of Hinnon, or Gehenna which became a picture of hell
 - When Judas' body landed on the heap and began to decay, his body would have bloated and eventually burst open
 - Peter's point in speaking graphically was to remind everyone that his death was a just punishment
 - In effect, both his body and soul were in hell
- Somewhat ironically, Peter says in v.17 that Judas has already received his portion of Jesus' ministry
 - And that portion was to play a very ignominious part in fulfilling Scripture
 - The Psalm 69 records that a man's homestead would be left desolate, with no one willing or able to dwell on it
 - For he will be the one to forsake the Messiah
 - The priests used Judas' reward money to buy a field after his death
 - And under Jewish tradition, that field remained his since it was purchased with blood money
 - No one else could claim that field
 - And then Peter quotes another Psalm (109) speaking of that same betrayer, saying that another man will take his office
 - So acting out of his faith and devotion to God's word, Peter takes the initiative to find that replacement Apostle
 - Interestingly, Peter doesn't assume he has the authority to appoint such a person
 - He turns to a time-honored tradition to discern God's will in finding a replacement
- Peter then gives a qualification of who may be considered an Apostle
 - In v.21 Peter says he must be a man who has accompanied Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry with John the Baptist

- And they must be witnesses to the resurrection of the Lord
 - These are the qualifications to be one of the Twelve
 - Other apostles were selected (like James and Paul) but they weren't one of the twelve who have the promise of ruling over the 12 Tribes
- Apparently, only two men met that test and were placed in consideration
 - Then they placed the decision in the Lord's hand praying that He would reveal His will
 - And in an act of faith, they drew lots, believing that God would direct the outcome according to His will
 - Casting Lots is a valid Old Testament method of receiving the Spirit's revelation
 - Rocks were labeled with the men's names and placed in a container or pot and shaken until one fell out
 - God gave this practice in Proverbs 16:33 and it appears in numerous Old Testament books
 - After the indwelling of the Holy Spirit came upon the Church, this method was no longer valid in light of the inward leading of the Spirit
 - In fact, this is the last time in the Bible that we see this method used, as expected
- And so Matthias becomes the 12th Apostle



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 2A

Chapter 2 1:13

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- Chapter of Acts is probably one of the more famous chapters of the New Testament
 - And justifiably so, for in this chapter we see the birth of the Church
 - This chapter has four primary sections
 - There are two primary events
 - The arrival of the Holy Spirit
 - The sermon by Peter
 - And there are two consequences that follow from each of these events
 - The manifestation of the Spirit among the Body of believers
 - And the response of the Church to Peter's sermon
 - As we said last week, Acts is a book of transitions and it wasn't written as a book of theology or even necessarily of church practice
 - And the events of Chapter 2 in particular are extraordinary and unprecedented
 - The first of these events is the arrival of the Holy Spirit as promised by Christ

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

Acts 2:2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Acts 2:3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

- Luke opens with a very telling phrase
 - When the day of Pentecost has come
 - The phrase “had come” literally translates “to fulfill completely”
 - So Luke begins “when the day of Pentecost was fulfilled completely...”
 - Luke is saying more than you might have assumed
 - The day of Pentecost is actually a Jewish Feast called the Feast of Weeks or First Fruits
 - It was established in Exodus 34 and later in Numbers 28 and was to be observed for 50 days following Passover
 - Hellenistic Jews gave it the title Pentecost which means 50th day
 - The feast commemorated the day the nation of Israel received the Law at Mount Sinai
- Luke prefaces his description of the arrival of the Holy Spirit in Chapter 2 by announcing that the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled completely by the events of this chapter
 - If we look at the parallels between the events of Exodus and the events of Acts 2, we see what Luke was saying

- In Exodus, the day of Pentecost followed 50 days after the Passover
 - The Passover itself was a forerunner of Christ's sacrifice on the cross
 - So in Exodus, God's people were set free from slavery and saved from death by the sacrifice of a spotless lamb
 - And the blood of that lamb was their covering
 - Then 50 days later, God's people were alone in the desert, fearful, waiting for God to direct them and guide them
 - At that point, God gave His people a Law written on stone
 - And this Law was their guide to righteous living
 - And the giving of that Law was accompanied by great signs and wonders and miraculous events
- Now moving to the book of Acts, the day of Pentecost follows 50 days after Easter
 - Easter is the day that the Passover celebration was completely fulfilled
 - The Passover of the Old Testament was merely a shadow or picture of the greater fulfillment found in Christ's sacrifice
 - This was the day when God set all His children free from the slavery of sin and death by the sacrifice of His sinless son, the Lamb of God
 - Our sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb
 - Then 50 days later, God's people are alone, fearful and awaiting direction from God
 - And at this point, God sends the Holy Spirit to men so that a Law may be written on their hearts
 - And the giving of the Spirit became the means for righteous living
 - And the giving of the Spirit is accompanied by great wonders and signs and miracles
- There is a "lesser to greater" relationship between the giving of these events in their original forms and the ultimate fulfillment in their later forms
 - This is a general pattern you will find in all the feasts of Israel
 - The earlier is a shadow of the later, greater fulfillment
 - The first points to the second, and the second event was the one in view from the beginning
 - So here, Luke says we are seeing the true fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost
- At this moment, all the disciples are still together, probably in the upper room because it says "house" in v.2
 - Then a miraculous, unique manifestation took place
 - First there was a sound of a rushing wind
 - Notice that the text doesn't say it was a wind, only the sound of a wind
 - The people in the room aren't thrown around or knocked over by a wind
 - It's only the sound of a wind

- Wind is a common picture of the movement or work of the Holy Spirit
 - Most clearly seen in John 3:8

John 3:8 “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

- Secondly, there are tongues of fire that appeared to distribute themselves among the people in the room, one tongue of flame per person
 - In the Greek, the description here is particularly vivid
 - A cluster of licking flames appears and then seems to separate apart
 - And each flickering flame moves toward a different person in the room
 - Here again fire is associated with the Holy Spirit
 - Christ Himself makes that comparison in Luke 3:16

Luke 3:16 John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

- The arrival of the tongues of fire demonstrate the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each believer in that room
 - And the indwelling was made visibly evident by the fire
 - Making clear that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the baptism of the Holy Spirit or the baptism of fire
 - These are synonymous terms in the Bible
 - Next Luke says these men were filled by the Holy Spirit
 - This is a different experience than the indwelling of the Spirit which occurred in v.2
 - The word filled implies controlled (as Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:18)
 - So after the indwelling, these men became controlled by the Holy Spirit
- Then the men under the control of the Spirit spontaneously begin speaking in languages they didn’t know a moment earlier
 - When the Bible uses the word “tongues” to describe language, it’s referring to normal, understandable human language
 - English, Spanish, Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, etc...
 - It doesn’t mean babbling nonsense words
 - It doesn’t necessarily mean a dead or unknown language
 - It simply means speaking a real, knowable language that the speaker didn’t know beforehand
 - The miracle is found in the simple fact that a person is suddenly able to speak a language they’ve never spoken before

- What's the significance of speaking in a foreign language?
 - Why did God chose to use this strange manifestation to mark the indwelling of the Spirit at Pentecost?
 - Consider the origin of multiple languages
 - When men were rebelling at the tower of Babel, they were seeking a way to unite themselves in the power of the flesh
 - They were trying "to reach God" according to Genesis
 - But they were doing it in the sin of their flesh
 - So God frustrated their efforts by confusing the language and scattering them
- Now God is producing the opposite effect
 - He is uniting a group of men who had previously spoken different tongues
 - Now they're speaking in tongues they didn't know previously, and suddenly language wasn't a barrier anymore, at least for this moment
- More over, the arrival of the Spirit meant that a spiritual uniting of these believers was taking place
 - Where before men were striving to unite in the flesh and reach God
 - Now they were being joined together by the Spirit as God reached out to them
 - Before their efforts were frustrated by a separating of the languages
 - Here God is bringing them together by uniting their languages
- God chooses to bring about speaking in tongues to send an unmistakable message that this moment is a time of reconciliation among men
- So before we move to the next section, let's stop to ask the obvious question:
 - Why did these events accompany the indwelling of Holy Spirit, and why don't they happen to all believers?
 - First, all believers do share in the key event of this moment
 - Jesus and the Apostles all taught that all believers receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a result of coming to faith in the Gospel
 - And that baptism ushers us into the family of God
 - But we also know that by and large Christians don't experience miraculous manifestations like those described here when we believe
 - We don't hear the sound of a violent rushing wind
 - We don't see tongues of fire arriving and diving into our bodies
 - We don't find ourselves falling under control of the Spirit and our mouths beginning to speak a foreign language
 - So the question is why did God find it necessary to bring these manifestations at Pentecost?
- Place yourself as an observer in the upper room as the Spirit arrived
 - Remember, you have no understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this

new age

- Try to remember that you would have had no idea what to expect or even that the event was coming
- Then you see these miraculous, powerful displays
 - You hear a powerful wind, but you don't feel even a breeze
 - You then see a fire ball in the room, and then the fire breaks apart and divides itself into each person in the room
 - But the fire doesn't burn you
 - It just appears to go into each person
 - Finally, the body begins to do things on its own, including speaking in foreign languages
- As you watch this happening, what do you conclude?
 - Something has happened
 - God has entered each person and has begun to control their behavior
- Now pretend the first indwelling of the Holy Spirit had arrived in the same way that He comes to us today
 - That is to say, what if the Holy Spirit had arrived silently?
 - What if the only effect of the Spirit's arrival had been the fruit He produced in believers' lives over time?
 - Simply put, you would have never known it happened, at least not for some time
 - And there would likely still be Christians today arguing whether the indwelling of the Spirit was even possible much less universal
- God desired to make His presence in the lives of these believers clearly evident in that day
 - But it's equally obvious that God didn't intend to continue these manifestations for all believers after He had made His point
 - Signs like this served their purpose in their day
 - Once the point has been made, it doesn't require God to make that same point over and over again
 - Finally, when we understand the significance of this moment in the history of God's dealing with men, we can put the entire scene in perspective
 - Pentecost was a pivotal moment when God sent His Spirit to permanently indwell all His children
 - Prior to this moment the Spirit only chose to indwell some men, sometimes for only a short time
 - It wasn't used as a universal mark of faith
 - Now in Acts 2 God ushers in a new dispensation in God's administration of mankind
 - All of God's children would receive something previously reserved for only a few, usually priests, prophets or kings

- And the indwelling would be a permanent gift intended to bring sanctification
 - Third, this indwelling would unite men and women through a common Spirit and purpose as the Bride of Christ
 - Fourth, it brought access to supernatural power through spiritual gifts previously available only to a few chosen
 - Fifth, for the first time we see God's Spirit reach out to Gentiles and unite them with Jews
 - Finally, the arrival of the Spirit opened the door for the preaching of the Gospel to the world
- With all these purposes being accomplished in this moment, should we be surprised that God would treat the moment in a special way, showing Himself in a unique way?
 - And likewise, once the precedent had been established, should we expect Him to repeat this experience every time another person is ushered into the family of God?
 - For example, the nation of Israel saw miraculous displays when God delivered the Word of God to them for the first time at the Mountain
 - But did God repeat those miraculous displays every time another child was born into Israel and received instruction in the Law?
 - Or did the mountain shake and pillars of fire appear every time a foreigner received circumcision and enter the assembly of Israel?
 - Of course not
 - Similarly, should we expect God to repeat the first experience every time a new believer receives the Spirit and enters the Body of Christ?
 - No
 - And so we should not seek after such displays nor teach that they are the expected norm simply because it happened in the early church
- Now we said the chapter had four divisions, so let's move to the second division: the peoples' response to what they've witnessed

Acts 2:5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.

Acts 2:6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.

Acts 2:7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

Acts 2:8 "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?"

Acts 2:9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

Acts 2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around

Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Acts 2:11 Cretans and Arabs — we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”

Acts 2:12 And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

Acts 2:13 But others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.”

- The second section describes the effects of this display of the Spirit upon others in the city of Jerusalem
 - Based on vs.5-6, here’s what we can assume has happened
 - The group in the upper room experienced the arrival of the Spirit and then began speaking in foreign languages
 - Though we can’t know exactly what they were saying, the text in v.11 says they were speaking of the mighty works of God
 - Most likely they were declaring the saving work of God in history and of the Gospel all the while praising the Lord
 - As their excitement spills over, they pour out of the upper room and into the crowded streets of Jerusalem on Pentecost
 - Out in public, the sound of their voices draws attention
 - The Greek word for sound in v.6 is different than the word in v.2 indicating that it wasn’t the sound of the wind that drew the crowd
 - It was the sound of the men speak in a multitude of foreign languages
 - In the crowd were a large number of Jews and a few Gentile converts visiting from countries outside the land of Israel
 - This was common in that day because Passover and Pentecost were both feasts that Jewish men were required to observe in Jerusalem
 - Jews living in the land simply left after Passover and returned again 50 days later for Pentecost
 - But Jews living outside the land would stay over for the 50 days waiting for Pentecost
 - That meant there would be a large number of foreign speaking Jews hanging around the city during this time
- In v. 6 we see a description of these men as they watch the disciples speaking in foreign tongues
 - They can hear the disciples speaking in their own foreign languages
 - And they were bewildered because they couldn’t understand how these residents of the Galilee were able to speak their native tongues
 - They probably knew these men were Galilean either by their appearance or by their accent
 - Galileans were said to have a distinct accent, which would have been apparent even as they spoke a foreign language
 - In vs.9-10, we see the list of countries representing the nationalities present

- Based on these countries, we can know the languages being spoken in the moment
 - There would have been Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and Nabeteian
- This reminds us that speaking in tongues means speaking in a real, recognizable language
 - Any attempt to fake this gift only results in silly gibberish that no one could understand since it's not a real language
- Now look at the effect this scene had on the crowd
 - Among the visiting Jews, it caused them to puzzle and ask questions of the meaning of this miracle
 - They recognized it was important and supernatural but they didn't understand the meaning
 - The second group seem by comparison to be local Jews, who just mock the event as drunkards
 - They don't ask questions because they doubt the significance of the event
 - Both these groups are unbelievers who are seeing this manifestation of God, with some responding with an open heart and others responding by mocking
 - Paul explained how God used this unique display

1Cor. 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

1Cor. 14:21 In the Law it is written, “BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,” says the Lord.

1Cor. 14:22 So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

- Quoting from Isaiah 28:11, Paul says this gift was given to fulfill prophecy given to Israel
 - God told Israel they would know when God was judging them when they saw Him opening the mouths of Gentiles to speak in foreign tongues
 - Here we see the beginning of that prophecy, when unbelievers respond to signs by questioning it and looking for answers
 - Even as some turn their backs
- To this receptive and inquisitive crowd, Peter will begin to preach, and his preaching forms the final two sections of the chapter



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 2B

Chapter 2:12-41

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- We return tonight to a critical moment in the Book of Acts
 - The Spirit has arrived and with Him came unique demonstrations of His power among the crowd
 - Last week we noticed that these manifestations led to two different responses from the crowd that observed the event
 - We'll return to examining the two responses and then move to the second half of the chapter
 - But first we need to retrace our steps through a very important issue arising from the text here
 - That is, why does the arrival of the Spirit occur long after these men became believers (especially in light of the fact that this is no longer God's pattern)
 - Last week I taught that the answer is that God is seeking to distinguish this day in our memories
 - This is the day that the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost is fulfilled
 - As such, it's important that believers throughout history understand plainly that on this day God instituted a unique ministry of His Spirit
 - Beginning on this day, all believers would receive a personal indwelling of the Spirit, which we call the baptism of the Holy Spirit or the Baptism of Fire
 - Since this marks such a dramatic departure from God's previous working among men, it warranted a unique and unrepeatable display of God's power to set it apart
 - Instead of indwelling these believers on the day they believed, the Father waited to send His Spirit until this special day
 - For that reason, these men received the Spirit after they had believed so as to mark the day
 - But after this day, believers receive the Baptism of the Spirit when they believe
 - However, there are two exceptions in the book of Acts in which this delayed indwelling of the Spirit takes place
 - We will study these in detail as we reach them...one occurs in Acts 8 when the Samaritans receive the Gospel
 - And the other happens in Acts 10 when the Gentiles first receive the Gospel
 - For now I want to remind you of something I taught on the first night
 - The story of Acts is a story of the outward movement of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome
 - And it's the story of how God's grace moves outward from Jews first, then to Samaritans and finally to Gentiles
 - As the Gospel reaches each of these audiences, there is yet another opportunity for God to make clear the arrival of a new ministry for the Spirit
 - So in Acts 2 we see God bringing the indwelling of the Spirit to Jews

- And in this way, Scripture confirms that salvation is from the Jews and they will receive God's promises first
 - They are the ones who experience the fulfillment of the Jewish Feast of Weeks
- But then when God opens the door for Samaritans and later Gentiles, He will redisplay these manifestations for their benefit
- But after the third group sees the sign, this unique delayed indwelling of the Spirit comes to an end
 - And the associated physical manifestations of the indwelling, having met their purpose, also quickly begin to diminish
- Returning to the reactions of the crowd, remember what we saw last week

Acts 2:12 And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

Acts 2:13 But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

- The group of visiting Jews recognize the miracle but can't understand what they see
 - A second group of local Jews dismiss the entire event as merely drunk men
 - They do not perceive the event as supernatural in origin, and therefore it triggers no questions
 - Both these groups are unbelievers who are seeing this manifestation of God, with some responding with an open heart and others responding by mocking
 - Paul explained how God used this unique display

1Cor. 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

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- Quoting from Isaiah 28:11, Paul says this gift was given to fulfill prophecy given to Israel
 - God told Israel they would know when God was judging them when they saw Him opening the mouths of Gentiles to speak in foreign tongues
 - Here we see the beginning of that prophecy, when unbelievers respond to a sign by questioning it and looking for answers
 - Notice that Paul says that the sign was not for believers as a means of edifying or building up faith
 - It was a sign to unbelievers
 - And yet it's clear that this sign was never intended to save man by itself

- It was intended to cause questioning
- Isaiah says that the sign will not transform the Jewish nation into believers
- In order for this sign to become the means for salvation, it must be united with understanding concerning the meaning of the sign
 - And so it falls to Peter to preach a sermon to the crowd which offers an explanation for the events they've witnessed

Acts 2:14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.

Acts 2:15 “For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;

Acts 2:16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

Acts 2:17 ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says,
 ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;
 AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY,
 AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS,
 AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;

Acts 2:18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN,
 I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT
 And they shall prophesy.

Acts 2:19 ‘AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE
 AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW,
 BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.

Acts 2:20 ‘THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS
 AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,
 BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.

Acts 2:21 ‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’

- Peter hears the snide comments from the local Jews of the city, so he stands with the eleven and raises his voice so that everyone in the crowd can hear him
 - And then he delivers a sermon
 - Beginning with a reading of Scripture, from memory in this case
 - Before we examine what Peter says in this chapter, let's consider the pattern that Scripture is presenting here
 - Because this is one instance where a useful pattern is present, and we should take note of it and follow it
 - First, we have already noted that the situation began with a supernatural display of God's power
 - Specifically, a work of the Spirit brought about the opportunity for Peter to preach and deliver this message

- Similarly, if we are to reach the world with the Gospel, our work must always begin with a work of the Spirit among the people
 - It won't always be such a vivid display
 - Nor will it necessarily grab the attention of so many people at one moment
- Nevertheless, if our message will reach anyone, it must come by the power of the Holy Spirit

John 6:44 “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

- Here the drawing ministry of the Spirit is evident in the way the visiting Jews in the crowd respond to the miracle by asking its meaning
 - Similarly, our work today in presenting the Gospel depends on the Holy Spirit to prepare hearts and draw men to Christ
 - But just as in this case, that drawing work is only half the equation
 - The second part of the process is found in a message that brings the Word of God
 - Paul describes this two-part process succinctly in Romans:

Rom. 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- Faith comes from hearing the message of the Gospel, as delivered by the Word of God
 - And Peter opens his sermon with a presentation of God's word, and in particular a passage that says something about the circumstances
 - We're witnessing the Biblical way preaching should be done
 - A reading of God's word
 - Accompanied by exposition of its meaning
 - Followed by an application and call to believe based on its meaning
 - The power of such preaching isn't found in the persuasiveness of the speaker's words
 - But rather in the power of God's Spirit and His word
- Turning to Peter's sermon itself, Peter defends the men
 - He makes clear they aren't drunk as some suppose, since it's only about 9:00 in the morning
 - Rather, Peter says their behavior is consistent with what Joel wrote concerning the last days
 - Peter quotes from Joel 2, and yet look carefully at what Joel says
 - He begins describing a pouring out of the Spirit on men
 - And as a result of the outpouring of the Spirit, your sons and daughters will prophesy
 - See visions, dream dreams

- And accompanying this moment, there will be miraculous signs in the sky
 - And it will all take place before the great and glorious return of Christ
- Looking at those details, we immediately notice that none of those things have happened in this moment
 - Furthermore, the things that have taken place at Pentecost like speaking in tongues and the wind and fire are NOT mentioned in Joel's prophecy
 - So though Peter read from Joel, this passage is clearly talking about a different moment than the one that took place in the upper room
- In fact, the moment Joel is describing is the same moment described in Zechariah 12 immediately before the Lord returns to reign
 - This is the prophecy of how the nation of Israel will receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the end of Tribulation and receive the Lord
 - We studied this moment as you remember in Isaiah
- So why does Peter read from Joel in this moment?
 - Peter is referencing Joel to make the point about how God uses His Spirit to create manifestations
 - When the Holy Spirit is poured out on Israel in the last days of Tribulation, those men and women will act in ways similar to the way the disciples are acting here
 - They will be filled by the Spirit and say and do things that will appear strange
 - So here, Peter is making an application of Joel, not an interpretation
 - Peter is saying that this scene should be understood to be a work of the Spirit because of what Joel said to expect in the last days
 - Simply put...these witnesses should understand this strange behavior as a work of God by His Spirit and not as human weakness
- So having read God's word, now Peter turns to applying it for the sake of his audience
 - This is where the "preaching" begins
 - But notice that like all good Biblical preaching, the sermon hinges on the meaning of Biblical text and not on human wisdom, funny stories, etc.
 - The turning point of the sermon comes with the final verse of Joel
 - Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord in response to God's Spirit will be saved
 - The only question left to address is who is this Lord?

Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know —

Acts 2:23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Acts 2:24 "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death,

since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Acts 2:25 “For David says of Him,

‘I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE;

FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN.

Acts 2:26 ‘THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED;

MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE;

Acts 2:27 BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES,

NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.

Acts 2:28 ‘YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE;

YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.’

Acts 2:29 “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

Acts 2:30 “And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE,

Acts 2:31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.

Acts 2:32 “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

Acts 2:33 “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

Acts 2:34 “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,

“SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,

Acts 2:35 UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.’”

- Peter begins in addressing the crowd as the “men of Israel”
 - At this point, Peter is preaching to Jews alone
 - And this is how it should be
 - The Jew was to receive the Gospel first
 - Only later does God open the ears of Samaritans and Gentiles
 - Until God brings Peter to understand that the Gospel will reach the entire world, He is logically focused on Jews
- Peter then begins to name the Messiah who is responsible for stirring up this crowd
 - Jesus of Nazareth, Who proved His claims with signs and miracles that God performed through Him by the Spirit
 - And these men remember all these things
 - It was only 50 days earlier
 - But the question on their minds would have been how the Messiah could have been put to death?
 - Peter anticipates this question and answers it
 - The man was delivered over to death by God Himself
 - And this was a predetermined plan by God’s foreknowledge

- Predetermined means “determined by God’s fixed purpose”
- And foreknowledge means to “know beforehand” in the sense of pre-planned
- So God brought Jesus to death because it was a pre-planned event in keeping with God’s fixed purpose
- And yet Peter makes clear that God worked through the agency of sinful, godless men in accomplishing this outcome
 - Since God is not the author of sin, He relies on sinful men to act on their sinful impulses and He directs them to His intended end
- In the end, God brought Jesus back from the dead, because it was impossible for death to hold Christ
 - Death is reserved for those who are guilty of sin and deserve death
 - Since Jesus was sinless, He couldn’t be held in death forever
 - He remained there long enough to accomplish God’s purpose and then He was resurrected
- Then Peter quotes from several different Psalms written by David to prove his point concerning Jesus as Messiah
 - First David said in the Psalms concerning the Messiah that He is always seated at the right hand of the Father
 - And the Messiah’s flesh will live in hope because His soul will not be left in Hades nor will the body undergo decay
 - Instead the Messiah will know the way of life
 - Traditionally, Jewish rabbis interpreted these verses to be a description of David himself
 - But Peter corrects that view and opened by saying that David spoke these statements about the Messiah, not himself
 - And Peter then makes the obvious observation that David didn’t resurrect, at least not yet
 - He was still buried in a grave nearby in Jerusalem
 - So these words couldn’t have been referring to David
 - They were describing someone who is resurrected from death and brought to eternal life without suffering decay in the meantime
 - Only Jesus fits that description
 - Then Peter goes on to say that David knew he was promised to have a descendent on his throne forever
 - And the fulfillment of that promise is met in a resurrected Lord who can live forever and sit on that throne without ever suffering death again
 - Finally, Peter says that this Jesus having ascended is the One Who sent the Holy Spirit as promised to His sons, thus resulting in this strange display
 - Peter testifies in v.32 that they witnessed this resurrection
 - And it was the fulfillment of David’s prophecy that the Lord would sit at the

right hand of the Father

- Not that David himself was to receive this promise
- Finally, Peter brings his sermon to a climax

Acts 2:36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:39 “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

Acts 2:40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”

Acts 2:41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

- Having spoken truth backed by the power and authority of God’s word, Peter gives a call for repentance
 - And the work of the Holy Spirit is clearly evident in their hearts
 - They were pierced, which means shocked or stunned
 - They knew this was true, but the news stunned them because it showed them they had previously rejected Christ
 - And now they were understandably concerned for what they could do about this situation
 - So they ask Peter
 - Peter answers and says that forgiveness is available, if they repent and are baptized
 - Then they too can receive the baptism of the Spirit
 - The close connection Peter makes between salvation and baptism is uniquely associated with the Jewish generation of his day
 - Normally, we wouldn’t declare that baptism is a necessary requirement for salvation
 - And it wasn’t a requirement for salvation in Peter’s day either
 - But the generation of Israel that rejected Jesus was under a special judgment that Jesus Himself declared in the Gospels
 - Because the nation of Israel rejected their Messiah, Jesus declared this generation of Jews to be under a penalty
 - They committed the unforgivable sin and were appointed to suffer the judgment of AD 70
 - Virtually the entire nation was executed by the Romans

- If a Jew wanted to avoid that judgment in this generation, they must believe in the Gospel and be baptized so that they were separated from their generation
 - This is the meaning of Peter's comment in v.40
 - They were being called to eternal salvation through faith, and to an earthly salvation from the AD 70 judgment through baptism
- In Acts, every time we see baptism so closely connected to a message of salvation, it's always present to a Jewish audience who were in jeopardy of this specific judgment
 - Today, we wouldn't preach that someone be baptized to be saved
 - Rather, we preach as Paul did that Gentiles should be baptized as an obedient act of faith
- And on this day, 3,000 men received the testimony of God's word as preached through Peter
 - And they did as Peter commanded instantly growing the early church ten fold on its first day



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 3

Chapters 2:42 - 3:26

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- The end of Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3 are closely connected, so we study them together tonight
 - At the end of last week, we were in the streets of Jerusalem after the Spirit descended upon the Church
 - And Peter preached to the multitude gathered resulting in 3,000 Jews baptized that day
 - Through baptism they entered the Church
 - And as Jews, they also became part of the believing Remnant of Israel
 - This is the same remnant Paul describes in Romans 11:5-7
 - Then at the end of this scene, we find a summary statement of what followed for this group

Acts 2:42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- Those who came from Pentecost were continuously devoted to two activities, and to a lesser extent two other activities, Luke says
 - The Greek word for continuously devoted (*proskartereo*) means adopting a lifestyle
 - You can see it used in Acts later:

Acts 10:7 When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants,

- - “Personal attendants” is the same word in Greek, indicating a vocational dedication to something
 - So those who experienced Pentecost adopted a new lifestyle of personal dedication to two activities
 - Learning the Apostles' teaching and spending time together
 - The grammar in the Greek sentence makes clear that the latter two activities – the Lord's Supper and prayer – were conducted somewhat less frequently
 - This makes sense on a practical level
 - The Jewish believers in the early church would have continued observing standard Jewish practice for prayers and meals, which occurred at prescribed intervals
 - But teaching and fellowship were continual and made a part of everyday
- Luke gave us this overview to help us understand the events of Pentecost better
 - Someone might have heard about the events of Pentecost, but then dismissed it entirely as an emotional response – mass delusion
 - After the excitement had died down, these people would come to their senses and forget the whole experience

- Today, we might see some who make a profession of faith but within a fairly short period of time, they leave it all behind
 - The reality is that strong emotional responses are not an accurate measure of truth
 - People often experience strong emotions in response to some message or event
 - But as sincere as these responses may be, they can be sincerely wrong
- So Luke gives us evidence that the huge response on Pentecost wasn't a flash in the pan
 - Over 3,000 people came to faith on the first day of the church, and that change was followed by a new personal lifestyle
 - And a bond of the Spirit that drew this group together in new ways
 - These people began to live and think differently – fundamentally differently – as a result of the indwelling of the Spirit
 - It changed their view of Jesus, which brought salvation
 - And it changed their view of the world and of each other in the Church, which led them to think and act differently toward one another
- Ironically, many have taken Acts 2:42 to be a recipe for a how to establish a healthy church environment, when it's really speaking of individual devotion
 - First, remember that the book of Acts is not intended as a manual for how to conduct church
 - We aren't supposed to mimic the first century experience
 - We're supposed to follow the Spirit
 - Secondly, these activities are good and necessary disciplines of faithful believers, but they don't create faithful believers by themselves
 - The believers themselves were continually devoted to these activities (i.e., new vocation or lifestyle)
 - They were outward signs of a new heart and Spirit...they didn't produce those things, they followed these things
 - So it must be the individual decision of a believer to become devoted to these disciplines as a matter of lifestyle
 - But the activities themselves are important
 - Teaching, Fellowship, Communion, Prayer

Acts 2:43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

Acts 2:44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;

Acts 2:45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

Acts 2:46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with

gladness and sincerity of heart,

Acts 2:47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- Finally, Luke provides a snapshot of life in the early church
 - There was a feeling of awe or fear (*phobos*) as they witnessed the miracles performed by the Apostles
 - Throughout Acts we'll hear of miracles happening in the early church, but notice that they are always performed by Apostles or delegates who received the laying on of hands
 - They are not performed by the congregations as a whole
 - Nor could they be handed down except by the Apostles themselves
 - The gift of Apostleship was unique in the early church, and after the last Apostle died, the spiritual gift of miraculous powers ended
 - This new church in Jerusalem was living close together, sharing all they had and helping the needy among them
 - This was a unique church for a unique time
 - And the Jerusalem church was unique even in its own day
 - We hear nothing of communal living outside of Jerusalem in Acts and it disappears entirely in the narrative after Acts 5
 - We also know from the epistles that Jerusalem was a poor church and often depended on gifts from wealthier Greek churches
 - It makes sense then that these early poor believers in Jerusalem would have seen good reason to adopt communal living to help with their individual needs
 - But here again, the unique experience of these believers in the first church shouldn't be used as evidence for how other church bodies should operate
 - For example, these early Christians also spoke Hebrew, wore tunics and sandals, and they bathed once a month
 - If someone wants to argue that all churches should operate like this church did, how far are they willing to take that comparison?
 - If we want to make useful comparisons to the first century church, we should focus on making personal applications
 - Am I continually devoted to receiving God's word?
 - Spending time in fellowship with other believers?
 - Participating in communion and prayer?
 - As a result of their faithful dedication to the Lord and their open practice of their faith in the Temple grounds and in the city, they gain favor
 - First, they gain favor with God
 - They are praising Him and He is adding to their numbers daily
 - Secondly, they gain favor with the people in Jerusalem

- Among the Jewish people of the city the early believers are viewed favorably – probably from piety and sincerity
- But obviously, they wouldn't have found favor with the Pharisees
 - And in fact, Luke ends Chapter 2 with this statement because he wants to set up a contrast with what comes next in Chapter 3
 - Over the next two chapters, Luke portrays a single day in the life of the church in which a miraculous healing leads to confrontation with the Jewish authorities

Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.

Acts 3:2 And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.

Acts 3:3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.

Acts 3:4 But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!"

Acts 3:5 And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

Acts 3:6 But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — walk!"

Acts 3:7 And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.

Acts 3:8 With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

Acts 3:9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God;

Acts 3:10 and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

- On one day in the life of the early church, the Apostles went to the temple as they usually did
 - A man crippled from birth is set down in his usual place at the gate to the Temple
 - Later we learn that his condition lasted for forty years
 - 40 is a number associated with testing or a trial
 - So this man's condition seems to have been instituted by God as a test until the day when God would correct it through the Apostles
 - Similar to the blind man in John 9
 - The Beautiful Gate was the gate between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women
 - Only Jews could pass through this gate

- And this man was placed here to beg for alms, financial gifts given from one Jew to another as a demonstration of virtue
- This man is begging when he makes a request from Peter and John for money
 - Rather than give him the money he wanted, they tell him to look at them
 - The man had probably been looking down asking without making much effort to look at anyone in particular
 - When Peter calls upon the man, he looks up eagerly, probably in anticipation of receiving money
 - It's interesting to note that though Peter and the rest of the church had pooled their possessions, Peter makes no effort to give this man the charity he requested
 - Meeting physical (or “felt”) needs among unbelievers is not the ultimate aim of Christianity
 - Nor is it the best expression of the Gospel
 - James instructs us to be generous with our giving in supporting believers' physical needs
 - But Acts teaches us to be generous with the message of the Gospel to the unbelieving world
 - In Peter's case, he says I don't have much money, but I have Apostolic authority to grant you a miracle
 - And Peter commands the man to walk, but he does so in the name of Jesus
 - Invoking the name of Jesus means in the authority of Jesus
 - Peter knew he could produce this result because he was acting in accordance to the will and direction of Jesus
 - The Apostolic gift included the ability to perform such miracles
 - But like any spiritual gift, the power resides with Christ working through us
 - It is not our power to wield as we desire
 - This distinction is important in the story, because of what Peter says next to the crowd
- After the healing, the man just sits there, which makes sense since he has never walked before
 - So Peter reaches down and lifts him up and immediately he's walking – a true miracle
 - The result of the miracle is predictable
 - People are amazed and praise God
 - Before we look at what follows on this day, give a moment's thought to how this same process works in every Spiritual gift
 - When the Spirit works in the Body of Christ to produce a work, it always follows a similar pattern
 - First, the work is performed for the benefit of others

- Spiritual gifts are given to the body to edify – build up – others
 - They are not for our own benefit
 - So they must be used corporately
- Secondly, they are made possible by God's power in us so that our work will result in glory to God
 - In this case, many people rightly credit God for the miracle
 - Though some looked to Peter himself
 - We must never turn our gift into a platform to glorify ourselves
- Thirdly, we must look for ways to redirect attention given to us back to God for the praise He deserves
 - In this case, we see clearly why the apostles were gifted to produce such miracles
 - In the earliest days of the Church, God determined that such public displays of His power were essential to giving His messengers the credibility they needed to bring His message to the people
 - This would also explain why these apostolic powers ended as the last Apostle died
 - By that time the church and the Gospel itself was firmly established, and such displays were no longer needed
 - In fact, they would begin to distract from the message itself if allowed to continue
 - Look at how Peter makes use of this display to focus attention on the Gospel

Acts 3:11 While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.

Acts 3:12 But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?

Acts 3:13 “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him.

Acts 3:14 “But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,

Acts 3:15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.

Acts 3:16 “And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

- Naturally, Peter and John receive the peoples' attention and amazement
 - And they flock to them in the same way that people flocked to Jesus in His

ministry

- But these men redirect the crowd's attention from themselves to Jesus, Who was the true source of the power to heal
- Let's look at the structure of Peter's second sermon
 - First, he acknowledges what caught their attention
 - They are excited about seeing a healing, and they are looking to Peter and John to see what they'll do next
 - Second, Peter gives the true source of the power
 - The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is at work glorifying His servant Jesus
 - Using the three patriarch names was a shorthand way of referring to the Abrahamic Covenant
 - In other words, these events are a part of God's work to keep His promise made in that covenant
 - And that promise was fulfilled ultimately in the servant Jesus
 - Peter uses the term servant to describe Jesus in light of Jesus' suffering
 - The Jews knew of Isaiah's promise that the coming Messiah would be God's suffering Servant
 - Calling Jesus servant implied that He was the One Isaiah described
 - Third, Peter reminds the crowd that they previously responded in the wrong way to demonstrations of God's power through Christ
 - The Jews of the city were complicit in Jesus' death, demanding that Pilate kill Jesus and release a murderer
 - Remember the people told Pilate that the blood of Jesus should be on them and their children (Matt 27:25)
 - Peter uses a variety of names for Christ:
 - Holy One, Righteous One, Prince of Life
 - All of these terms reinforce Jesus as the Messiah and as deity
 - Fourth, Peter presents the undeniable fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead by the Father
 - Something these people witnessed
 - This is the second time Peter has made this statement
 - It seems as though virtually everyone in the city of Jerusalem had witnessed Jesus alive after the cross
 - These are the essentials of the gospel message
 - Jesus is God in the flesh
 - He died though He had no sin
 - The Father raised Him from the dead
 - And then fifth, Peter calls upon the crowd to respond in faith
 - He says the lame man is walking because of faith in Jesus' name

- The Greek in v.16 is difficult to parse, since the verse is a complicated sentence
 - The sentence actually begins back in v.13
- Here's how it reads most literally in English

Acts 3:16 and on the faith of his name, this one whom you see and have known, his name made strong, even the faith that through him did give to him this perfect soundness before you all.

- ○ If we replace the pronouns, we can make it a little easier to follow

Acts 3:16 and on the faith of Jesus' name, this lame man whom you see and have known, Jesus name made [him] strong, even the faith that through Jesus did give to the lame man this perfect soundness before you all.

- ○ The NET Bible renders the text in a very readable way:

Acts 3:16 And on the basis of faith in Jesus' name, his very name has made this man—whom you see and know—strong. The faith that is through Jesus has given him this complete health in the presence of you all.

- Clearly, Peter is crediting faith in Jesus as the means of the healing
 - The lame man was healed by faith in the name of Jesus
 - Yet consider that the man himself never received a gospel preaching from Peter
 - Peter simply commanded him to walk in the name of Jesus
 - How are we to suppose that this man's faith entered into the process?
 - Did he already have faith in Jesus?
 - This is one likely explanation
 - Perhaps Jesus gave Peter the awareness to heal the man because the man had already shown faith in Jesus
 - But look again at Peter's statement, especially in the NET
 - Peter says that a faith in the name of Jesus – in the authority of Jesus – made the man strong
 - And the faith itself, Peter says, is through Jesus
 - The NIV renders it “the faith that comes through Him”
 - The faith that saves is a faith that comes to us through Jesus
 - Through is “*dia*” in Greek, and it simply means “because of”
 - Use that phrase instead of “through” and you see the full meaning of the sentence

- NIV: “The faith that is [because of] Jesus has given him this complete health in the presence of you all”
 - And on the basis of faith in that name, he was healed
- The emphasis on “through” is very important to understanding what happened in that moment
 - The gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) was delivered to this man so that he might be healed

Acts 3:17 “And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.

Acts 3:18 “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.

Acts 3:19 “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;

Acts 3:20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you,

Acts 3:21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

Acts 3:22 “Moses said, ‘THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you.

Acts 3:23 ‘And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’

Acts 3:24 “And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days.

Acts 3:25 “It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’

Acts 3:26 “For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”

- Peter acknowledges the Jews of the city were ignorant of what they were doing
 - They didn’t realize the man they were killing as the Messiah
 - Unlike many within the leadership of Israel who were not innocent in this way
 - And the entire episode was according to prophecy, that the Messiah must suffer
 - But now they were called to repentance
 - There is something interesting happening here
 - First notice that the word for repent in v.19 is plural in Greek
 - In Texas we say “y’all repent”
 - Peter is calling for the collective group to repent
 - Secondly, Peter says their repentance would result in the Father sending Jesus Who was appointed for them

- But Jesus was already sent, right?
- In fact, Peter says in v.21 that Heaven “must” receive Jesus until a period of Restoration of all things which God spoke about
- Finally, Peter says that Moses among the prophets told Israel that God would raise up a prophet from among the Jews to Whom all Jews would give heed
 - And this generation was the first of Israel with the opportunity to see this prophecy fulfilled
- Putting this all together, we see Peter is preaching two closely-linked messages simultaneously
 - First, Peter is making a call for personal salvation, as he did at Pentecost
 - He tells them clearly they have the opportunity to see their sins washed away
 - But by addressing the crowd in the plural and by adding the additional promises, Peter raises the appeal to a national level
 - If the nation as a whole repents, Peter says they will enter a time of refreshing brought about by the presence of the Lord
 - This period of refreshing is a reference to the Kingdom or 1,000 years of Christ ruling physically on Earth
 - It will happen because of the presence of the Lord, His return from Heaven
 - And it will result in the restoration of all things promised by the prophets concerning Israel
 - And this coming Kingdom is predicated on a national repentance by Israel and their acceptance of the Messiah
 - Peter offers his generation that opportunity
 - At the very least each individual has the call for personal salvation
 - And should the entire nation receive that call, then it will result in a national salvation and restoration
 - We know from Zechariah 12 that this moment awaits for the last days of Tribulation



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 4

Chapters 4:1-20

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- Let's jump back into the events at the Temple as Peter heals a lame man and preaches to the Jewish crowd gathered around
 - Looking at the very end of Chapter 3, we remember Peter's call to the Jewish crowd

Acts 3:25 "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.'

Acts 3:26 "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

- As we ended last week we noted that Peter's sermon is decidedly eschatological in its focus
 - He is calling the Jewish people to repent and receive their Messiah
 - But his call emphasizes the opportunity for the Jewish nation to enter a time of refreshing and enjoying the presence of the Lord
 - Peter assumes that if he could compel the entire nation to receive this call, then the Messiah's return would have taken place
 - Remember the Old Testament prophets never anticipated or understood an institution like the Church...it was a mystery
 - A mystery in the Bible is a component of God's plan that was previously unknown but has now been revealed
 - Paul himself declared that the Apostles were the ones given the mission to reveal the mystery of the Church

Eph. 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles —

Eph. 3:2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;

Eph. 3:3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

Eph. 3:4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

Eph. 3:5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;

Eph. 3:6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

Eph. 3:7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

- But at this early point, Peter hasn't yet appreciated this mystery himself, much less begun to teach it to others
 - Despite Peter's best efforts, this generation of Israel was not to receive the Lord's

return

- They were under judgment for rejecting the Messiah
- And this generation was not to receive a second opportunity
- Though an individual Jew could still receive the Messiah
 - And he could enjoy the promises in a future day in the Kingdom
- We're going to watch Peter grow as the gospel itself expands
 - First it grows among Jews, but soon thereafter it moves on to Samaritans and later Gentiles
 - And Peter will grow throughout this time, learning to accept that the Messiah came for other people besides the Jewish nation
- Finally, notice that Peter's sermon this time doesn't declare that baptism was required for this salvation
 - Only their belief in Jesus was required for the nation to receive their Messiah
- After preaching this sermon to the people, Peter naturally caught the attention of the leaders within the temple
 - And many of these leaders were exactly the same men who persecuted and conspired against Jesus
 - So when they see the commotion in the temple grounds and notice Jesus' disciples at the center of the crowd, they became concerned
 - And they quickly reacted to what they saw

Acts 4:1 As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them,

Acts 4:2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Acts 4:3 And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.

Acts 4:4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

- Peter (and John) were still in mid-sentence when they're interrupted by the temple officials
 - Three groups of priests are mentioned, but in reality they were all probably from the same group of temple leaders
 - In the Temple you would find priests performing different jobs
 - Some priests acted as guards or temple police and one priest was the captain of that guard
 - He was second only to the High Priest
 - And the Sadducees were the ruling council of 24 chief priests who controlled the Temple ground
 - So altogether these men represented the authority responsible for the temple

- The Greek phrase in v.1 should read “confronted them”
 - It indicates they were hostile from the start
 - And they were immediately bothered when they determined that they were teaching the people in the compound
 - In Israel, teaching on spiritual matters was not permitted unless the person had been carefully trained and approved by the Jewish leaders
 - And teaching in the Temple was the highest honor for teachers
 - Remember in the days before He was crucified, Jesus encountered opposition when He taught in the Temple
 - The leaders challenged Jesus repeatedly to substantiate where He received His authority to teach in the Temple
- Secondly, the Sadducees were bothered to hear Peter and John teaching that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead
 - You may remember that the Sadducees had determined for themselves that resurrection was a myth and not true
 - So to hear someone teaching resurrection especially angered them
 - It was even worse that Peter declared that Jesus had resurrected
- Consider the dangerous trap that existed in Peter’s day
 - On the one hand, teaching on spiritual matters was only allowed by teachers who had been approved by existing leaders and teachers
 - Secondly, those new teachers could only teach what was approved by men, even if that teaching was in conflict with the Scriptures
 - This is why Jesus condemned the leaders in His day when He said:

Matt. 15:7 “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying,

**Matt. 15:8 ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,
BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.**

**Matt. 15:9 ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,
TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’”**

- They were teaching precepts of men as if they were doctrines, that is as if they were God’s truth
 - And since they also controlled who could teach, they ensure that the truth was suppressed
 - Do I even need to make the parallel to our day?
 - Men today are often required to complete certain sanctioning or ordination requirements before they may teach God’s word
 - And those sanctioning bodies insist that their graduates adhere to certain prescribed views on doctrine
 - This pattern explains why we have denominations and church bodies separated by a common religion

- We act like Sadducees seeking people who will teach what we already believe
 - And if they teach differently, it's proof they are unqualified to teach
- Obviously, some people are unqualified to teach, but the standard for whether someone should or shouldn't teach are provided in Scripture
 - And those qualifications don't include seminary, ordination or other man-made certifications
 - They do include tests of character and maturity
 - And ultimately a person's teaching is to be evaluated against the light of Scripture, not against denominational creeds
- Moving back to the test, these temple guards take Peter and John into custody
 - The text says they were "kept," probably in a room in the Temple
 - And since it was illegal under Jewish law to hold a trial at night, they held them overnight and planned to conduct an inquiry in the morning
 - Luke ends v.4 with a stunning contrast
 - Even as Peter and John are arrested, five thousand men who hear Peter's sermon come to believe in Jesus
 - It's hard to imagine how Peter could have stood and spoken in an open courtyard and expected to speak loudly enough to allow 5,000 people to hear
 - Much less that so many would agree with the message
 - Clearly a remarkable work of the Spirit to draw men to hear and believe
 - Luke's coupling of persecution with growth is a well-known relationship in church history
 - Those times when the church has endured its greatest persecution is also the time when the church has grown the fastest
 - And growth under persecution is particularly good growth, as it filters false confessors
 - It produces a particularly strong and mature believer
 - Whenever the enemy decides to strike out at the church through persecution, the Spirit inevitably uses that occasion to bring growth through pruning
 - The early church saw this pattern under Jewish persecution, Roman persecution, Roman Catholic persecution during the Reformation
 - Today it continues in many oppressed nations

Acts 4:5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem;

Acts 4:6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.

Acts 4:7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

- A remarkable group of authorities were assembled to interrogate these two men
 - We have the entire Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Israel
 - Sadducees, Pharisees and the High Priest and the family of the High Priest
 - Remember there were two high priests at this time since the Romans had removed the true high priest and placed his son in law in the position
 - Both are present here
 - This is an unusually powerful gathering for two insignificant men
 - They focus their inquiry on their central concern – the healing
 - They weren't as much interested in the fact that these men were teaching or proclaiming Jesus as Messiah
 - Those claims by themselves posed no threat
 - They were disturbed by the powerful miracle that accompanied the teaching
 - And by this fact we can understand why the Lord chose to award these powers to the Apostles
 - The ability to perform these miracles was a key component to gaining the attention of both the crowds and the leaders of Israel
 - It's relatively easy to dismiss the unsubstantiated claims of "crazy" men
 - It's another thing altogether to dismiss a healing that cannot be denied
- Notice the question they ask the apostles
 - They want to know where their power came from to perform the healing
 - This is so similar to the questions asked of the blind man in John 9 after Jesus healed him
 - They ask the blind man the origin of Jesus' power
 - And the blind sarcastically mocks the leaders because the answer was obvious to him and everyone else
 - Yet the leaders acted as if the answer was a mystery because they couldn't bring themselves to admit that Jesus came from God
 - Their personal and political interests forced them to pretend they were ignorant and to deny the obvious
 - Here as well, the men ask about the name or power behind their healing, though the answer would have been obvious
 - Rather than mocking them as the blind man did, Peter gives them a straightforward answer

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people,

Acts 4:9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,

Acts 4:10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good

health.

Acts 4:11 “He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone**.

Acts 4:12 “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

- This is Peter’s third sermon in as many chapters
 - It’s clear at this point that Peter has become God’s instrument during the early days of the church to speak on behalf of the Lord to Israel
 - And like prior sermons, Peter speaks under the influence of the Holy Spirit
 - I assume that Luke makes the point that Peter’s speech is under control of the Holy Spirit to remind Theophilus of something Luke wrote in the Gospel

Luke 12:11 “And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you should say;

Luke 12:12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

- And to the leaders of Israel, Peter speaking under the Spirit’s control declares that Jesus is the One doing this work of healing
 - And Peter not-so-diplomatically reminds the leaders that they were the ones who crucified this Lord
 - This is remarkable boldness, brought on by the Spirit
 - Peter had good reason to fear for his life, but the Spirit didn’t allow Peter to focus on his own safety
 - This is exactly how all Christians are called to live, without regard for personal needs – we serve a Master
 - And in a comment that must have particularly angered the Sadducees, Peter repeats his claim of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead
 - It was the name of Jesus who healed the man standing before you lame, Peter says
 - Obviously, they had taken the lame man into custody too, probably because they wondered if the whole thing had been a hoax
 - Imagine the poor lame man, finally able to walk but now locked up and unable to go anywhere
 - Peter quotes from Psalm 118:22 that Jesus would be the most important stone in the building God is building in Israel
 - We see this verse today as a reference to the stone that starts a building, meaning the Church
 - But its full meaning in the context of the Psalm is of a stone that serves as foundation for an obedient, glorified Israel
 - In fact, the verses in Psalm 118 that follow v.22 speak of the regeneration

of Israel in the coming Kingdom

- So Peter is again declaring that the Name of Jesus is the One rejected by Israel's "builders"
 - The builders were the leaders of Israel, the very men Peter is addressing
 - They rejected and stumbled over the stone that must form the foundation for the future Israel these leaders say they wanted
- Finally, Peter ends his short answer with a succinct presentation of the Gospel... the need to believe in this Name
- In response to Peter's defense, the council makes its own observations

Acts 4:13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

Acts 4:14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

Acts 4:15 But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another,

Acts 4:16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.

Acts 4:17 "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name."

- First, the council made observations of Peter and John themselves
 - They were untrained, uneducated men
 - Blue collar working class and no threat
 - And they recognized them to have been Jesus' disciples, which wasn't a compliment
 - In their attempts to explain the unexplainable, the leadership first considered that these men might have a power of their own
 - They had spoken eloquently and with authority and knowledge of Scripture
 - And yet they were uneducated and untrained by men
 - They were the acquaintances of a convicted criminal
 - And yet they were trained by the Holy Spirit, and so they displayed power and knowledge out of keeping with their station in life
 - This is precisely the way Christ wants us to be seen among the world

1Cor. 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

1Cor. 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,

1Cor. 1:29 that no man should boast before God.

- Secondly, the council inspected the man who claimed the healing
 - If they couldn't explain the healing by finding power in Peter and John, perhaps they could discredit the healing itself
 - But they had nothing they could say
 - The text says he was "standing" before them
 - The fact that a lame man was standing was proof all by itself
 - He was clearly walking
 - And since he was present at the Temple everyday for many years, there was no denying he had previously been lame
 - Now we see God's purpose in leaving this man in a handicapped state for so many years
 - It becomes further proof and validation of the Lord's miracle through Peter
 - Had the man only appeared a short time earlier in the Temple, the leadership could have claimed he was faking his inability to walk
 - But after forty years, there was no way to deny the miracle
 - God may choose to leave us in a debilitated state for His own glory, which is His right as God
- After dismissing Peter and John, the men confer and discuss what to tell the people
 - The people of Israel took their spiritual direction from these men, and whatever these men told the people was accepted largely without debate
 - Notice they aren't looking for the truth
 - They are looking for a way to explain away the truth
 - In v.16 they say "we cannot deny it"
 - They want to deny it because its existence is a threat to their power
 - So they resort to simply intimidating Peter and John and forbidding them from speaking to anyone else about what happened
 - Specifically, they didn't want Peter and John to speak "in this name"
 - Not only do they not speak Jesus' name themselves
 - They don't want anyone else to speak about Him
 - Here's an insight to the way the enemy tries to stop the message of the Gospel from spreading
 - Though he tries to distort and incriminate the message and the messengers, those tactics ultimately fail
 - The message is the word of God
 - And the messengers go out with the power of God
 - Occasionally, the enemy will succeed in distorting the Gospel and producing false versions

- And occasionally he will discredit messengers who fall to temptation
- But usually the enemy is reduced to persecuting and intimidating the Church hoping to halt the spread of the message

Acts 4:18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;

Acts 4:20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

- The leaders communicated their decision to Peter and John
 - But the apostles respond with a rhetorical question
 - Is it right to obey God or men?
 - Peter knew these leaders would understand the answer to that question was always to obey God
 - So Peter boldly tells the leaders he wouldn’t obey their command
 - The reason is that they couldn’t stop speaking about what they’ve seen and heard
 - Why couldn’t they stop?
 - Because Peter couldn’t control himself? No.
 - Because believers are called to be witnesses of the Gospel

Luke 24:45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

Luke 24:46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,

Luke 24:47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Luke 24:48 “You are witnesses of these things.

- Remember, the definition of “witness” is not someone who observed something
 - The recent controversy over LeBron James’ departure from Cleveland reveals that misunderstanding
 - In Cleveland, they used to declare they were all witnesses to LeBron’s rise to stardom
 - They used the term to mean they were all observers
 - But that’s not the proper use of the term
 - A witness is someone who testifies about something
 - It’s a role of speaking after having observed
 - Peter and John say they cannot stop speaking because they were made witnesses, speakers of things they saw
 - And all of us are commanded by Jesus to be witnesses too

- Which means we are commanded to be vocal and to share what we know and understand about Jesus
- And if we obey men who call us to be silent, we are disobeying the God Who has instructed us to be witnesses



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 5A

Chapters 4:21 - 5:6

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- In Chapter 4 last week, the Sanhedrin council has set a legal precedent
 - They declared that it was no longer acceptable for men to teach in the name of Jesus
 - Peter and John answered and said they couldn't agree to those terms
 - But nevertheless, the ruling council of Israel has made a determination that had the force of law in that society
 - It will become the basis for further action against believers in the city and Judea

Acts 4:21 When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;

Acts 4:22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

- Luke implies that the leaders had a desire to take strong action but simply couldn't
 - Firstly, the apostles hadn't violated any clear rule or prohibition
 - On the other hand they had healed a man, which was praiseworthy
 - Secondly, the result of their miracle was a public outcry in praise of God
 - This was an outcome that the Sanhedrin should have found worthy of commendation, not condemnation
 - Plus, if they had decided to take action against Peter and John, they risked an uprising among the 5,000+ who were praising God for the work of these men
 - So, they admonished the men and then let them go
- Naturally, Peter and John return to the other Apostles, who have probably been worrying for them

Acts 4:23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

Acts 4:24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,

Acts 4:25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said,

'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE,
AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?

Acts 4:26 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND,
AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER
AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.'

Acts 4:27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,

Acts 4:28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Acts 4:29 “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,
Acts 4:30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”
Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

- The response of the believers in the city to the apostles’ release is to take their relief to the Lord in praise
 - They praise Him for His grace in releasing these two important leaders of the early church
 - And their prayer centers around Psalm 2
 - Reading the entire Psalm gives us a better sense of how this Psalm became such an important reason why these Christians were so happy at this outcome

Psa. 2:1 Why are the nations in an uproar

And the peoples devising a vain thing?

Psa. 2:2 The kings of the earth take their stand

And the rulers take counsel together

Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,

Psa. 2:3 “Let us tear their fetters apart

And cast away their cords from us!”

Psa. 2:4 He who sits in the heavens laughs,

The Lord scoffs at them.

Psa. 2:5 Then He will speak to them in His anger

And terrify them in His fury, saying,

Psa. 2:6 “But as for Me, I have installed My King

Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

Psa. 2:7 “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:

He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,

Today I have begotten You.

Psa. 2:8 ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance,

And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

Psa. 2:9 ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron,

You shall shatter them like earthenware.’”

Psa. 2:10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment;

Take warning, O judges of the earth.

Psa. 2:11 Worship the LORD with reverence

And rejoice with trembling.

Psa. 2:12 Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way,

For His wrath may soon be kindled.

How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

- This psalm describes how the world will oppose the Messiah but He will triumph nonetheless
 - The Second Psalm is a description of the resistance that the Messiah will experience in the final days of Tribulation as He returns
 - And the psalm also makes clear that the Father is behind the scenes directing the whole affair
 - He will give the Son the nations for an inheritance
 - By application, these early believers correctly recognized that the Lord was at work in their circumstances fulfilling His word
 - Though Jewish leaders were dismissing and challenging the claims of Messiah just as they did to Jesus
 - The Lord will have the last laugh
 - And this situation was under God's control
- As they hear the apostles' report, it's clear that the believers put this together
 - They come to understand that this trial was a part of God's plan for the church
 - Keep in mind that the persecution of Peter and John was a crossroads for the early church
 - It probably shocked the conscience
 - The prospect of persecution was almost unthinkable
 - And the news that the apostles were under inquiry was probably a great worry
 - Then as the apostles were released, the Spirit connected the dots for the church and brought them to Psalm 2
 - The persecution that started with the Sanhedrin was a reflection of the hatred that Christ Himself experienced in His first coming
 - And the Church quotes this Psalm to emphasize that they understand that the world will resist the message of the Gospel
- But the Father is in control
 - In vs.27-28, the church states plainly that the events that led to Christ's death were predestined by God to occur
 - Specifically, the church declares that the conspiracy relied on Gentiles (Romans) and the people of Israel
 - Both Jews and Gentiles were culpable in the death of Christ
 - But in v.28 they say that God was ultimately the One bringing about these circumstances
 - And in v.29 they appeal to God to notice that the persecution David spoke of had come home to rest upon them
 - Specifically, they ask that the Lord "take note" which means to "look upon"
 - The implication is that the Lord will take revenge
 - Secondly, they grant boldness to continue speaking God's word
 - I find it fascinating that the prayer isn't for a removal of the persecution

- Rather, it's merely for the courage to keep speaking in the face of opposition
 - Perhaps John has told them of Jesus' words concerning persecution

John 15:20 “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

- Finally, they ask for wonders and powers to accompany the proclamation of the name of Jesus
 - They are seeking to see God manifest His power to confirm their testimony
 - Plus, powerful signs will help overcome the fear that persecution will produce
 - The result of the prayer was an answer in the affirmative from God
 - God gave manifestations to the group, filling them with the Holy Spirit
 - And they spoke in boldness
- So through the first four chapters of Acts, Luke has planted the seeds for the rest of the book
 - He has shown a new institution established among Jews
 - Accompanied by signs and wonders to propel the Gospel forward in the face of opposition
 - Led by men of remarkable powers
 - But rejected by the Jewish leaders
 - Called to preach God's word in the face of opposition
 - Expecting the Lord's return at any time

Acts 4:32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.

Acts 4:33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales **Acts 4:35** and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

Acts 4:36 Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement),

Acts 4:37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- At the end of Chapter 4 comes this interesting story of how the early church was combining property
 - Luke sets the scene here in Chapter 4, but the real impact is recorded in Chapter 5

- There are a fair number of things going on here we must examine
- First, in Jerusalem there was a congregation of believers
 - They apparently worshipped together and shared in their property to help support one another
 - Remember that the church in Jerusalem was relatively poor but numerous
 - Over 8,000 believers at this point
 - Within such a large group this kind of sharing would have been very helpful to maintaining a common standard of living among the believers
 - Historical records tell us that this time was difficult economically for the city
 - The ranks of the needy were growing
 - But Luke says there wasn't a needy person among the church because of their sharing
- What prompted the shared love and self-sacrifice?
 - They were of one heart and one soul
 - These were the early innocent times
 - The early blush of faith was still the driving force in the body and the power of the Spirit was holding the body together
 - Amongst all this unity, the Apostles are giving great witness to the resurrection of Jesus through their own miraculous powers
 - Here again is proof that the Apostles were the only ones to show these miraculous powers
 - Luke connects these two points in v.35
 - The people immediately recognized that the apostles were appointed as leaders by Jesus
 - And the powers these men held were proof that God had vested them with His authority
 - They could declare things in the name of Jesus
 - They held the keys to the kingdom

Matt. 16:19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

- The Apostles were uniquely anointed by the Holy Spirit to make determinations on Earth concerning spiritual matters as Christ's representative
 - These men were necessary to the survival and growth of the early church
 - And they held authority and power to accomplish a difficult task
 - And they will be expected to serve as examples in everything they do, including in the ways they died
 - So as someone in the congregation had a need, others would respond by selling property and bringing the proceeds to the Apostles' feet

- In Greek, the phrase suggests that not all the proceeds were necessarily brought to the Apostles, but only what was required to cover the need
- And the acts of bringing it to the feet of the Apostles reflects their view that the Apostles were Christ's representatives on Earth
- Another way to see it was these were gifts given to God as represented by the Apostles
- The chapter ends with an example of one man who follows this practice
 - The man identified at the end is Joseph of Cyprus, whom the Apostles called Barnabas
 - Barnabas becomes an example of one who follows this practice faithfully
 - We didn't really need Barnabas' example since the general practice had already been described
 - But Luke chooses to highlight Barnabas' obedience because he will become a central character in the book
 - Barnabas is the cousin of Mark author of the Gospel
 - He was one of the 500 who were said to have met with the resurrected Jesus
 - And as a result he has the gift of Apostleship as well (Acts 14)
 - He will become a traveling companion to Paul for a time
 - He is instrumental in establishing the early church with Paul
 - But he is also one who was carried away by hypocrisy in practicing legalism according Galatians 2
 - Here we see Barnabas early in Jerusalem leading by example, responding to the needs of the body and submitting to the Lord through the leadership of the apostles

Acts 5:1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,

Acts 5:2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 5:3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?"

Acts 5:4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Acts 5:5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

Acts 5:6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

- Luke's account of Ananias and Sapphira represents the first serious sin in the early church
 - There are two contrasts between Chapters 4 and 5

- First there is the contrast between the honest Barnabas and the dishonest Ananias and Sapphira
 - Secondly, there is a contrast between the external threats to the church from the authorities
 - And the internal threats to the church from the sin of the congregation
 - And the Lord will protect His Church from both threats
- At first the story proceeds in keeping with Barnabas'
 - They sell a property
 - But then a conspiracy ensues
 - They conspire to hold back some of the proceeds of the sale
 - They place only some of the money before the Apostles but they claim to have brought it all
 - The language in v.2 is reminiscent of the story of Achan in Joshua
 - As the nation of Israel entered the land and began to push back the enemies in the land, Achan held back some of the spoils of Jericho which Joshua declared belonged to the Lord's temple
 - Like Achan, Ananias has held back something that should have been designated for the Lord's use
 - Joshua was Achan's "apostle" in his day, and he suffered death for his deceit
 - When Ananias chose to lie to the Apostle, Peter says he was lying to God
 - He was professing love for the Body of Christ when in fact he had little regard for anything other than his own reputation and image
 - So his intent was to say he gave all when he only gave some
 - The issue was hypocrisy, so that their image before the brethren was enhanced without the need for real sacrifice
- Peter instantly discerned the deception, another spiritual component of apostolic power
 - First, he says Satan has instigated this desire to lie to the Holy Spirit
 - But Ananias is the one who chose to act in sin
 - Here we see the enemy's power to undermine the Church, and his obvious interest in doing so
 - He seeks weak members of the body and entices them to act against the unity and love of the saints
 - Satan does not need to do anything to create unbelievers...he just uses them
 - And he has no power over believers except through external means like temptation, fear, deception, etc.
 - A believer's defense to the schemes of the enemy are prayer and firm knowledge of God's word
 - Paul says in 2 Corinthians

2Cor. 2:11 so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

- ◦ Later he says:

Eph. 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

Eph. 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Eph. 6:13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

- Considering what Peter tells Ananias, it seems he would have been safe had he simply decided to keep some money and make clear his choice
 - The sin wasn't holding back the money, but lying
 - Still, to hold back the money would have reflected a selfishness
 - Ananias understands this, but rather than address his selfishness, he looks for a way to cover it up
- So as Peter was speaking, Ananias falls dead
 - Did Peter act to take Ananias' life?
 - There is nothing in the text to clearly connect Peter to the death
 - Perhaps Peter was surprised too
 - But Peter ends by saying you lied to God
 - Which sounds like a judge declaring a verdict
 - And then came the penalty
 - Based on the next account of Sapphira, it seems that Peter had a hand in the process
 - If so, then God was allowing Peter this latitude as a part of the authority given to the Apostles
 - Why was this sin worthy of such an extreme response?
 - Firstly, all sin is worthy of death (Romans 6:23)
 - And many times our sins do result in death, whether immediate or delayed
 - Secondly this was likely the first major issue of sin in the young church
 - As such, many would naturally watch to see what the effect of such behavior would be
 - Would the Apostles have authority over such things?
 - Do they take you to the courts or to the Pharisees?
 - Unlikely, since they weren't allies
 - If this sin were left unchecked in the early church, imagine how long before all

respect for authority was gone

- The strong response to Ananias' sin was necessary to make clear the seriousness and legitimacy of the Apostle's authority



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 5B

Chapters 5:7 - 40

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- Following the death of Ananias, we jump back in to the moment, watching as his wife returns to the camp of the believers in Jerusalem

Acts 5:7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

Acts 5:8 And Peter responded to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?” And she said, “Yes, that was the price.”

Acts 5:9 Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.”

Acts 5:10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Acts 5:11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

- An hour later, his wife arrives without knowledge of her husband’s predicament
 - By this point we can imagine many things have transpired
 - Word about Ananias must have spread quickly in the church community
 - Somehow Sapphira didn’t hear, probably because everyone was too afraid to speak to her about it
 - And perhaps because they didn’t know what to tell her
 - Also, there’s probably no reason to warn her, because no one would have assumed that she had anything to do with Ananias’ deception
 - Men ran the finances and women had little to say about them
 - In this case, she had known of her husband’s decision
 - Notice the text doesn’t say she agreed to it or even condoned it
 - She just knew about it
 - So now she comes to Peter and he asks her if she sold her property for the amount that Ananias proposed
 - This is her opportunity for repentance and confession
 - She might have suspected something was amiss at this point
 - And her conscience probably convicted her
 - Nevertheless, she decides to sin as her husband did
 - She says that was all they received, which was a lie
 - She decided to give her loyalty to her husband in sinning with him rather than to God and in truthfulness
 - Remember, she didn’t know her husband was dead
 - So when Peter named the price, she must have known that her husband had already told Peter the lie
 - Rather than admit her husband had lied, she agreed with the statement,

perhaps to protect her husband

- Honoring her husband comes second to honoring the Lord
- Peter's question suggests he had made no predetermination concerning her guilt
 - He wasn't sure if she had been involved in the decision
 - So Peter gives her the chance to vindicate herself
 - Instead when she answered, she incriminated herself
 - Based on her answer, she was convicted just as was her husband
 - In fact, she is buried "toward" him or face-to-face, as the Greek word for beside indicates
 - Ananias showed loyalty to money over God and Sapphira showed loyalty to her husband over the Lord
 - Both sins resulted in death
- This situation achieved the desired result: great fear among the people
 - Now consider how this event impacts the early church
 - There was great fear within the church among all who heard of the events
 - This is the first mention of the word "church" in the book of Acts, and it emphasizes how God was at work in this event forming a cohesive whole
 - There is a parallel between how this dispensation of God begins and how previous dispensations began
 - In the dispensation of innocence in the Garden, Adam's sin was met with a very serious and unique punishment from God to make a point
 - In the dispensation of conscience after the Fall, Cain's murder was met with a serious and unique response by God to make a point
 - In the dispensation of civil government, the sin of the Tower of Babel was met with a very serious and unique response from God to make a point
 - In the dispensation of patriarchal rule, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was met with a very serious and unique punishment to make a point
 - In the dispensation of Law, the early failure of the Jews in worshipping the calf was met with a very serious and unique punishment to make a point
 - Etc...
 - Each major dispensation of God's grace includes an early failure by men
 - And in response to that sin, God merits a serious and unique punishment that addresses the sin while making a point
 - And the effect of that response is to warn others and cause obedience within the group
 - In that sense, God's stern response is a form of grace itself, since it motivates others to respect God's decrees, at least initially and to some extent
 - Here we see a sin occurring early in the Church Age, and God responds through Peter with a unique and stern response
 - And it had its intended consequence, that is to dissuade others from

following in their footsteps

- And it demonstrated the seriousness of the New Covenant
- Finally, it reminded the church that judgment will begin at the house of God, as Peter himself wrote in 1 Peter 4:17

1Pet. 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

- ○ ■ I assume that when Peter wrote these words, Ananias and Sapphira were on his mind and on the minds of his first century readers
- Based on the combination of strong leadership, stern response to sin and the supernatural displays of the Holy Spirit, the early church flourished

Acts 5:12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

Acts 5:13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.

Acts 5:14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,

Acts 5:15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.

Acts 5:16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

- Notice again, that the signs and wonders of the early church were coming “at the hands of the Apostles” and not by everyone
 - And the people were of one accord (or one mind)
 - This implies that they had a single-mindedness about their purpose and their doctrines, or understanding of God's truth in the church
 - Luke seems to contrast the miracles and the common mind of the early church with the disobedience of Ananias and Sapphira
 - And they were meeting in Solomon's Portico
 - This was the name given to a covered part of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple
 - By some estimates, the church had grown to around 10,000 believers
 - The previous meeting locations were no longer sufficient
 - They needed the largest venues in the city
 - In v.13 Luke mentions that the “rest of them” dared not associate with the early

church

- “Them” refers to the rest of the Jews in Jerusalem
 - They probably feared the Pharisees
 - And they may have also feared the power of the Apostles as displayed in the death of Ananias and Sapphira
- But then Luke adds that they held the early Christians in high esteem
- The early church modeled nearly perfectly the Biblical principle that the church must be salt and light in the world
 - The church stood out and remained separate from the rest of Jewish society
 - And yet the way they stood apart brought respect and appreciation and ultimately glory to God
 - At least until widespread persecution began, the church wasn’t perceived as negative or disruptive or strident
- They fulfilled the expectations Paul gave in his letter to the Corinthians

2Cor. 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

2Cor. 6:15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

**2Cor. 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,
“I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.**

2Cor. 6:17 “Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” says the Lord.

**“AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN;
And I will welcome you.**

- Paul goes further in Romans 12-13 exhorting the church to be good citizens and respectable persons in their community and in the church
 - Honoring one another and obeying the civil authorities
 - And at the same time Paul commands the church in Romans 12:2 not to be conformed to the world
 - Here we see what that kind of life can produce
 - The church of one accord, clearly not conforming to the world and yet still giving a good witness
 - And all the while God continues to grow the early church within the city of Jerusalem
 - Despite the fear among the Jews of the city, the Lord kept adding to the church
 - Here’s a powerful lesson on how to grow the church

- Notice that the people are flocking to the faith in Jerusalem despite their fear of this new movement
 - They may have respected the movement, but they weren't attracted to it in the traditional sense
 - It wasn't attractive...it was scary and different
- And yet the church swelled in size
 - This pattern defies the "church growth" teaching of the recent decade that suggests churches grow only by pandering to the wants and needs of a community
 - On the contrary, the church grows when the Lord adds to its numbers
 - And growth from any other source is false growth
 - And yes, it's possible to "grow" a church without relying on the Lord
 - The growth can be numeric (i.e., more bodies) but not spiritual (i.e., not true Christians)
- Now to properly understand v.15, we need to take note of a parenthetical statement Luke is making in his passage
 - Look back at v.12
 - Luke starts by saying that many signs and wonders were happening at the hands of the apostles
 - Then in the second half of that verse, Luke mentions how they were gathered in the Temple
 - To understand the narrative, we need to insert an open parenthesis before the statement about being of one accord

Acts 5:12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

- That parenthetical statement continues until the end of v.14
 - It is an aside describing the way the church was perceived in Jerusalem in this day
 - They were set apart and feared, yet respected
 - And they still attracted great numbers
 - And then the parentheses end
 - Now in v.15, Luke returns to his main thought
 - So place the first half of v.12 together with v.15, and the narrative makes more sense
 - The apostles were performing many miracles, to such an extent that the people of Jerusalem began to bring their sick to Peter for healing
 - Just his shadow would cause healing
 - And according to v.16, they were all being healed
 - Their behavior wasn't superstition

- It was a rational response to the power Peter was demonstrating in the city
- Clearly, God was using Peter in his role as the early leader of the church to manifest supernatural power
 - And the manifestation brought God and His Church glory
- It probably doesn't surprise you to hear that false teachers have turned to this passage and used it to defend the prosperity gospel
 - The fact that "all" were healed in this instance is used as proof that God was to heal everyone
- This is simply bad exegesis of Scripture
 - Luke is describing an event, not prescribing something for every Christian
- As we might imagine, it also brought a lot of negative attention among God's enemies

Acts 5:17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.

Acts 5:18 They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.

Acts 5:19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said,

Acts 5:20 "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."

Acts 5:21 Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought.

Acts 5:22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back,

Acts 5:23 saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside."

Acts 5:24 Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.

Acts 5:25 But someone came and reported to them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

Acts 5:26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned).

- What a curious and even humorous series of events
 - First, it begins with jealousy among the Sadducees
 - They're jealous of the apostles' fame and success in leading the people
 - The Sadducees (and the Pharisees like them) were desperate for the same kind of following among the people

- And here comes these untrained men to challenge their authority and popularity among the people
 - So they're insanely jealous
 - The Greek language implies they were controlled by their jealousy
 - So they lay hands upon Peter and the other apostles and put them in jail
 - This would have to be the same jail as before, since the Jews didn't operate a jail apart from the Temple itself
 - Peter and John are getting accustomed to this rough treatment, but now the rest of the apostles are caught up in the situation
- That very night, though, the Lord sets the apostles free by means of an angel
 - This is the first of three times in Acts that an angel sets someone free from jail
 - In each case there is an audience for the release
 - In the first case, the audience are the Jewish authorities
 - In the second case, it's the Roman authorities
 - In the third case, it's the Greek population of Philippi
 - But their release comes with a command
 - The apostles were to proceed immediately back to the Temple, where they were arrested initially
 - And they were to begin preaching at daybreak
 - And they were to preach "the whole message of life"
 - This phrase means the Gospel, but it also carries a specific Hebrew sense implying resurrection
 - In other words, the apostles were to preach the whole message of salvation including the coming resurrection
 - Obviously, a message of resurrection was intended to antagonize the Sadducees, who rejected the possibility of bodily resurrection
- God is clearly teaching the apostles to respond boldly to persecution
 - Without fear and without hesitation
 - Their response to freedom isn't to run and hide and protect themselves
 - The response is to face the threat and continue preaching
 - The only way they bring themselves to do something like that is by recognizing that God is in control of their life and death
 - God is also teaching the leadership that these men have His power behind their work
 - Finally, He's teaching the people that the Church's message of salvation won't be bent to fit the desires of the authorities
- The story then gets very humorous
 - The Sanhedrin council meets to conduct another inquiry
 - They call for the prisoners but the guards return to report the prisoners are missing without a trace

- The council is perplexed and worried about what will come of this
 - The sense here is that the leadership is worried how it will reflect on their leadership
 - Or perhaps they assumed these men pulled the same disappearing trick that Jesus Himself did in the tomb
 - And if Jesus' disappearance led to a movement of thousands, what will happen after 12 men disappear?
- Fortunately for these confused men, they learn the whereabouts of the apostles
 - They're right back where they found them...in the temple teaching
 - So this time the officers and the captain go retrieve them without violence
 - They lead them carefully and without aggression so that the crowd wouldn't be aroused against them
 - And the apostles probably agreed to go in keeping with the way their own Master agreed to His own arrest
 - Also, they must have had great assurance that God was working to take care of them in the midst of these circumstances

Acts 5:27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them,

Acts 5:28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

Acts 5:31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 5:32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Acts 5:33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them.

- Here's the second time a court in Israel has addressed the issue of teaching in the Temple
 - The high priest, Annas, is present
 - And he begins the proceeding by noting the council's previous judgment
 - The apostles were commanded not to teach "in this name"
 - Notice the chief priest refuses to name the Name of Jesus
 - The priest adds that the apostles were trying to bring the blood of Jesus upon the council
 - He is suggesting that the apostles were slandering the council by accusing

them of unlawfully killing Jesus

- In truth, that is exactly what they did
- They had even told Pilate that the blood of Jesus should be upon them and their children in Matthew 27:25
- But now they deny such a thing and hold it against the apostles
- And in a powerful moment, the apostles give a sharply worded and bold testimony of the Gospel to this evil men
 - Peter appears to do the talking, but Luke makes clear he either spoke for the apostles or the other apostles also said things at times
 - Peter reiterates that they must obey God
 - As Christians, we must obey God and earthly authorities unless they conflict
 - Then we must obey God while willingly submitting to the punishment that comes our way for disobeying earthly authorities
 - This is what Peter and the apostles are willing to suffer here if necessary
 - Then Peter reiterates that Jesus was raised (resurrected)
 - After He was put to death by the Jewish leaders
 - Even worse, they hung Him on a tree, which was a particularly dishonoring way to die according to Scripture
 - They did this to the Prince of Israel, the Messiah
 - Finally, they are witnesses and the Holy Spirit confirms this truth among those who believe
 - Naturally, the leaders are angered to the point of wishing to put these men to death
 - Unfortunately, disobeying a command of the council didn't carry the death penalty in Israel
 - So the council may have wanted to kill these men, but they lacked the grounds to carry it out
 - Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed

Acts 5:34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time.

Acts 5:35 And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.

Acts 5:36 “For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.

Acts 5:37 “After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.

Acts 5:38 “So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let

them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown;
Acts 5:39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.”

Acts 5:40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.

- The famous Gamaliel, Paul’s instructor, speaks up
 - He was an elder statesman in that day

Gamaliel was a disciple of Rabbi Hillel, and at this time, he was the head of the School of Hillel. In Jewish sources, he was known as Rabban Gamaliel. Most rabbis were simply called Rav or Ravi, which means “teacher” or “my teacher” respectively, but Gamaliel was given a title of “Rabban.” This is a title above rabbi, which means “our teacher” and was a special title of the leader of the School of Hillel. Gamaliel was the first of seven rabbis to have this title. This was the same Gamaliel who was Paul’s teacher according to Acts 22:3. He had so much influence in his own time that the Jewish Mishnah states: “Since Rabban Gamaliel the elder died there has been no more reverence for the law, and purity and abstinence died out at the same time.”

The point is that Rabban Gamaliel was able to hold a moral force that others followed, simply because of the strength of his own moral character.

The verse also states that he was a doctor of the law, which refers to his position of knowledge in the Law of Moses; he had authority to interpret the Law in accordance with the Jewish traditions. Other doctors of the Law are mentioned by Luke in Luke 2:46 and 5:17. As to his reputation, he was: had in honor of all the people; everybody held him in some degree of honor, including Sadducees, as this context will show. One of his more famous sayings was, “Procure yourself a teacher; avoid being in doubt; do not accustom yourself to give tithes by guess.” This was Rabban Gamaliel. -

Arnold Fruchtenbaum

- - And he sent the apostles out of the room, to confer with the other council members
 - He says be careful with these men
 - Don’t overstep your bounds and make a foolish move
 - In a sense, Gamaliel made a case for these situations working themselves out
 - He uses two historical examples from Israel’s recent past where men revolted against Rome and were eventually executed
 - When they died, their followers dispersed
 - The implication is clear

- If these guys are just revolutionaries intent on fighting a cause, they will eventually butt heads with Rome, and Rome will win
 - And their admirers will just fade away
 - In that case, the Jewish authorities didn't need to get involved
- On the other hand, if this is a movement of God, nothing will stop it anyway
 - They would be fighting God
- The concern for Gamaliel was the possibility the council acted rashly and brought Roman authorities down upon them
 - And while his advice makes sense, it's not necessarily a Biblical principle or truth that movements of men always die out
 - It was merely his viewpoint
- The council agrees and releases the apostles with a flogging
 - This would have been 39 lashes as called for in Deuteronomy 25
 - Severe punishment
 - This is the first time believers are physically persecuted for their faith
 - Their crime was disobeying the previous council order not to teach in the name of Jesus



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 6

Chapter 6

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- Today we begin the story of Stephen
 - Commonly known as the first martyr of the Church
 - He was also the first deacon
 - And deacons have traditionally played the role of martyr ever since
 - The story has two parts or divisions, which follow neatly in two chapters
 - Chapter 6 tells the story of why and how Stephen received his appointment as well as Stephen's witnessing of the Gospel
 - Chapter 7 covers Stephen's martyrdom, including his famous monologue summarizing God's plan for redemption
 - At the end of Chapter 7 we also see a hint of Luke's second main character in the book of Acts
 - Stephen's story becomes the link between Luke's protagonist in the first part of Acts (Peter) and his protagonist in the second half of the story (Paul)
- To start, we need to finish the final two verses of Chapter 5, which set the stage for the events of Chapter 6

Acts 5:41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Acts 5:42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

- After the second trial and flogging of the apostles, they went back to the brethren
 - They had been beaten and threatened with more severe punishment
 - Yet they left rejoicing
 - The reason for rejoicing was the way the Lord had counted them worthy to suffer shame for His Name
 - Jesus Himself had told the disciples that they would be blessed when persecuted

Matt. 5:10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

Matt. 5:12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- The disciples knew this, and as persecution came upon the apostles, they naturally rejoiced
 - Truly, it was an honor
 - The honor comes from how God is using our life to mirror His Son's life, in particular mirroring His sacrificial death

- Not every Christian is granted this honor
- And the apostles rejoiced at having been counted worthy for that honor
- God purposes in granting it now and in this way it seems to be preparation for what will follow in Chapter 6
 - The leaders of the early Church were the Apostles
 - But the Apostles were hardly the only ones who would suffer persecution
 - And God has determined not to bring the Apostles to death too quickly, since they were needed to build this early church
 - So it stands to reason that other disciples would be appointed to be among the first to die
 - That leads us into Chapter 6, where we encounter Stephen
- So the Apostles gladly ignored the command of the council and kept teaching and preaching, which kept growing the church

Acts 6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

Acts 6:2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

Acts 6:3 “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

Acts 6:4 “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Acts 6:5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

Acts 6:6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

- So at this time the church is growing
 - And with growth comes growing pains
 - Christians are people, and anytime people gather, relationship difficulties can develop
 - And the solution to disunity is strong leadership
 - Here we’re witnessing the second example of internal threats to unity within the early church (the first being Ananias and Sapphira)
 - A complaint arose – the term in Greek is *goggusmos*, which means to murmur or secretly complain
 - It tells us that discontent was percolating and threatening to erupt into something more serious

- The two groups involved were Jews from different origins
 - The first group are Hellenistic or Greek-speaking Jews
 - They came from outside the land of Israel and have returned to settle in Jerusalem
 - The second group are Hebrews
 - Which means they are Jews from within the land who speak Hebrew and Aramaic
 - There was long history of tension between these groups
 - Hebrews were more conservative and a bit haughty
 - Hellenistic Jews were more liberal and less likely to following the Law
- Both of these groups had their respective widows
 - Widows were especially vulnerable members of society, and the church placed an emphasis on showing respect for widows
 - This may have been one reason why the church stood out positively in the culture
 - Especially against the backdrop of the Pharisees, who showed no regard for widows despite requirements in the Law to do so
 - The church supported widows by taking collections and distribution money and food to the widows to support them
- Somewhere along the way, this process began to fail
 - The widows of the local Hebrew Jews were receiving a disproportionate share of the support
 - The text says that the widows of the Hellenistic Jews were being overlooked or shortchanged
 - How would something like this arise? Who would have instigated it or permitted it?
 - Today, we would assume it was the fault of a church leader who was biased or incompetent
 - But at this point in the church's history, there are only the apostles in leadership
 - And we know the Apostles weren't the kind of men to condone this type of favoritism
 - So we can rule out the possibility that they were the cause of the favoritism
 - That means that the unfair distribution of food was the result of the congregation itself conducting the distribution in a biased fashion in favor of the Hebrew widows
 - It's likely that the greater number of Jews in the Jerusalem Church were Hebrew
 - So the majority of the church body probably favored the Hebrew widows, naturally resulting in the unfair distribution

- And when the Hellenistic widows raised a complaint, a dispute arose
- We can see a pattern emerging here in Luke's account
 - The enemy works to divide the church over temptations of money, possessions and honor or pride
 - Think Ananias and Sapphira
 - Or he works to intimidate the brethren through persecution
 - Which forms the second half of Stephen's story
- This incident highlighted to the Apostles the need for additional leadership in the church to watch over the flock
 - So in response to the argument, the Apostles act
 - They bring the entire church together and announce the need for additional leaders
 - The reason for additional leaders is obvious
 - The needs of the church had grown beyond the capability of 12 men to handle everything
 - The Apostles express the need by saying it is not desirable (or pleasing) for them to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables
 - Let's consider what the apostles are proposing
 - First, the word pleasing suggests that the apostles know there is an audience watching their actions
 - The audience is the Lord, of course
 - Secondly, the thing that will displease the Lord is neglecting the word of God for lessor
 - The highest levels of leadership in the church were to be primarily – if not exclusively – devoted to teaching God's word
 - To do otherwise would not be pleasing to God's word
 - Even something as important and loving as feeding helpless widows was not as important as teaching God's word
 - Obviously, the need still had to be met, which is why the Apostles move to appoint deacons
 - But it's worth remembering that the model presented here is that the role of a congregational leader – pastor – is to teach God's word
 - And nothing should come before that duty (they were to be "devoted" to prayer and the word)
 - Other duties should be performed by other leaders
 - In my opinion, the pastor's weekly schedule should be dominated by teaching and preparation for teaching
- So the apostle bring the congregation together and announce the decision
 - The announcement makes clear three things to the congregation
 - Teaching God's word is preeminent in the church

- Other needs will be met by other (lessor) leaders
- These leaders have the backing of the apostles
- The selection process was also placed in the hands of the congregation
 - Though we remember that Acts was not written as a manual for church operation, nevertheless this practice is consistent with Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy and Titus
 - Suggesting that this practice for identifying leaders is intended to be a model
 - Here's the model:
 - The pastoral leadership of a church is a plurality of teachers with manifest authority to conduct the church's affairs
 - They are not beholden to the congregation
 - The sheep do not lead the shepherd
 - Since we do not have apostles today, we refer to these leaders as elders
 - Paul told Titus to appoint elders

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

- ○
 - So a shepherd appoints elders, based on their qualification to teach
 - The congregation selects deacons
 - Leadership from among themselves to minister to the other needs of the body
 - These lessor leaders also have qualifications, as Paul outlines in 1 Timothy and Titus
 - Here the qualifications are good reputation, the anointing of the Spirit
 - Reputation is *martureo* or witness or testimony
 - They must have a life and walk in faith that bears witness to godliness
 - It wraps up all that Paul outlines later in his letters
 - Then they must be full of the Spirit, which means having a life obviously under the control and direction of the Spirit
 - One thing (Spirit-led life) leads to the other (good reputation)
- The seven men selected are an interesting group
 - First, Stephen gets the most attention, because of his later focus in the chapter
 - Phillip is listed second because of his role in Chapter 8
 - The rest have no further mention in the Bible
 - All the names are Greek, indicating they were Hellenistic Jews
 - And one of them, Nicolas, was a Greek who converted to Judaism
 - This shows that the election of the deacons was clearly under the Spirit's

direction

- We might have expected at least an even distribution of Hebrew and Hellenistic Jews
 - Or even a predominantly Hebrew selection
- But it was all Hellenistic Jews, showing that the Spirit was working to correct for the biases in the group
- Finally, they were confirmed in their ministry with a laying on of hands
 - This is an important step
 - The men are nominated by the congregation but appointed by the apostles (elders)
 - And the laying on of hands symbolically represents the anointing work of the Spirit
 - All authority and power for ministry comes from the Spirit
- Now look at the result of this step

Acts 6:7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

-
- The word of God kept spreading because the apostles were freed from other responsibilities
 - This in turn led to the further increase of the church – and exceeding numbers
 - And now a new element
 - Priests, one after another, were coming into the faith
 - This is a remarkable footnote, because the priests of that day would have been Sadducees, since the Sadducees were in power during this time
 - And we see God adding to the church from among the ranks of their enemy in the city
 - And this revelation is likely the cause of the next episode of external threat to the church

Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

Acts 6:9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.

Acts 6:10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

Acts 6:11 Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”

Acts 6:12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they

came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council.

Acts 6:13 They put forward false witnesses who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law;

Acts 6:14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.”

- Stephen is working in the full power of the Spirit
 - And he has evidently received supernatural power to perform miracles and teach with authority
 - We know in Chapter 8 that Phillip has been given similar powers, so apparently the seven deacons were equipped in a similar fashion
 - Stephen and Phillip are clearly not capable of these things prior to their appointment, so the power traces to the Apostles
 - This is an example of how the Apostles were able to appoint others to perform miracles
 - But these seven are never shown transferring those same powers further
 - It stopped with them because it had to originate with Apostles
 - Secondly, notice that Stephen is not depicted waiting tables
 - No doubt he did his fair share of table waiting, but it’s also likely that he and the other seven appointed others to that task
 - They were deacons, leaders
 - This meant they had responsibilities to lead and run the congregation
- Stephen encounters a group of Hellenistic Jews and proceeds to present the truth of the Gospel to them from Scripture while in a synagogue
 - This is the first example of the disciples preaching inside synagogues
 - Paul later made this his usual practice in every new city he visited
 - He brought the gospel to the Jew first, seeking the remnant, but then quickly moved to the Gentiles, his primary calling
 - Luke identifies these men as members of the Synagogue of Freedmen
 - Jewish records indicate there were somewhere between 390-480 different synagogues in the city of Jerusalem
 - This synagogue was founded by formerly enslaved Jews, who returned to the city
 - Other groups involved were
 - Cyrenians, which were Jews from North Africa
 - Alexandrians which were Jews from Egypt
 - Cilicia, which were Jews from Turkey
 - This last group included Tarsus, which was Saul’s (Paul) hometown
 - Perhaps Saul was in this group unable to argue against Stephen’s wisdom

- Since the men couldn't win the argument, their pride was injured and their anger turned to conspiracy
 - So they stirred up others to spread rumors and lies
 - They accused Stephen of blasphemy
 - The literal blasphemy under Jewish law was speaking the name of God, which Stephen had not done
 - Instead they said he spoke against Moses and God, probably because he proclaimed the end of the Law
 - This led to the Elders dragging Stephen away and bringing him to the Council for yet another inquest
 - Stephen is accused before the council of two offenses:
 - Declaring the end of the Temple
 - Likely a repetition of Jesus' own words, referring to the replacing of the house of stone with the Temple of the Body of Christ
 - This charge would have been an offense to the Sadducees who operated and protected the Temple grounds
 - Secondly, he is accused of destroying the customs of the Law from Moses
 - Certainly, this refers to the end of the Law now that grace has come in Jesus Christ
 - This charge would have incited the minority party on the council, the Pharisees
 - So the charges against Stephen are designed to make everyone mad at him
 - This sets the stage for Stephen's persecution



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 7

Chapter 7

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- Part II of Stephen's story
 - Tonight is his defense of the charges brought against him
 - In this day, there were no defense lawyers or lengthy trials
 - Stephen was called to speak for himself and give a defense against the charges
 - Gamaliel's warning that the Sanhedrin risked fighting against God had all but been forgotten
 - Stephen's discourse is the longest and most famous in Acts
 - And it forms a very unconventional defense, though it's very powerful
 - It essentially takes the form of a retelling of the high points of Israel's history
 - And at first glance it seems to be a long speech without relevance to the charges or even the Gospel
 - In reality, it's a remarkable delivery of both a defense to the charges and a presentation of the Gospel
 - In fact, the discourse accomplishes three things simultaneously
 - First, it defends the the specific charges leveled by the false witnesses
 - Blaspheming God & Moses
 - Speaking against the temple, the Law and the customs of Israel
 - Secondly, Stephen demonstrates that God's plan has followed a regular pattern of picturing Christ throughout the history of the nation of Israel
 - And that the story of Jesus is merely the continuation of the record established in the Old Testament
 - Third, Stephen takes opportunity to show where the religious leaders of his day had distorted and misused God's word or Israel's customs
 - Finally, Stephen brings an indictment against the leaders for failing to recognize this truth and for persecuting the saints

Acts 7:1 The high priest said, "Are these things so?"

Acts 7:2 And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,

Acts 7:3 and said to him, 'LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.'

Acts 7:4 "Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living.

Acts 7:5 "But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM.

Acts 7:6 "But God spoke to this effect, that his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND

MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS.

Acts 7:7 “‘AND WHATEVER NATION TO WHICH THEY WILL BE IN BONDAGE I MYSELF WILL JUDGE,’ said God, ‘AND AFTER THAT THEY WILL COME OUT AND SERVE ME IN THIS PLACE.’”

Acts 7:8 “And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.”

- Stephen begins with a recap of the patriarchal period
 - This testimony is Stephen’s response to the charge that he blasphemed God
 - Though the technical definition of that charge is to speak the name of God, Stephen consents to the broader meaning of the charge
 - He defends himself against the suggestion that he has diminished God’s nature or character, not just His name
 - The retelling of Abraham’s story reflects a high view of God as a promise-keeping God
 - And it pays proper respect to the way God’s glory was established through the patriarchs of Israel
- Secondly, look at the subtle jabs Stephen takes at the Sanhedrin
 - He pointedly mentioned that Abraham had been called and given a promise while still outside the land
 - The Pharisees and other Hebrew Jews placed excessive importance on living in the land
 - One of the reasons they probably chose Stephen to persecute was that he was a Jew from outside the land
 - Here Stephen counters that notion by pointing out that God was working with Abraham, a man who came from outside the land
 - God’s favor, in other words, is the result of a call and obedient faith, not a result of birthplace or family line
 - Another jab comes in the form of the promised inheritance
 - The promise to Abraham was for an inheritance that Abraham never personally received in his lifetime
 - Stephen demonstrates that the fulfillment of that promise wasn’t to be found in the land of Palestine, at least not in its present form
- Now look for a pattern in these events that form a repeating framework for the entire discourse
 - A man of God’s choosing is shown in two stages
 - In the first stage, the man God chooses is seen falling short of the supposed goal or fullness of glory God intended
 - Only to be shown later reaching that very goal in a better way
 - The pattern repeats over the discourse to suggest that Jesus’ life is the model for this pattern

- For example, Abraham is chosen by God and sent to a foreign land
 - But in that land, he doesn't receive the full inheritance he was promised
 - Instead, he produces offspring that become a family and nation
 - But through a covenant, Abraham is promised to receive this inheritance in a future day
- Not only does this pattern begin to suggest Christ's own life
 - But Abraham's story itself serves as an important prerequisite for Christ's coming, since it is the Abrahamic Covenant that promises the Messiah

Gal. 3:16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

Gal. 3:29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

- A quick note on apparent discrepancies in the text between Stephen's statements and other texts of Scripture
 - All the differences are explainable, and the differences offer additional insight into these events
 - For example, Abraham's father died in Haran before Abraham left for the land
 - The problem comes because the age of Haran at death would seem to be too old given Haran's age when he is said to have become a father to Abraham and his brothers back in Ur
 - The confusion comes because we assume Abraham was first born in Haran's family

Acts 7:9 "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him,

Acts 7:10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.

Acts 7:11 "Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food.

Acts 7:12 "But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time.

Acts 7:13 "On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh.

Acts 7:14 "Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all.

Acts 7:15 "And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died.

Acts 7:16 "From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in

Shechem.

- Now the story turns to Joseph
 - In this section Stephen continues to develop the story of Jesus as reflected in the lives and circumstances of the Old Testament
 - Now the focus is Joseph
 - The first time Joseph was called to lead his family, his brothers rejected him and became jealous
 - Yet God was with him
 - Stephen's subtle point is that rejection by men (men of Israel) doesn't mean God is also rejecting His chosen
 - Eventually, God raised Joseph up and restored him
 - And now Stephen adds a new detail to the comparison
 - The family of Israel is struck by famine and stress and trial back in the land
 - And when Israel responded to their stress by seeking relief in Egypt, they appear before the one they previously rejected
 - And then they give Joseph respect
 - And Joseph sends for all Israel to join them
- This account offers such a wonderful parallel to Christ's experience with the nation of Israel
 - He appears once and comes to rule over them and his brothers (Israel) rejected him
 - While he is away, the Father exalts the Son to great power and authority
 - And Israel is suffering under dispersion and persecution
 - Then under stress the nation will appeal to Jesus for protection (Zechariah 12-14)
 - And Jesus will return for them and invite all Israel to become part of His kingdom
 - And here again Stephen emphasizes that God's blessing occurred outside the land and then they returned
 - A further jab at the Sanhedrin that valued the land over the Messiah Himself

Acts 7:17 “But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt,
Acts 7:18 until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH.

Acts 7:19 “It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive.

Acts 7:20 “It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home.

Acts 7:21 “And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son.

Acts 7:22 “Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.

Acts 7:23 “But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.

Acts 7:24 “And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian.

Acts 7:25 “And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand.

Acts 7:26 “On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?’

Acts 7:27 “But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, ‘WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US?’

Acts 7:28 ‘YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?’

Acts 7:29 “At this remark, MOSES FLED AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons.

- Now Stephen turns to Moses and in the process he’ll defend himself to the charge that he blasphemed him
 - The entire account of Moses is respectful and gives Moses the proper dignity
 - And now Moses takes the role of forerunner of Jesus
 - Like with Joseph, Moses is a man sent by God to deliver the Jews
 - This is an obvious parallel to Jesus
 - Several of the things Stephen says about Moses are similar to things said in the Gospel concerning Jesus
- Stephen begins by reminding the leaders of Israel that God promised the nation would be oppressed
 - So when the time for the promise arrived, they entered slavery
 - During this time the nation of Jews was under oppression at the hands of evil leaders
 - And in the midst of that experience, God raised up a deliverer for them
 - And that deliverer first came as a child with a unique background
 - He was raised by a surrogate family
 - These details remind us of Christ of course
 - At the age of forty, Moses takes note of the plight of his people in slavery and begins to defend them
 - And Stephen tells us that Moses anticipated that his action would be met with gladness by his fellow Jews
 - But Stephen says they didn’t understand
 - In fact, the next day Moses tried to act as a peacemaker among his people, but they mocked him

- They rejected him as a ruler and judge over them
- Having been rejected, Moses fled into the desert and produced sons
 - All of this prefigures Christ's first coming to deliver Israel
 - It also demonstrates that Israel has commonly rejected what God has offered

Acts 7:30 “After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH.

Acts 7:31 “When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord:

Acts 7:32 ‘I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.’ Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look.

Acts 7:33 “BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, ‘TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND.

Acts 7:34 ‘I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.’

Acts 7:35 “This Moses whom they disowned, saying, ‘WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?’ is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.

Acts 7:36 “This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.

Acts 7:37 “This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.’

- When it came time for Moses to return, God appeared to him
 - Notice again the reverence with which Stephen describes Moses
 - The charge of blasphemy against Moses is effectively denied here as Stephen gives a proper and respectful testimony concerning Moses
 - Secondly, Stephen continues to show that physical land was not the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel
 - The call to Moses took place outside the land
 - In fact, the land is counted holy simply because God was present
 - Further indictment of the Jewish leaders who had made the land of Israel their god
 - And now the man previously rejected by the nation of Israel becomes their appointed deliverer
 - And Stephen reminds the leadership that God Himself stated through Moses that their Messiah would be modeled on the life of Moses
 - Specifically, the pattern of a man “once rejected and later received” is the model that Moses provides and Jesus fulfills
 - Rather than Stephen speaking against Moses, it was the Sanhedrin who was
- But even after their deliverance, the nation continues in their disobedient ways

- Stephen emphasizes that the giving of the Law didn't change their hearts
 - The people of Israel have always violated their own law

Acts 7:38 “This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you.

Acts 7:39 “Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt,

Acts 7:40 SAYING TO AARON, ‘MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT — WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.’

Acts 7:41 “At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

Acts 7:42 “But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, ‘IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL?

Acts 7:43 ‘YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP. I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.’

- Stephen is now addressing the charge of speaking against the Law
 - Rather than speak against the Law, Stephen upholds the Law calling Scripture living oracles
 - They are living because they are the manifestation of God in Christ
 - They are living because they call men to a new relationship with God
 - In contrast to his adoration for a living word, Stephen speaks against the people's disobedience to the Law
 - They were unwilling to be obedient to God and turned their backs on Him
 - Here's another obvious jab at the leaders of Israel, who were unwilling to be obedient to the living word in their day
 - They were unwilling to be obedient to the Gospel
 - Their disobedience was instigated by the Jewish leaders, Aaron their high priest, who led them into idol worship
 - In fact, Stephen reveals that while the nation wandered in the desert, they continued to engage in idol worship and made sacrifices to Molech
 - By comparison, Stephen implies that it wasn't he who spoke against the Law
 - It was the Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin who were guilty of this offense in the way they rejected the word of God through Christ and chose idol worship instead
 - And the Lord promises to judge those who engage in idol worship contrary to His revealed word

Acts 7:44 “Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen.

Acts 7:45 “And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David.

Acts 7:46 “David found favor in God’s sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

Acts 7:47 “But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.

Acts 7:48 “However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:

Acts 7:49 ‘HEAVEN IS MY THRONE,
AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET;
WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?’ says the Lord,
‘OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?’

Acts 7:50 ‘WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?’

- The final charge was that Stephen had spoken against the holy place, or the Temple
 - Stephen had probably been charged with dishonoring the Temple because he had preached on the insignificance of a building
 - And he likely emphasized the importance of the living temple of God in the heart of the believer
 - Here he defends himself through a proper retelling of how the tabernacle originated and its true purpose
 - First, notice that the original tabernacle was not a temple
 - It was a tent built in the wilderness, Stephen emphasizes
 - Again, the blessing and grace of God arrived outside the land and in a different form than the one presently revered
 - Secondly, in keeping with the author of Hebrews, Stephen reminds the Sanhedrin that even the first tabernacle was not special in itself
 - Rather, it was important because it was built on a pattern as a copy of something truly important – that being God’s true dwelling place
 - God isn’t contained in a place built by human hands
- David asked God for the privilege of building a permanent structure to honor the Lord
 - The idea of a temple originated with David, and though God eventually permitted it, we see that it was a manmade request in the beginning
 - David requested it, but God denied him the opportunity
 - It was granted to Solomon, a lesser king compared to David
 - It became a part of Solomon’s undoing
 - The temple was not a priority for God because He doesn’t dwell in a building made by human hands

Acts 7:51 “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

Acts 7:52 “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;

Acts 7:53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.”

- Finally, Stephen brings his discourse to conclusion by applying all these lessons to his audience
 - They are repeating the sins of their fathers
 - They are uncircumcised in the heart, which is to say unbelievers
 - Interesting that Stephen uses this phrase
 - The use of circumcision to picture the saving work of the Spirit in the heart eventually becomes one of Paul’s favorite ways of communicating the difference between faith and works
 - Circumcision of the heart is contrasted with circumcision of the flesh
 - But here, Stephen introduces that concept
 - And in the audience was a young man named Saul of Tarsus
 - Stephen says they have rejected and persecuted the prophets as did their fathers
 - And in particular, they have persecuted the Righteous One
 - Who was foretold beforehand
 - All of Stephen’s discourse was intended to reflect how the Righteous One and his death were foretold in Scripture
 - They received the Law ordained by angels but did not keep it
 - To keep the Law in this context is similar to another of Paul’s later teachings
 - That true obedience to the Law means becoming obedient to the Gospel, because the Law points us to Christ

Acts 7:54 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.

Acts 7:55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;

Acts 7:56 and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

Acts 7:57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse.

Acts 7:58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Acts 7:59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”

Acts 7:60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep.

- In response to this damning conclusion, the Sanhedrin erupts in anger
 - They are cut to the quick we’re told
 - Luke’s language literally says sawn in two
 - They gnash their teeth, which means to bite with loud noises
 - This is an expression to indicate aggressive and angry speech
 - Interestingly, Stephen virtually makes no mention of Jesus
 - And yet he has been preaching Jesus throughout the testimony
 - It’s also interesting to see how Stephen becomes the link between Peter and Paul
 - Peter is known as the Apostle who was reluctant to put aside the Law and the customs of Israel in order to follow Jesus fully
 - Paul is the Apostle anointed to clearly demonstrate that the New replaced the Old
 - Stephen is the first among the brethren to preach this new dispensation and does so within hearing of both men
- While this eruption is taking place, Stephen is calmed and encouraged by a heavenly vision granted to him alone
 - He sees Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven
 - The Scripture tells us to expect this, especially Psalm 110
 - Later New Testament Scripture confirms this, but Stephen’s vision is the only known manifestation of that truth
 - Stephen alone sees what the Scriptures tell us is true
- When the Messiah is seen next to the Father, He may be described at times as seated or at other times as standing
 - The significance of Jesus sitting is that only when a servant’s work is finished may he sit
 - Jesus has finished the work of redemption
 - But if He is seen to be standing, it reflects His ongoing work to build and guide and protect His Church
 - Here, Jesus is seen standing because of His work in that moment to guide Stephen’s speech and reassure Stephen that Jesus is directing the outcome
 - Stephen was confessing Christ before men, and the vision reminds him that Jesus keeps His promise to confess Stephen’s name before the Father
- As Stephen gazes at this incredible sight, he is completely distracted away from the moment and even tries to share it with everyone
 - It’s as if Stephen expects that this vision is available to everyone, and if they would

only see it with him, it would stop the fight

- But no one else sees the vision
- And when Stephen declares that he sees the Son of Man next to the Father, he is declaring that Jesus is in that place
 - This statement is the last straw to the Sanhedrin who view it as blasphemy
 - They cover their ears, rush him, drag him outside the city and stone him
- According to Deuteronomy, the witnesses at the trial must be the first ones to cast stones in killing Stephen
 - In order to be more comfortable throwing stones, they first remove their outer cloaks and lay them at the feet of Saul
 - This is an incidental statement except that Luke knows how important Saul will become in his narrative later
 - Described as a young man meant Saul was under the age of 40
- While the stoning takes place, Stephen apparently continues to have a vision of Jesus
 - And he asks Jesus to take his spirit immediately, probably so that he wouldn't experience a prolonged death
 - And it appears Jesus answers his prayer, since he dies while still on his knees



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 8A

Chapter 8:1-17

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- At the beginning of our study, I explained that the book of Acts has many features that provide structure and divide the book into clearly identifiable parts or sections
 - Without reviewing all those divisions again, let me point out one such division taking place here as we leave Chapter 7 and enter Chapter 8
 - To this point in the story of Acts, the message of the Gospel has been preached exclusively to the Jews in Jerusalem
 - Peter has led this charge together with John
 - And now these early believers are experiencing the beginning of persecution from the very same Jews who were offered the message of hope
 - God always intended that the message of the Gospel would be delivered to Jews first, since “salvation is of the Jews” as Jesus says in John 4
 - Paul reiterates this priority in Romans 1:16

Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

- The events of Chapter 7 become the justification and the means by which God moves the Gospel outwardly to the next intended audience, the Samaritans
- After the death of Stephen, persecution of Christians in Jerusalem began a new phase
 - The trial and stoning of Stephen was a turning point, and the event itself was somewhat unusual
 - The Jews lacked the power of the sword under Roman authority, so stoning Stephen could have resulted in the participants being charged with murder under Roman law
 - The fact that so many were willing to engage in the stoning indicates that they were operating under different rules at the time
 - One explanation is that the Roman Senate had removed the right for Jewish execution under all circumstances except one
 - Offenses against the Temple could be punished by death in Israel
 - This was the charge against Stephen
 - Another explanation is that this event occurred during a short window in AD 36 between the departure of Pilate and the arrival of his replacement, when Roman rule wasn't present in the city
- But as the city saw and heard of the stoning of a Christian, the attitude of the city toward the new movement changed dramatically
 - Jews within the city turned on the believing Jews, particularly the Hellenistic Jews, the group to which Stephen belonged
 - Essentially, the Jewish population had heard the testimony of Stephen at his public trial and had rejected it soundly
 - And for the most part, the rest of the city followed suit in that rejection
 - Where before the people of Jerusalem were flocking to the church in great number, now they turned away out of fear or disapproval

- So naturally, this changed the nature of ministry in the early church
 - First, it moved the disciples outward from the city to safer areas of Palestine and the diaspora
 - Secondly, it caused the disciples to direct their message to non-Jewish audiences who were not already opposed to the message
- God was justified in moving the Gospel away from the Jews and toward a Gentile audience on the basis of the sign of Jonah
 - When Jesus declared that the Jewish nation had rejected Him and lost their opportunity to receive him (in Luke 13:34-35), he told the Pharisees that the nation would only receive the “sign of Jonah” henceforth (see Matthew 12)
 - The sign of Jonah is the sign of a resurrection
 - Jesus’ own resurrection was the fulfillment of that sign, and here we see that sign repeated through Stephen’s testimony of that resurrection
 - As Stephen testified in the trial concerning Jesus and His resurrection, the crowd rejected that testimony
 - Rather than receiving the sign of resurrection, they stoned the messenger
 - The Lord will again give Israel the sign of resurrection in the last days during Tribulation
 - The two witnesses will undergo a visible resurrection following their deaths
 - And this resurrection will be a sign to that future generation of Israel of the truth of the two witnesses’ testimony concerning Jesus
 - Of course, that future generation of Israel will also reject the sign in the moment it will be given
 - Now since the nation of Israel has rejected the sign of resurrection given in Stephen’s testimony, the gospel will move away from them and to a new people group: the Samaritans
 - But first, we begin Chapter 8 with three verses to bridge us into the rest of the chapter

Acts 8:1 Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 8:2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.

Acts 8:3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

- Saul approved of what he saw happening to Stephen
 - The Greek word for hearty agreement means that Paul didn’t instigate the action against Stephen, but he liked it and decided to make it his own cause
 - So Saul becomes a self-appointed vigilante to find and eliminate the Jewish

Christians

- Many disciples leave the city and go into Samaria
 - But the apostles, we're told, remain behind in the city
 - This fact becomes important later in Chapter 8
- Stephen we're told is buried by devout Jewish men who mourn his death
 - The Jewish customs and rabbinical law forbid public lamentations for anyone who was put to death by stoning
 - So Luke's mention of these lamentations seemed intended to reflect that not all Jews within the city were in agreement with the verdict and execution of Stephen
 - This statement stands in contrast with Saul's hearty agreement
- We can't help but notice that Saul has become the catalyst God is using to move the Gospel outward from Jerusalem
 - It's likely that had persecution never come to the early church, the leaders may have never ventured far from the city in preaching the Gospel
 - They certainly wouldn't have considered going outside Judea
 - And the fact that the Apostles aren't willing to leave even now that persecution has begun indicates their reluctance to move outward
 - Consider this interesting fact: Saul later becomes Paul, the man credited to be the single greatest evangelist in the history of church
 - God used Paul's ministry to preach the gospel to Gentiles in many new places and explain the full doctrines of the church
 - And yet here we see Saul – who has not yet come to faith himself – being used by God in exactly the same way!
 - Saul is responsible for moving the Gospel outwardly from Jerusalem
 - Perhaps Paul was thinking of this very irony when he wrote Romans 8:28:

Rom. 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- ○ Whether as Saul persecuting or as Paul preaching, this man was used by God to move His word to the nations
- Now we move forward looking at a second one of the early deacons
 - First we had Stephen, now we have Philip, and notice Luke's connecting verse:

Acts 8:4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

- Do you remember on the first night of the class I mentioned that the main thrust of Luke's account is not the work of the apostles
 - Rather, Luke emphasizes the work of the Spirit and power and importance of

God's word in building the Church

- Here's one of those moments when Luke pauses to make clear that the instrument God uses to move His church outward from Jerusalem is the preaching of His word
- Had the disciples merely scattered without preaching the word, perhaps instead trying to persuade men with human wisdom
 - The scattering would have accomplished nothing
- The Greek word for scattered is *diaspeiro*, which is the same word used for the scattering of seed on a field
 - It may cause you to remember the parable of the sower and the seed, where the spread of the Gospel is compared to the scattering of seed
- This scattering led to many important changes in the early church
 - For example, the Gospels were written because of this movement away from Jerusalem
 - While the church was largely centered in Jerusalem with the apostles nearby, no one had need of a written Gospel account
 - And questions regarding Jesus' teaching or the events of His ministry were handled in person during church services or in one-on-one questioning
 - Once the saints began to spread out into Judea and beyond, the need for a written record became obvious
 - Since the early church was mostly Jewish, the first Gospel account was written by the Apostle Matthew so that a Jewish audience could understand how Jesus was the Messiah
 - Later, other apostles write their Gospel accounts to serve different, non-Jewish audiences
 - Secondly, the apostles began to write letters to newly founded churches to encourage and instruct new believers in the absence of personal visits
 - As with the Gospel, the earliest epistles were the Jewish epistles (James, I & II Peter, Hebrews, and Jude) written to the dispersed Jewish believers
 - Third, church leadership was decentralized as local, non-apostolic leaders were established in each city to steward their congregations
 - Finally, formal doctrines and creeds of the Christian faith belief emerged from out of the apostles' writings
 - These doctrines bound the dispersed congregations together in spirit, and to contend with false teaching whenever it emerged
- Against that backdrop, we begin the story of Philip now

Acts 8:5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

Acts 8:6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

Acts 8:7 For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out

of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

Acts 8:8 So there was much rejoicing in that city.

- Philip goes down to the city of Samaria
 - Samaria was not actually a city in Philip's day, but rather a region directly north of Jerusalem
 - Luke says Philip went “down” because any direction away from the Temple mount is considered “down” to a Jew
 - This reference is one reason some believe Luke may have been Jewish rather than Gentile
 - Secondly, Luke says the “city” of Samaria to indicate some population center within the region, not to mean a specific city called Samaria
 - In the Greek, Luke says that Philip was continuously preaching or proclaiming Christ to the people in Samaria
 - In other words, Philip was preaching to Samaritans
- Samaritans were an interesting group historically
 - In a sense we could say they were neither entirely Jewish nor entirely Gentile
 - They were a people who descended from Jews who escaped the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and remained in the land
 - While living in the land, they began to inter-marry with the surrounding Gentile peoples
 - When the Jews were led back into the land by Zerubbabel after the Babylonian captivity, they encountered these halfbreed Jews still living in Samaria
 - The returning Jews no longer regarded these descendants of the Northern Kingdom to be true Jews
 - And they were correct: Samaritans aren't Jews any longer
 - In defiance to the returning Jews, the Samaritans tried to recreate their Jewish heritage in a counterfeit manner
 - They created a distorted version of the Mosaic Law and built their own temple and established their own priesthood and worship
 - Meanwhile, they became bitter enemies with the Jews
 - Jews hated Samaritans even more than other Gentiles because they were impostors pretending to be Jewish
 - You can see this rivalry throughout the Gospel accounts
 - The woman at the well in John 4 is a classic example
- As the Gospel moves outward from Jerusalem, we said earlier in the study that it will move through three distinct phases
 - First it goes to the Jews in Jerusalem
 - Secondly, it moves out of Judea and into Samaria and to Samaritans

- Lastly, it reaches Greek Gentiles across the entire world
- Since Samaritans are simply a unique group of Gentiles, why are they given a unique status in the progression of the Gospel?
 - The reason is connected to their historic role as impostors of the Jewish faith
 - The Samaritans had made a practice of counterfeiting everything of significance within Jewish religious practice
 - With each counterfeit, the Samaritans reinforced the notion that they were the true practitioners of the Jewish faith and the rightful heirs to the promise given to Abraham
 - Now that the long-awaited Jewish Messiah had come in fulfillment of that promise, it was likely that the Samaritans might concoct another counterfeit
 - They might propose the arrival of their own "messiah" and complicate the spread of the Gospel among the citizens of Judea and Samaria
 - At this early vulnerable stage of growth, the Lord saw fit to bring Samaritans into the church rather than compete with their false message
- With each new movement of the church, we are going to see a repeating of the pattern that was established in the beginning
 - When the church first arrived to Jews, the message of the Gospel was accompanied by:
 - Signs & miracles
 - Power over the demonic realm
 - The delayed indwelling of the Holy Spirit
 - Large numbers of converts in a brief time
 - Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised to see that pattern repeat when the Gospel first arrives for this new group in Samaria
 - Interestingly, the signs are performed by a delegate of the Apostles rather than by an Apostle personally
 - Because the Apostles had not yet understood the necessity of moving beyond a Jewish audience in spreading the Gospel
 - This issue comes to a head in Acts 10–11
- Looking at the text, Philip preaches and the crowds respond
 - Specifically, the crowds were of "one accord" or one mind in their response
 - In contrast to the resistance seen in Jerusalem, here the crowds were uniformly receiving the Gospel message
 - This is similar to the way the crowd in Jerusalem received the Gospel at Pentecost and immediately following
 - Naturally, their attention was directed on Philip because he was performing miraculous signs accomplished by the Spirit in confirmation of the truth of his message
 - So the signs were used to attract attention for Philip's message
 - And the message was received in part out of a recognition that it came by

the power of God

- At this point we're introduced to a new character, Simon

Acts 8:9 Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great;

Acts 8:10 and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God."

Acts 8:11 And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

Acts 8:13 Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

- Simon the magician is a curious and often debated fellow
 - His may be the first religious charlatan to infiltrate the Christian church
 - If there had been cable TV, "prayer cloths," and toll-free donation phone lines in this day, Simon probably would have been the first to employ them
 - Luke says he was performing magic, astonishing the people, and claiming to be someone great
 - In fact the people were calling Simon, the Great Power of God
 - It's interesting to see right from the beginning how Luke juxtaposes Simon and Phillip
 - Phillip is astonishing the people, as is Simon
 - But Phillip's work is the result of God's power
 - While Simon's work is the result of magic, dark arts
 - Real power, but demonic
 - Simon's work is intended to make himself look powerful and important before the people – and it was working
 - While Phillip's work causes the people to rejoice and give God glory
 - Based on Philip's preaching, the church has been established in this place and is starting to grow
 - And the re-emergence of miracles for the sake of the Samaritans was intended to affirm the truth of Philip's teaching in the same way that it did in Jerusalem
 - The Holy Spirit is not yet seen to indwell the new believers though
 - Why does the arrival of the Spirit wait under these circumstances?
 - In the case of Jerusalem, the Spirit's arrival was delayed until a certain day in order to fulfill the Feast of Pentecost

- Here the delay is different
- The primary purpose for a delay here was to make an impression on a different audience – the apostles themselves
 - Keep in mind that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the mark of faith
 - So it served as a powerful sign to anyone of where true faith was present
- Now speaking of powerful signs, Simon has a pretty good thing going here
 - Within his community he is the leading spiritual attraction
 - And like the Pharisees in Jerusalem, anything that contends with his prominence is a threat
 - So the arrival of a competitor wielding even greater power bothers Simon greatly
 - Simon, we're told, is so impressed by Philip that he "believes" and submits to water baptism
 - Even after the baptism, he continues to follow Philip around "observing" the miracles
 - The word for observing is *theoreo*, which carries the sense of studying or examining something
 - Simon was following Philip out of professional curiosity
 - It causes us to wonder about what Luke means when he says "believes"
 - Could Simon have made a confession without actually accepting the Gospel truly?
- The news of Philip's ministry soon reached the apostles in Jerusalem, and of course they were surprised to hear of it

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,

Acts 8:15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 8:17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

- Peter and John are not assigned the duty of going to Samaria and investigating this news
 - The fact that they go at all tells us how concerned they were by this news
 - Don't read v.14 and v.15 together too quickly
 - If you do, it will sound as if the purpose of their travel to Samaria was to lay on hands, as if that was the expected function of the Apostles
 - This isn't the proper reading
 - They came to investigate and validate that the Samaritans were actually being

called into the truth faith

- Rather than simply mimicking the Jews once again
- Once they arrived, then they performed these activities in response to the faith they found
- The apostles were an important part of this event, because their presence validated their experience
 - It also confirmed again that Peter had the keys to the Kingdom
 - And he was now enlisted to recognize the expansion of the church beyond Jews and the entry of Samaritans into the Kingdom by faith
 - This is why the baptism of the Holy Spirit had not yet occurred
 - Peter is always involved in the first faith experience for every new group (Jew, Samaritan, Gentile) because he held the “keys” according to Jesus direction
 - This also ensured that Peter was able to personally witness God’s work through the Spirit and understand himself that these new groups were joining the church
- Finally, John is included here as well, perhaps because of his early desire to destroy the Samaritans when they rejected Jesus during the Gospel account
 - After this moment, John is never mentioned again in the book of Acts



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 8B

Chapter 8:14:40

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- We're in the middle of Philip's experience in Samaria where he has brought the Gospel
 - He's performing signs and wonders and many are believing
 - He's also confounding a man named Simon
 - Before Philip, Simon the magician has long impressed the crowds with signs and wonders
 - But he did these things with the power of the demonic realm
 - And he's transfixed by the greater power of Philip
 - And he has professional jealousy over Philip's stunning success
 - So Simon joins in
 - Scripture says even Simon believed and was baptized
 - And then Simon began following Philip studying his technique
- Meanwhile, we saw the Apostles Peter and John come down (north) to see if what they heard was true

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,

Acts 8:15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 8:17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

- The apostles traveled to validate the reports of Samaritans coming to faith
 - As we discussed last week, Peter had the keys to the Kingdom

Matt. 16:17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 16:18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Matt. 16:19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

- With each new group that received the Gospel, Peter was always the one God used to usher them into the family of God
 - This was the honor Peter received since he was the first Apostle to recognize Christ
 - He in turn would be the one to open the Gospel to Jews, Samaritans and later Gentiles
 - Once Peter "turned" the key for a given group, they remained an open door for the Gospel

- The opening of one of these doors by Peter was always marked by the arrival of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a visible, obvious way
 - Once that manifestation of the Spirit had occurred, it quickly subsided
 - In its place came the normal experience of new faith accompanied by an invisible dwelling of the Spirit
- It's also worth noting that the three parts of a salvation experience are shown to happen in a different order in each of the first two groups
 - In the case of the Jewish disciples who began the church, first they experience faith, then they experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Spirit baptism) at Pentecost, and lastly they performed water baptism after Peter's speech
 - In Chapter 8 as the Samaritans enter the church for the first time, the order is first belief followed by water baptism and then lastly by Spirit baptism with the laying on of hands
 - And the Jewish church never experienced the laying on of hands by apostles
 - This step is only employed for the Samaritan and Gentile converts
- Finally, we need to note that there is no speaking in tongues reported among this group in Samaria
 - This makes sense, since the stated purpose of the gift of tongues is as a sign to unbelieving Jews, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:22
 - Since there are no unbelieving Jews present in Samaria, there was no need for this sign to be manifested
 - This is further confirmation that the moment of salvation will not include this special manifestation of the Spirit except under Biblically-correct circumstances

Acts 8:18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

Acts 8:19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 8:20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!

Acts 8:21 "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Acts 8:22 "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

Acts 8:23 "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

Acts 8:24 But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

Acts 8:25 So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

- Back to Simon, he finally believes he's found the source of Phillip's power to perform the miracles – the Spirit, and more specifically the Apostles' ability to bestow the Spirit
 - Clearly the Apostles are in charge here
 - Philip would have shown them respect and honor when they arrived
 - So Simon draws the obvious conclusion: these men are the source of Philip's power
 - And naturally, he hopes that these men may be willing to empower other men...men like Simon
 - Especially if he offers them an incentive
 - And Simon goes a step further
 - He doesn't just want Philip's power
 - He wants the Apostles to grant him their power
 - He wants to go to the top of the ladder if possible
 - It's fair to conclude from this scene that Simon has not received the laying on of hands himself
 - And therefore, he never experienced the arrival of the Spirit
 - It's never described in the text
 - And what is described is very disturbing – his willingness to obtain something spiritual with money
- So as we consider Simon's offer, we have to ask ourselves the obvious question
 - Is Simon merely an immature believer still caught up in his old ways or is he an unbeliever posing as a Christian and now he shows his true nature?
 - Many commentators have lined up on either side
 - Rather than trying to guess, I believe we should leave it to eyewitnesses who were present in that moment
 - We should ask Peter what he thinks about Simon's heart
- Let's look at Peter's response
 - In v.20 Peter says, may your silver perish with you
 - Literally in the Greek Peter said you and your silver go to Hell
 - Strong words, but Peter is being literal
 - He is declaring that this man is on the road to Hell, not heaven
 - In v.21 he says Simon's heart is not right before the Lord
 - Because of that, Simon has no part or portion in this matter
 - The Greek word for "matter" is logos
 - Logos is in The Word
 - Part means present, while portion means future
 - Simon has no part in the Word – in Christ
 - In v.22 he says that Simon should repent of his wickedness

- Pray for forgiveness, that if possible the Lord would forgive Simon
 - A believer would never need to hear such a statement
 - While a believer could certainly sin, and should pray for forgiveness, there is never any doubt that a believer would be forgiven
 - Only an unbeliever should hear such a statement
 - Clearly, the apostles didn't believe that Simon was a believer
- In v.23 Peter says I see that you are still in the bondage of iniquity
 - This word in Greek for iniquity literally means unrighteousness
 - This man is still in bondage to sin, he is an unbeliever

Rom. 7:14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

- Then perhaps most telling of all
 - Simon says to Peter please pray for me
 - This is the unbeliever's "brush off"
 - We hear this whenever we encourage them to read the Bible, come to church, repent and believe in the Gospel
 - They tell us to pray for them or they compliment us on our faith
 - These are polite ways to deflect the conversation away from them and back toward us
 - Simon clearly isn't interested in the truth
 - And Peter's own statements concerning his heart are a clear indictment
 - They tell us that Peter himself believed Simon was without faith
- Simon merely saw Phillip as a competitor, and he was willing to play along to get what he wanted from Jesus
 - Simon has attached himself to a movement for selfish, cynical, hypocritical reasons
 - Simon is a type or example in Scripture of the false confessor
 - Someone who attaches themselves to the faith superficially but has purely carnal motives
 - And even Christians can reduce Christianity to a "means to an end" rather than an end in itself
 - The Christian faith brings benefits...immeasurable benefits
 - But they are largely spiritual and almost always delayed
 - When we expect them to be immediate and earthly, then we are destined to be disappointed
 - And if we preach a carnal "gospel," which is no gospel at all, we will only attract more Simons
- What kind of response might we have expected from Simon had he truly believed?

- Well, a later experience in the book of Acts gives us a clue:
- Another group of magicians will hear the Gospel in Acts 19 and profess faith in Christ, but then look at what they do next:

Acts 19:18 Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.

Acts 19:19 And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Acts 19:20 So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

- While I am not suggesting that every new believer will immediately take dramatic steps to reform their life (for we know many do not), still we should demand progress in discipleship
 - If the progress is lacking, we either treat the person as an unbeliever (i.e., continue to present the Gospel)
 - Or we admonish them as a believer to serve the Lord more faithfully
 - We should not ignore it
- Having established the church in Samaria (north of Jerusalem), the Lord now uses Philip to spread the Gospel to the southern parts of Palestine
 - But we'll notice the message is still being directed outside the Jews and to those who are closely associated with Israel

Acts 8:26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.)

Acts 8:27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship,

Acts 8:28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

- Philip leaves Samaria, which was about 50 miles North-Northwest of Jerusalem
 - The Lord directs Philip (through an angel of the Lord) to a desert road in the middle of nowhere about 50 miles to the South
 - Here again we see the Lord directing the affairs of the Church
 - Philip went to Samaria because of persecution, not because he had a great idea to reach Samaritans
 - Likewise, he goes south to the Desert not because it made sense to proclaim the gospel in the Desert, but because the Lord wanted His word preached there
 - This road in Gaza connects Jerusalem with the Via Mars, which ran north-south along the Mediterranean
 - The Gaza road runs southwest from Jerusalem through the Negev desert

- and connects to the Via Mars in the town of Gaza on the coast
 - For long stretches of the road, you find yourself in the middle of nowhere
- What do we assume Philip was thinking as he made this trip?
 - He was literally in nowhere with no idea (presumably) of what would come next
 - How could he spread the Gospel to an empty desert?
 - But the Lord knew there would be an opportunity to reach new places through an encounter on this road
- At a point along the road a chariot comes up (probably from behind) and passes Philip
 - In the chariot is an interesting character
 - He was Ethiopian – not a Jew
 - Yet he had been worshipping in Jerusalem we're told
 - Proselytes
 - God-fearers
 - And he owned a Jewish scroll of Isaiah, which would have been rare and expensive
 - He was clearly devoted to his faith in a sincere and serious way
 - He was therefore wealthy
 - And as a Eunuch in the court, we know he was powerful and important, riding in a chariot driven by a chauffeur
 - So here we have a man who, in some ways, represents the other side of the coin in connection with the Samaritans
 - Like Samaritans, he was not a Jew, but he worshipped as a Jew
 - Therefore, like the Samaritans he represented a unique group that knew of a Messiah and anticipated His arrival
 - Unlike true Gentiles, who never heard of a Jewish Messiah much less were anticipating His arrival, he was in a unique position to receive the Gospel
 - So the Lord uses Philip to reach him in the same way as the Samaritans
 - And the second half of the story in Acts 8 fills in the picture for the opening of the Gospel to the “nearly” Jewish camp
- The man is reading Isaiah aloud we're told, which was the normal tradition for men in the East, especially in reading God's word

Acts 8:29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”

Acts 8:30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

Acts 8:31 And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Acts 8:32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:
“HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;

**AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.**

**Acts 8:33 “IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY;
WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?
FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH.”**

Acts 8:34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

- Notice Luke’s emphasis on the actions of the Spirit and the importance of God’s word in this encounter
 - As Luke tells this story, he is intentionally contrasting several elements between the first story with Simon and the Samaritans with this man’s conversion
 - This is a classic moment of evangelism
 - Look at the elements
 - A man seeking the true God
 - Reading the Word of God
 - Then the Spirit of God directs Philip to this man to explain the scripture
 - And by that explanation of the scripture, Jesus Christ is revealed to the man’s heart
- Philip first asks if the man understands what he is reading
 - The question in Greek implies, did the man understand the person described in Isaiah’s account?
 - Philip knows to ask because the man is reading out loud
 - The eunuch invites Philip up to explain, and so now they ride on together for a distance
 - Philip doesn’t know where he’s going and has no plan for the evening
 - He has apparently put all earthly issues or concerns away for the moment and is simply riding along with the Spirit...literally
 - The man was reading Isaiah 53
 - And in the verses quoted, there is an interesting line
 - In v.33, the Scripture asks who will “relate” His generation?
 - This means who will explain Jesus to Jesus’ own generation, or family?
 - The sense of this line in Isaiah 53 is a lament that Jesus’ own people will not believe in the gospel
 - Ironically, here is a non-Jew reading about and seeking to know this Christ
 - While a Jew explains it to him
 - Fulfilling Isaiah’s very words, that Jesus’ own generation will not follow while others will

- The man then asks who is this speaking about, Isaiah himself or someone else?
 - Then Philip seized the opportunity
 - He explained that this was Jesus of Nazareth
 - But Luke says Philip used many other Old Testament Scripture as well to preach who Jesus was according to Scripture
 - While the text never covers the eunuch's reaction to this news, we understand by what follows that he believed it
- This conversion is in stark contrast to the way Samaria experienced evangelism
 - Here, belief in the gospel wasn't produced by signs and wonders
 - In Samaria the signs were included to validate the opening of the Gospel to Samaritans
 - And to show the Apostles of its reality
 - But even though the Holy Spirit may use such things to further His purposes, this is not the appointed method for new faith
 - Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17)
 - Here we see a man hearing the gospel on the basis of the Word of God
 - And unlike Simon the man is impressed by the message, not the messenger
 - And he responds with true faith, not a manufactured response designed to get something he wants
 - Remember, this man is rich and powerful and Philip is lowly, poor and thoroughly unimpressive
 - The tables have been turned here
 - Nothing could argue for the eunuch's conversion except the power of God

Acts 8:36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

Acts 8:37 [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]

Acts 8:38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

- Evidently somewhere in Philip's discussions with this man, he had introduced the topic of baptism
 - Philip must have explained how Jesus Himself had commanded that any who believe in Him should demonstrate their faith through baptism
 - Of how the inward change of faith in Christ produced by the baptism of the Holy Spirit must be followed by an outward witness through a baptism of water
 - We can assume Phillip gave the eunuch this background because look what the eunuch asks next
 - He sees water and asks if he could be baptized
 - Now consider they are in the middle of a desert

- The odds of finding a pool of standing water in the middle of a desert are so astronomical, that it can only be God providing the opportunity
- And the eunuch recognizes the rarity of this opportunity, which is why he seizes on it and asks to be baptized
 - All believers are expected to respond to their new found faith in Christ in this same way
 - By seizing the first opportunity to be baptized
- The eunuch didn't wait for the possibility of another pool later
 - He knew this was the one
- And when he asked what prevented him from being baptized, Philip gave the right answers of course
 - If you believe, you may be baptized

Acts 8:39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 8:40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

- Lastly, the encounter ends while Philip is still standing in the pool next to the Eunuch
 - The word snatched is the same word Paul uses to describe the rapture of the Church
 - He's not saying that Philip is raptured here, because Philip lands somewhere else on earth
 - In fact, Philip is placed in Ashdod, which is about 20 miles northeast of the city Gaza on the coast
 - There Philip continues to minister along the plains of Palestine eventually reaching Caesarea where he stays



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 9A

Chapter 9:1-22

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- Luke has temporarily suspended his account of Peter's ministry to describe three men who contributed to the movement of the Gospel outward from Jerusalem
 - First we saw Stephen, whose death created the environment for the Gospel to spread
 - Then we read about Philip, who became the first evangelist of the church
 - And now we learn about Saul, the man God selected to lead the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles
 - And in perhaps the greatest irony of the New Testament, the strongest persecutor of the early Church becomes its most important minister
- Because Saul (Paul) is so central to the spread of the Church and to the story of Acts, we should take a few moments to consider Saul's background, based on what we find in Scripture and tradition
 - We know from Paul's own testimony in Acts and later in his letters, that he was raised in Tarsus
 - Tarsus was an important Greek city, containing one of three known medical schools in his day
 - Jews were forced to move to Tarsus after Alexander the Great conquered the area
 - It was featured at times in the history of Cicero, Augustus Caesar, Mark Anthony and Cleopatra
 - Tradition says he was raised by parents who fled the upper Galilee after the Roman invasion in the first century BC
 - Paul tells us he was raised as a Pharisee, which means his parents would have followed strict Jewish practices in this regard
 - He began studying scripture at age 5
 - At age ten, he moved to studying rabbinical teachings (tradition)
 - At 13, he had a bar mitzvah
 - During his teen years, he would have lived in Jerusalem where he studied under Gamaliel
 - He may have lived with a sister, who Paul says in Acts 23:16 resided in the city
 - Paul also tells us that he was a Roman by birth, which means either his father or perhaps his grandfather had been granted citizenship by the Emperor
 - Usually, citizenship was granted by political favor or as a reward for loyal service to the Emperor
 - It brought significant benefits in Rome, including protection from degrading punishment
 - The child of a citizen was granted citizenship if the child was registered within 30 days
 - Registered infants received a certificate as legal evidence of citizenship
 - Paul apparently possessed one of these documents, and he may have carried it with him as he traveled in his missionary journeys

- Roman citizens assumed three Greek names
 - We only know one of Saul's three Roman names: Paullus (or Paul)
 - Saul was his given Jewish name
- Saul was well educated, obviously very intelligent and trained in critical thinking and argument
 - He also spoke at least four and perhaps more languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin
 - Though his intellect was impressive, his physical stature left something to be desired
 - By Paul's own testimony, he was a poor speaker and suffered physical illnesses and frailties
 - He must have been rather short, since the Greeks assumed him to be the short god, Mercury, rather than the more important (and taller) god Jupiter
 - As he completed his missionary journeys, he suffered persecution to the point of marking his body with wounds, according to Galatians 6:17
- As we move now to Acts 9, we witness perhaps the greatest conversion in the history of Christianity
 - Even Paul himself made his testimony of the events portrayed in this chapter multiple times, both in Acts and in his letters
 - We can safely assume that Paul gave his testimony on many occasions
- The scene is set for Saul's conversion in the first two verses of the chapter

Acts 9:1 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,
Acts 9:2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

- Luke reminds us of Saul's hatred for Christians
 - We remember how Saul was ravaging the church as Luke describes it in Chapter 8
 - Saul has become focused on persecuting Christians after his experience at the stoning of Stephen
 - He thinks he can find and destroy every single believer in the process
 - Now we see the extent to which Saul went to accomplish his self-appointed role of chief persecutor
 - He follows the pattern of the Sanhedrin
 - First giving threats followed by taking action (murder)
 - But now he has taken to involving the Roman authorities
 - The Romans had granted to the Jewish leadership by treaty the right to issue letters of extradition in cases involving violations of Jewish law outside the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin

- The Caesar extended this right over all Jews in the Roman empire
- With these letters, a Jew like Saul could enlist Roman authorities to arrest Jews and bring them back to the Sanhedrin for trial
 - In fact, this step was necessary since Jewish Christians had fled Jerusalem precisely to avoid the reach of the Sanhedrin after the death of Stephen
- Saul went looking for members of the “Way”
 - This was the term for the early Jewish believers, because they were said to follow the “way” of Jesus
 - Just as in the Old Testament the prophets talked about Israel following the way of Jehovah or the unbelievers following the way of the wicked
 - When Saul found them he brought them back to Jerusalem bound, which led to beatings, imprisonment and even death
 - Paul himself says he was responsible for the deaths of Christians
 - It makes me wonder if Paul’s future in heaven will include a glorious reward
 - What kind of reward awaited those who were killed by Saul?
 - And what kind of reconciliation took place when Paul entered the Lord’s presence and met those he had killed earlier?
 - This trip to Damascus appears to be Saul’s first attempt to track down and retrieve Christians from outside the Land

Acts 9:3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;

Acts 9:4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Acts 9:5 And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,

Acts 9:6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”

Acts 9:7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

- Saul was approaching Damascus, we’re told, which means Saul had almost made it to his destination
 - But God intervened in the last moment to redirect him
 - As Paul tells this story later in Acts, he mentions that the event happened at midday
 - This tells us that the sun was at its brightest in the sky
 - And yet another light even brighter appeared to blind Saul
 - With the light was a voice, the voice of Christ Himself
 - The voice asks Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?

- The repeating of Saul's name reminds us of how God typically addresses men in a critical moment
 - Like Abraham, Abraham
- And the name Saul is written in its Hebrew form in the text, indicating that the voice spoke in Hebrew
- Though Saul never met Jesus personally in His earthly ministry, here he has a personal encounter with the Lord
 - This encounter and all that follows later become Paul's validation for his claims to be an apostle
- Jesus' first words to Saul ask an interesting question
 - Why was Saul persecuting "Me", Jesus asks?
 - The statement is understandable in at least two ways
 - First, as Saul persecutes Christians, he persecutes the Body of Christ, of which Jesus is the Head
 - We can take comfort in knowing that as we suffer persecution for our faith, Jesus feels it with us
 - Secondly, it reflects that persecution of the Church is suppression of the message of the Gospel, which is the Word
 - Again, when the Gospel is attacked, it becomes an attack against Jesus Who is the Word made flesh
 - The question is also interesting precisely because it is phrased as a question
 - Why not simply say "Saul stop persecuting me"
 - Yet Jesus asks Saul why does he persecute the Lord?
 - It seems the question was calculated to shock Saul all the more
 - Saul was zealous for the Lord and for what Saul thought was truth
 - By asking the question, the Lord shocked Saul to consider that he had been fighting against God all this time rather than for Him
- Saul's answer can be confusing without proper perspective
 - He answers, "Who are you, Lord?"
 - Saul's use of the term "Lord" could be confusing, because it suggests that Saul immediately came to know Jesus as Lord
 - In reality, the word is commonly used as a respectful term, like "sir"
 - In this context, it seems likely that Saul is using it in that way
 - After all, if Saul didn't know who this voice belonged to, how would he have known to call it Lord except in the generic sense?
 - The fact that the voice originated in the heavens gave Saul an immediate clue he was hearing from a heavenly source, perhaps God Himself
 - As a Pharisee, Saul would have been intimately familiar with the Old Testament accounts of patriarchs or prophets hearing from God in such a manner
 - He must have been terrified and prostrate as men of the Old Testament

often were in these circumstances

- Still Saul asks who was speaking, because he couldn't make sense of the question itself
- But then Saul gets a specific answer
 - The voice is the very person Saul has been disparaging and persecuting – Jesus
 - Without waiting for Saul to respond (for what could Saul say at this point... sorry?), Jesus gives him instructions
 - Saul was to continue to Damascus but wait for instructions from Jesus
- Meanwhile, Saul's traveling companions were speechless
 - They heard a voice but saw nothing
 - Actually, later in Acts 22 Paul clarifies that they heard something, but they couldn't understand the words
 - Only Saul understood what was spoken by Jesus
 - This fact tells us something important
 - Saul DID see something, perhaps even Jesus Himself
 - In contrast to Saul, these men see no one, we're told
 - God's sovereignty is firmly on display here
 - First, the Lord is seen to be sympathizing with His people in persecution
 - To the point that He Himself feels the persecution
 - Secondly, He interrupts the plans of men to preserve (and later grow) His Church
 - And He does so by turning the chief persecutor into the chief builder
 - Third, He takes action without the involvement of another human agent
 - God Himself appears to Saul on the road
 - No ambassador or intermediary is required for God to intervene and change the course of man's plans
 - Fourth, God will immediately guide Saul into a new walk of life according to God's purpose
 - God lays out a new plan for the man from the start
 - Fifth, Saul is never given a choice
 - Saul is never asked if he would like to "give his life to Jesus?" or "invited" to welcome Jesus into his heart
 - The only question Saul is ever asked is, why are you persecuting Me?
 - Saul's life had been committed to God's purposes even before Saul knew who the voice belonged to
 - Finally, God has purposely selected Saul to hear the words while not permitting his companions to have the same experience
 - God's plan of salvation operates according to His sovereign will and purpose

- This experience impacted Saul both spiritually and physically

Acts 9:8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.

Acts 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

- Saul has been blinded by the encounter
 - So his companions must lead him by the hand into Damascus
 - And while in the city, he ate and drank nothing for three days
 - God's purpose of the blindness was to reinforce the reality of what happened to Saul
 - As Saul sits in complete darkness, he is alone with his thoughts
 - And his last visual memory will be that encounter on the road
 - Ironically, Saul had been blind spiritually though he could see physically
 - Now his situation was reversed at least for a time
 - Later the restoration of Saul's sight also becomes an opportunity for the Lord to build Saul's relationship with the wounded church that fears him
 - When his eyes are opened, Saul will see the church in a new way
 - And the church will see Saul in a new way as well
 - Spiritually, Paul referred back to this event numerous times
 - Both in defense of his commission as apostle
 - But also in contrition to give evidence that he was the least of all apostles
 - Undoubtedly, Paul's memory of his days before his conversion gave him an inexhaustible supply of motivation to reach the world for the Lord

Acts 9:10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

Acts 9:11 And the Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying,

Acts 9:12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight."

Acts 9:13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;

Acts 9:14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

- Clearly, the church had made its way as far north as Damascus

- And in that city was a man named Ananias
 - God gives Ananias a vision with instructions
 - He would find Straight street
 - It was named straight because in ancient cities, streets were usually crooked
 - This street was straight and that made it unusual and gave it its name
 - Then he would walk down the street asking for Judas' house
 - When he found the house, he would meet Saul of Tarsus
- And this Saul will be praying
 - And through his prayer, he will be given an answer that his blindness will be removed by a Christian named Ananias
- Isn't it amazing to watch God at work here?
 - Saul is praying for a miracle to regain his sight
 - Meanwhile, God selects a man and directs him to Saul
 - Even the names of each man are revealed to the other, so that when they meet, they will recognize God's work in their lives
 - Remember this story as you share your concerns with God and ask His forgiveness and intervention
 - And then remember that the reason Saul is in this situation was because God made him blind
 - But then remember that his blindness was a part of the way the Lord saved Saul from his sin
 - Finally, take note that the answer to Saul's prayer includes a new mission and a revelation that his mission will include much suffering for God's glory
 - As you reach out to God in prayer, remember that even your needs were produced by God
 - And therefore the solutions are at his disposal as well
 - And consider that whatever answer God brings may leave you all the more needing prayer and intervention
 - But always to God's glory and ultimately to our blessing
- Finally, Ananias responds in the way you might expect
 - In fact, he says what I would have said
 - In a word, no way!
 - Ananias points out that Saul isn't one of the good guys
 - He has been persecuting the church
 - He has letters to arrest and take them away to Jerusalem
 - Despite Ananias' effort to "help" the Lord, Jesus corrects Ananias
 - Saul is a chosen instrument of God
 - Notice, again, the lack of choice or free will in any of this

- Never is Saul asked or recruited by God
 - Scripture never describes our relationship with Christ as a personal choice
 - It only describes it as God's choice
- Saul's future has been set and it will include suffering, as Jesus indicates
 - Specifically, Saul will be the Apostle to the Gentiles
 - Secondly, he will testify before kings
 - Finally, he will testify to the Gospel before the Jewish people
 - Though they are not the focus of his ministry, Paul always gave the Jews opportunity to believe first
 - He never stopped looking for the remnant
 - Luke's account in the second half of this book is his exposé of Jesus' promise that Saul would suffer for His sake
- Did you notice that Jesus doesn't expect much from Ananias in this transaction
 - Ananias isn't supposed to convert Saul or change his mind on anything
 - Ananias will simply lay on hands
 - Jesus will do all the talking
 - With these words, Jesus persuades Ananias to go and attend to Saul

Acts 9:17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

Acts 9:19 and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, **Acts 9:20** and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

Acts 9:21 All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"

Acts 9:22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

- Ananias finds Saul, and his words and actions display supreme faith
 - First, to even enter Saul's presence must have taken great courage
 - It would be the equivalent of walking across a battle field and stepping into the bunker of the enemy without fear of being shot
 - Ananias must have been terrified of Saul, yet he goes none the less
 - Secondly, he addresses Saul as "brother" from the beginning

- Ananias isn't waiting for Saul to prove himself
- The Lord has declared he is converted, and therefore Ananias operates from that presumption
- Jesus' use of the man Ananias to confer this new calling upon Saul is notable for who Ananias is NOT
 - Specifically, Ananias is not an Apostle himself
 - Jesus converted Saul without the direct involvement of any other Apostle so to make clear that Jesus didn't intend to work exclusively through the 12 to build His church
 - He could and would raise up other disciples and even apostles by His own hand
 - Also notice that Saul's conversion – easily the most important conversion of the book of Acts – occurs without signs of the Spirit
 - No speaking in tongues, no miracles
 - Saul is converted without any of those manifestations, because the Apostles were not present and there was no purpose in such signs in this situation
 - Still, God did show Himself through miracles nonetheless, so that He could demonstrate to Saul and others that a real change was taking place
 - The same reason for signs and wonders in every case within Acts
- As Paul regained his sight, his first instinct and desire was to be baptized, even before he broke his three day fast
 - Here's another reminder that the first responsibility of a believer is to submit to water baptism at the first opportunity
 - If they pass up the earliest opportunity for water baptism, they enter into a state of disobedience that must be dealt with eventually
 - Having been baptized, Saul then eats and gains back his strength
 - He spends a few days with the disciples
 - And then he immediately begins to preach in the synagogues
- His preaching has two effects
 - First, it amazes the church as they try to reconcile what they see with what they had heard about Saul
 - God was already using Saul to edify the church by building their confidence that the Lord will build His church against all odds
 - Secondly, his preaching confounds the Jews in their arguments over the claims of Christianity
 - The greatest threat to the church has become its greatest defender overnight
 - But naturally, this stirs up the Jews yet again against the Church
 - And now they have a new target in Paul, formerly Saul



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 9B

Chapter 9:23 - 10:6

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- Tonight we rejoin the introductory story of Saul, which Luke has retold before rejoining the ministry of Peter
 - Last time we met, Saul had seen the Lord, been converted and began preaching to Jews in Damascus
 - His conversion confounded everyone and angered the Jews especially
 - They lost one of their strongest weapons against the early Christians
 - And he had become a powerful tool of the Church
 - But the Jews' anger turns on Paul

Acts 9:23 When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,

Acts 9:24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;

Acts 9:25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

- The phrase “many days elapsed” actually means when the days were fulfilled
 - Luke means when the time came for Paul's preaching to move beyond Damascus
 - God's sovereignty is still the center for all that happens here
 - Just as the church moved outward from Jerusalem by means of persecution, similarly Paul's ministry will move outward by persecution
 - Ironical, especially considering it was Saul's persecuting of Christians that began the first movement
 - Also, Luke skips over a three year period in that phrase
 - In Galatians, Paul tells us that a considerable period of time elapsed in between

Gal. 1:13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it;

Gal. 1:14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

Gal. 1:15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased

Gal. 1:16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,

Gal. 1:17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

- Paul left Damascus initially, and Paul says he did so because he didn't want to consult with blood and flesh
 - The obvious conclusion is that he consulted with someone other than flesh and

blood

- With the Spirit and with the Lord
- Paul describes part of his experience in Arabia in the third person

2Cor. 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

2Cor. 12:3 And I know how such a man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows —

2Cor. 12:4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

- The distinction in Paul's calling and extraordinary degree of his knowledge was a result of his special appointment by Christ
 - The reason so much Scripture came from Paul was the direct result of his unique conversion and commissioning
- In Damascus, the Jews appealed to the Roman authorities to get Paul arrested
 - As with Jesus, they made false accusations
 - And Paul says they convinced the ethnarch to arrest him

2Cor. 11:30 If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.

2Cor. 11:31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

2Cor. 11:32 In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me,

2Cor. 11:33 and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

- Notice that Paul saw this event as a shameful way for him to leave the city
 - Also, notice that Paul had disciples in Damascus
 - His preaching had resulted in converts who followed his teaching
 - Having left the city, Paul arrives at Jerusalem

Acts 9:26 When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

Acts 9:29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they

were attempting to put him to death.

Acts 9:30 But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

Acts 9:31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

- Naturally, when Paul came to the city he wanted to be associated with other Christians
 - Had he not been converted, he would have immediately reported to the Sanhedrin upon his return
 - But of course as a Christian, Paul sought a new group with which to fellowship
 - Equally naturally, the group wanted nothing to do with him
 - The last time they saw Saul was a mere three years earlier
 - They had probably heard rumors about some strange occurrence involving Saul on the road and of his blindness and supposed conversion
 - But then he disappeared for three years, leaving people to debate and argue over what really happened
 - Suddenly Saul appears three years later and says he follows Jesus and wants to fellowship
 - Seems too good to be true and probably a trick
 - So they reject him
 - In fact, if we read Paul's own account again in Galatians, we see that Paul failed to ever associate with the Jerusalem church, at least at this point in his ministry

Gal. 1:18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.

Gal. 1:19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

Gal. 1:20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)

Gal. 1:21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

Gal. 1:22 I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ;

Gal. 1:23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."

Gal. 1:24 And they were glorifying God because of me.

- Based on Barnabas' testimony, Paul is able to gain an audience with Peter and stayed with him 15 days
 - It probably required that long for Peter to become convinced of Paul's conversion
 - The last time Peter saw Paul, he was standing over the body of Stephen

- Now he was eating in Peter's house
 - Probably more than any other person, Paul understood the meaning of the words he wrote

2Cor. 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

- ◦ Paul's conversion truly created a new human being
- In addition to Peter, Paul met with James, who was the leader of the Jerusalem church
 - But notice that Paul says he saw no other disciples
 - In fact, in v.22 Paul says that no disciples in Jerusalem knew him by sight
 - They only heard that the one previously persecuting them was running about the city preaching Christ
 - Back in Acts, Luke gives us the same description
 - In v.27 Barnabas introduced Paul to the apostles
 - That would be Peter and James
 - Then Luke says Paul moved freely about the city preaching to the Jews
 - That was what the church heard about, yet they never associated directly with Paul
 - Paul's point in Galatians 1 emphasizing that the church didn't associate with him while he preached in Jerusalem was to highlight that his message came from God and not men
 - And his ministry was uniquely appointed to be independent from the ministry other men were pursuing
- But eventually, Paul's preaching upset the Jews in Jerusalem as well, and they ran him out of town as well
 - Do you notice a pattern here?
 - The Gospel has been preached to Jews, who rejected it and persecuted it
 - So God sent the message to the Samaritans as He promised
 - But the message still went out to the Jews
 - And again they rejected it
 - So now it will go outward again, even farther than before
 - To Tarsus
 - Paul mentioned this trip in Galatians 1 as well, calling it Syria and Cilicia
 - Paul stayed in Tarsus for 10 years
 - And his conversion is credited with a peaceful period for the church in Judea and Galilee and Samaria
- Having told the story of Paul's conversion, Luke is ready to return to Peter's ministry
 - Remember, it's been decades since Christ's death and resurrection, and still the

Gospel has yet to reach the Gentiles in a serious way

- It's still largely confined to the Jews and Samaritans
- And yet Paul has been called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles
 - Still, Paul is preaching to Jews exclusively so far
 - As is Peter
- But Peter has the keys to the Kingdom
 - So before the Gospel will be received by the Gospels, Peter himself must be involved in that process
 - He must turn the key to open the Gospel for the Gentiles
- So before Luke can tell his next installment in the spread of the Gospel, he must show how the barrier to the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles is breached
 - And it is breached with the holder of the keys: Peter

Acts 9:32 Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

Acts 9:33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed.

Acts 9:34 Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed." Immediately he got up.

Acts 9:35 And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

- Peter was traveling through Judea, Galilee and Samaria
 - James held down the fort in Jerusalem, but Peter was the traveling apostle preaching the Gospel throughout the lands of Israel
 - Notice that Peter is focused entirely on Jews (or near Jews in the case of the Samaritans)
 - At one point he reaches Lydda and Joppa, Jewish seaports where Peter finds believers already living
 - They were probably Jews dispersed from Jerusalem or converted by Philip's ministry
 - Today, the main Israeli airport is located at Lydda
 - And Peter does what must have been routine for the chief Apostle
 - He heals a man, this time a believer who was paralyzed
 - Peter prays, feels the Spirit's leading, and calls upon the man to stand
 - The man is healed and it brings many to believe
 - But Luke says that all who lived at Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord
 - At first glance, we might think that Peter's miracle converted an entire city
 - Reminiscent of Jonah, who interestingly also passed through Joppa
 - But the phrase "all who lived at Lydda" means all who dwell in the city

natively, in other words, the Jews of the city

- The majority of the city were Gentile, so Luke is saying that the minority Jewish population came to faith through the miracle
- This miracle is followed by a summons from Joppa

Acts 9:36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.

Acts 9:37 And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room.

Acts 9:38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, “Do not delay in coming to us.”

Acts 9:39 So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.

Acts 9:40 But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

Acts 9:41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

Acts 9:42 It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

Acts 9:43 And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.

- A well-liked believer, Tabitha (or in Greek Dorcas) dies in Joppa
 - And Joppa is about 10 miles away from Lydda
 - So the disciples call for Peter to come quickly
 - Why should Peter come quickly if the woman has already died?
 - The fact that believers thought Peter could help them in this situation tells us that the Apostles had earned a reputation of raising people from the dead
 - And the fact that they had to call an Apostle to get this miracle is also proof that such miracles weren’t gifts common to all believers (otherwise why call for Peter specifically?)
 - The woman has been prepared for burial in the traditional Jewish way
 - But when Peter arrived, many widows were standing around her body mourning and showing Peter the clothing Dorcas had made for them
 - It seemed to be a display calculated to convince Peter that Dorcas was worthy of resurrection
 - Peter then orders everyone out and prays
 - Then he calls her to arise
- Again, Peter’s miracle causes many to believe in the city of Joppa

- And the result of this success is that Peter stays for a considerable time in the city
 - Peter has ministered to Jews throughout the land
 - But because he hasn't brought the keys of the Gospel to the Gentiles specifically, they remain largely unreached
 - Even in a city like Lydda where there was a tremendous response to the Gospel, the response was limited to Jews
 - And again in Joppa, when Peter chooses to minister, it's directed at the Jewish believers
- But there are cracks in Peter's wall, as Luke suggests at the very end of the chapter
 - Peter is living at the home of a tanner, an unclean profession among Jews
 - Peter seems to be dropping some of his strict Jewish observance
 - It becomes a tiny bit of foreshadowing for the events of Chapter 10

Acts 10:1 Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,

Acts 10:2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

Acts 10:3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!"

Acts 10:4 And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

Acts 10:5 "Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;

Acts 10:6 he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea."

- Once again, Peter is to be summoned, but this time by a Gentile centurion in Caesarea
 - The centurion was a noncommissioned officer in the Roman army who commanded 100 troops
 - Something close to an army captain
 - His unit or cohort was a 600-man force called the Italian cohort
 - It's interesting that every reference to centurion in Scripture is positive, and this one is no exception
 - This centurion was a God-fearing man as it turns out
 - He gave sacrificial gifts to the Jews
 - And He prayed to the Jewish God
 - Both of these actions placed him in great danger with Rome
 - So the question is was Cornelius a believer at this point?
 - Based on the testimony of Scripture, we would say no
 - Cornelius was God-fearing and sympathetic to the Jewish people

- He had forsaken the Roman pagan gods including the Caesar himself
 - Yet he hadn't come to know of a Messiah nor seek for Him
- Cornelius represented the ultimate Gentile roadblock for Peter and any Jewish evangelist
 - Not only was Cornelius a Gentile, he was a Roman
 - The Romans were hated because they had conquered Judea
 - And not only was he a Roman, he was a Roman soldier who commanded those occupying troops
 - Cornelius seems calculated by God to present the greatest possible obstacle for Peter to overcome in preaching the Gospel to Gentiles
 - Yet he was also a man who had been prepared by the Spirit to receive the Gospel readily when the time was right
- So the scene has been set for the Gentiles to enter the church
 - And it begins with a messenger, an angel
 - Who says Cornelius' prayers were a memorial or reminder before God
 - And now God is ready to act
 - Notice, hear again how the entire process is coming as a result of God's work to move people into position
 - The angel moves the centurion to dispatch men for Peter
 - Peter doesn't intend to reach out to Gentiles, so the Lord is going to send Gentiles to Peter
 - And the details provided are so specific, that they leave Cornelius no doubt concerning its origin – it's from God

Dr. Constable tells of how modern missionaries have told stories of similar seekers after God. After they penetrated some remote tribe and preached the gospel, the natives explained how they had previously worshiped the God the missionary preached and had prayed for more light.

- Notice that the angel gives Cornelius no indication of why he needs to be called for this man Simon
 - Yet Cornelius knows to obey
 - And he ask Peter to return with him to Caesarea



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 10

Chapter 10

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- In Chapter 10, God begins to prepare Peter's heart to open the Gospel to the Gentiles
 - As we learned last week, the responsibility for the preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles rested primarily on Paul's shoulders
 - Peter's ministry was always a ministry to the Jew
 - And yet Peter's willingness to reach out to the Gentiles was critically important to the outward movement of the Gospel
 - Peter holds the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16:19)
 - So bringing Peter to an awareness of God's plan for the Gentile Church was a necessity
 - And Chapters 10-11 tell the story of how Peter's heart is opened to receiving Gentile converts

Acts 10:1 Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,

Acts 10:2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

Acts 10:3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!"

Acts 10:4 And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

Acts 10:5 "Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;

Acts 10:6 he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea."

Acts 10:7 When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants,

Acts 10:8 and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

- Cornelius as we learned last week was a Roman soldier
 - He is a devout man, but his religious devotion was directed toward the God of Israel
 - Cornelius is giving alms – religious donations – to the Jewish people
 - And he prayed to the Lord continually
 - This pattern of worshipping the true God but with a limited understanding is evidence of God's handiwork
 - Paul himself teaches about this kind of spontaneous response to God in Romans 2

Rom. 2:14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

Rom. 2:15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their

conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

- Paul is describing the way God will step into lives of His elect and bring faith, sometimes without any direct connection to human revelation
 - He describes a Gentile who knows nothing of God's expectations for Law yet still strives to live in a way that pleases God
 - Where did such a person get the desire and understanding to live in a godly way?
 - Paul says the Law of God is written on their hearts
 - Remember the promise of the New Covenant?

Jer. 31:33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people

- In other words, the way the occasional Gentile becomes a follower of the Living God is no different than the way all men and women come to that place
 - The Lord reveals Himself to our hearts by His Spirit
 - It is a supernatural process, not one dependent on human agency
 - But once the Lord makes that change, it will drive us to seek God in a new and earnest way
 - For Cornelius, it was through alms and prayer
 - And then God transitioned from the supernatural revelation of Himself to a reliance on human agency to transfer that knowledge
 - Always under the guidance of the Holy Spirit
 - For us today, the process is still the same
 - Our faith moment is a supernatural work of God to write the Law upon our hearts
 - But then God moves us forward through the help of others who have gone before us in this process
 - Recent experience with Jewish convert
 - When the time was right, the Lord sent an angel to Cornelius so that he would come to know Peter and understand and receive the full testimony of the Gospel
 - He's told to find Simon, not Peter
 - Probably because of Cornelius' affinity for Jews and his identification of their God with His people
 - And based on the angel's instructions, Cornelius moves quickly to comply

Acts 10:9 On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

Acts 10:10 But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;

Acts 10:11 and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,

Acts 10:12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

Acts 10:13 A voice came to him, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!”

Acts 10:14 But Peter said, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.”

Acts 10:15 Again a voice came to him a second time, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.”

Acts 10:16 This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

- The trip from Caesarea was a two day walk
 - On the second day at noon (sixth hour) Peter goes to the rooftop to pray
 - The rooftop was a place of privacy
 - While he was praying, the text says he became hungry
 - The sentence construction in Greek indicates he was extremely hungry
 - God appears to have created this strong sensation of hunger in Peter
 - With the power suggestion, God then leads Peter into a trance
 - From Heaven a large sail or sheet (literally, linen cloth) held up by four corners begins to descend to earth
 - Inside the sheet are all kinds of four-footed animals and other creatures
 - Notably, the sheet held many types of animals that were not lawful for Jews to eat according to the Mosaic Law
 - Peter felt great hunger, but not enough to eat something he had been taught and trained never to eat
 - So Peter responds indignantly
 - He begins, “No, Lord...”
 - Those two words should never appear together in that order
 - They are self-contradictory
 - Peter is behaving in a pattern similar to days past
 - When he heard that Jesus would die, he declared, God forbid it Lord
 - He then says he has never eaten anything that wasn’t kosher and killed properly
 - The Jewish dietary laws require that only certain kinds of animals be eaten
 - And even those must be killed in a specific way that removes the blood
 - The animal can’t be killed in the common way, which was strangling –

or any method that left the blood in the body

- God's response to Peter is that Peter shouldn't consider something unclean if God has cleansed it
 - And in the case of the dietary restrictions of the Law, they were no longer in effect because the Law no longer held authority over those who had received the Messiah
 - Furthermore, God is teaching a principle to Peter
 - We follow God where God goes
 - And as God changes His expectations and purposes, we are obliged to change with Him
 - The dietary rules came at a point in time for a purpose
 - Once that purpose has been met, then God will remove those restrictions
 - This was Paul's essential argument in Galatians

Gal. 3:17 What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

Gal. 3:18 For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Gal. 3:19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

Gal. 3:20 Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.

Gal. 3:21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.

Gal. 3:22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Gal. 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Gal. 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

Gal. 3:25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

- The ultimate purpose in this message to Peter was to create a willingness in him to preach the Gospel to Gentiles
 - The previously unclean nations of pagans were about to become children of God by faith
- Despite the clear message, Peter resists
 - The whole conversation is repeated twice more
 - Can you imagine denying God's command in a personal conversation?
 - One commentator suggested that Peter may have heard Jesus' voice in

this conversation and probably recognized it from memory

- If so, I wonder if Peter had thoughts of a previous conversation of threes?
 - Jesus asks Peter if he loved the Lord three times
 - Which followed Peter's denial of the Lord three times
 - Which itself followed his refusal to believe he could ever forsake the Lord
- Peter has a history of stubbornness when it comes to listening to the Lord
 - Nevertheless, the Lord has made his point and Peter didn't miss it

Acts 10:17 Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate; **Acts 10:18** and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there.

Acts 10:19 While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you.

Acts 10:20 "But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself."

Acts 10:21 Peter went down to the men and said, "Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?"

Acts 10:22 They said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you."

Acts 10:23 So he invited them in and gave them lodging.

And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

- Peter is troubled and puzzled by what he received in the vision
 - While still thinking about it, the men from Cornelius arrive
 - The fact that these two events are so closely associated in time is further evidence that the message Peter received is related to the arrival of these men
 - In fact, Peter gets a second vision from God
 - The Spirit tells Peter that these men are looking for him and he must go down immediately and follow them
 - Since these were Roman soldiers asking for Peter, his host may have tried to hide Peter or deny he was in the house
 - So Peter himself was directed to greet the men
 - Furthermore, the Spirit has sent these men to Peter, so don't fear their intentions
 - Go with them without concerns
- And you have to love the dedication to the mission of the Roman soldiers

- They deliver the precise message Cornelius gave them
- Peter receives them, and gives them lodging
 - They had arrived at the end of a second day's walk, and it was too far to set out on a trip to Caesarea until morning
 - They left the next morning, and six other Christians in Joppa accompanied Peter
 - We learn the number in Acts 11
 - A total of seven Jews witnessed the first Gentile conversion
- This point in the book of Acts is the turning point for Gentiles
 - Here the man with the keys to the Kingdom is about to turn the key for the sake of Gentiles
 - Beginning with this centurion
 - And to show how monumental this moment is for the Church, consider what it took to get here:
 - Peter, brought to Joppa through a series of circumstances
 - An angel sent to Cornelius, a delegation coming to Peter's home, a voice from Heaven to Peter, and the Holy Spirit coaching Peter to respond

Acts 10:24 On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Acts 10:25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him.

Acts 10:26 But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man."

Acts 10:27 As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled.

Acts 10:28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

Acts 10:29 "That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me."

- Cornelius' first reaction is to worship the one sent to him
 - This is understandable
 - The centurion received his instructions from an angel and must have been waiting for this encounter with tremendous anticipation
 - But Peter corrects him and reminds Cornelius that Peter's presence in his home is a risk for Peter
 - Because he's violating the religious rules of the Jewish people
 - And Peter says he came without objection, so he's done his part
 - So let's get on with this
 - The tone and sense of Peter's words suggest he's not comfortable and

he's here somewhat reluctantly

- Despite his words to the contrary
- The Centurion responds...

Acts 10:30 Cornelius said, “Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments,

Acts 10:31 and he said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.

Acts 10:32 ‘Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.’

Acts 10:33 “So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

- By his own words, Cornelius describes how the Lord spoke to him and instructed him to find Peter
 - And he invites Peter to present the truth Cornelius has missed up to this point
 - He knew of God and he knew that the God of Israel was the only true God
 - But he lacked the fulfillment of what he sought
 - There was a piece missing, and he was ready for that piece
 - So Peter responds with another version of his Pentecost and Sanhedrin speeches

Acts 10:34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,

Acts 10:35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

Acts 10:36 “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) —

Acts 10:37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.

Acts 10:38 “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Acts 10:39 “We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.

Acts 10:40 “God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible,

Acts 10:41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

Acts 10:42 “And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and

the dead.

Acts 10:43 “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

- Peter begins reminding himself of what he’s always known
 - The language is Greek, but the phrase is a direct translation of the Hebrew in Deuteronomy

Deut. 10:17 “For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.

- On the contrary, Peter affirms that God welcomes anyone who fears Him (has faith) and accomplishes works of righteousness (gives evidence of faith)
 - Then Peter gives the presentation of the Gospel to this Gentile
 - In his delivery of this message of hope, Peter uses his keys to open the Kingdom to the Gentiles according to God’s purpose and leading

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

Acts 10:45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

Acts 10:46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,

Acts 10:47 “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?”

Acts 10:48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

- Here’s the pattern we expected to see as a new category of believers receive the Gospel
 - Even as Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit falls upon all who were listening
 - Notice that the effect extends beyond the Gentiles
 - Even those who were previously indwelt by the Spirit are responding in this moment
 - This fact means that the response is not a response of new faith
 - It is something altogether different
 - It is a special manifestation added to this moment by the Holy Spirit to mark the occasion in a unique way
 - The Jews understand the meaning of these signs
 - It’s been seen twice beforehand
 - First at Pentecost and then with the Samaritans

- But now with Gentiles?
 - It's something no Jew ever imagined would happen
- And the moment comes complete with all the signs and wonders we've come to expect when the kingdom arrives for a new category of believers
 - Finally, the Jewish observers have no choice but to accept what they've seen
 - And they agree they can't refuse baptism
- This conversation at the end is important in the way it keeps baptism in its proper role
 - Cornelius and his household were made children of God by faith in the Gospel
 - And the arrival of the Holy Spirit gave proof of their acceptance by God
 - At that point, the Jewish observers could only acknowledge what was obvious
 - Then they agreed that since these Gentiles were believers, therefore they must be baptized
 - Their own reason for not withholding baptism was that they had already received the Holy Spirit
 - Water baptism pictures the baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - So if the Holy Spirit had arrived, then water baptism was the natural next step
 - But we see that baptism didn't make them believers
 - It was a recognition of their faith
 - But it was important (Peter ordered...) and it was the means by which Cornelius joined into the Church and into fellowship with believers

Acts 11

- Having seen the miracle of God opening the hearts of Gentiles to receive the Gospel, we turn to chapter 11 to see the expected result
 - The Jewish people rejoicing in the fact that Gentiles are also turning to the Lord
 - Hardly
 - Rather, they admonish Peter for daring to cross the line separating Jews and Gentiles

[Acts 11:1](#) Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

[Acts 11:2](#) And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him,

[Acts 11:3](#) saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

- After Cornelius' household received the Gospel, the news spread in Judea among the church
 - The spread of this news was as swift as it was stunning
 - But notice what part of the news interests the Jewish believers the most
 - It was not the miracle of the Gentiles receiving the grace of God
 - It was the fact that Peter went to them and ate with them
 - The Jewish point of view concerning the Gentile was so fixed by teaching and custom that they overlook the miracle of God in bringing them to faith
 - And instead they focus on Peter's audacity in daring to cross the uncrossable line
 - There was a reasonable case to be made against Peter, in this case, in that his actions were likely to provoke the anger of the unbelieving Jews
 - Perhaps Peter's church brethren were concerned that Peter's actions would bring even more persecution upon the church

- Regardless, their criticism ignored the obvious conclusion that God ordained this outcome, so Peter's actions were not only warranted but necessary
- In fact, Peter's actions were according to the direction of the Spirit
 - So his success in persuading Cornelius concerning the Gospel should have been proof in itself to the brethren that this was a work ordained by God
 - Nevertheless, the apostles and brethren were critical of Peter
 - We should take note that even the Apostles were critical
 - But the principle criticism came from the Party of the Circumcision
 - Paul also refers to the existence and negative influence of this faction within the early church in Gal 2

[Gal. 2:11](#) ¶ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

[Gal. 2:12](#) For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

[Gal. 2:13](#) The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

- Sadly it seems the early church was burdened by divisions and false teaching as it is today
 - The false teaching among the early Jewish believers centered around practice of the Law by a believer
 - The party of the circumcision was given that name because they advocated for the necessity for the church to remain Jewish and to adhere to all Jewish custom and law
 - The challenge to Peter here begins a years-long dispute in the church
- It's also worth noting that the church doesn't seem hesitant to challenge Peter's decision here
 - This would argue against the view that Peter was a "pope" with the kind of absolute authority assigned to the popes of today

- The Church has never had a “pope” or any other single spiritual leader apart from Christ
- Such offices are man-made and ultimately destructive
- Watching this seen, we can certainly see better why it required such a monumental effort on God’s part to move Peter toward Cornelius
 - And this must have been an interesting moment for Peter
 - He was just as reluctant to travel to Cornelius or any Gentile
 - Only after God took extraordinary measures to ensure it happened did Peter cross the line
 - Now he finds himself called to account for doing the very thing he was opposed to doing in the first place
 - Peter’s only recourse is to describe the events exactly as they happened

[Acts 11:4](#) But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying,

[Acts 11:5](#) “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me,

[Acts 11:6](#) and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air.

[Acts 11:7](#) “I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’

[Acts 11:8](#) “But I said, ‘By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

[Acts 11:9](#) “But a voice from heaven answered a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.’

[Acts 11:10](#) “This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.

[Acts 11:11](#) “And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea.

[Acts 11:12](#) “The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man’s house.

[Acts 11:13](#) “And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here;

[Acts 11:14](#) and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’

[Acts 11:15](#) “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.

[Acts 11:16](#) “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

[Acts 11:17](#) "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

- Peter wanted to walk his critics through his experience
 - His hope is they will conclude, as Peter did, that taking the Gospel to Cornelius was the proper thing to do
 - The story follows exactly as we saw it unfold in chapter 10, with the added detail that six brothers accompanied Peter to see Cornelius
 - Peter's story climaxes with his retelling of the moment the Holy Spirit descends upon the Gentiles
 - Peter reminds his audience that this experience mirrors their own
 - His point, of course, is that the arrival of the Holy Spirit is proof of the work of God in salvation
- Paul echoes this same thinking in Romans, when he says

[Rom. 8:14](#) For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are **sons of God**.

- The fundamental definition of a Christian is anyone indwelt by God's Spirit
 - For this is the way one becomes a Christian
 - And it is not an experience shared with unbelievers
- Secondly, Peter draws his listeners' attention to Jesus' own words concerning the meaning of the Spirit's arrival
 - Jesus said the arrival (or baptism) of the Holy Spirit would be an expected experience for all who follow Him
 - Therefore, the arrival of the Spirit upon Gentiles confirms that they have become followers of Jesus just the same
- Finally, Peter makes his conclusion in verse 17
 - If they received the same gift (the Spirit) from the same Giver (God) for the same reason (after believing in Jesus), then how could Peter stand in the way?

- Notice also that Peter recognizes the unique significance of the Holy Spirit's arrival upon these believers
 - Peter says that Cornelius' experience was similar to the one the Apostles had "at the beginning"
 - He is referring to Pentecost
 - His point is that the Pentecost experience has not been continuous
 - It happened only on rare occasions
 - And each occasion was notable because the Spirit gave such clear signs in His work
 - Today, Peter declares that this sign was extended to Gentiles
 - And there can be no other conclusion drawn from the events

[Acts 11:18](#) When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

- The crowd listening to Peter and they acknowledge the obvious, though remarkable, news
 - That God was granting repentance to the Gentiles also
 - The repentance that leads to life
 - Their choice of words here is important
 - They recognize first this is a work of God
 - This opening for the Gentiles was made possible because God permitted it
 - Secondly, they imply that without God's willingness to grant repentance, the Gentiles would never have come to faith
 - Nor would the Jewish Christians, for that matter
 - Paul again echoes this high view of God's sovereignty in salvation

[2Cor. 7:8](#) For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it — for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while —

[2Cor. 7:9](#) I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.

[2Cor. 7:10](#) For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

- Paul distinguishes between two types of sorrow
 - Worldly sorrow and godly sorrow
 - The worldly kind is the kind we are all familiar with
 - It is the regret of making a mistake
 - But the regret is self-centered
 - We regret the consequences of our actions
 - We may be truly sorry, but the locus of our concern is within ourselves
 - The Bible talks at times of this kind of worldly sorrow
 - Probably the best example is Esau, as the writer of Hebrews explains

[Heb. 12:16](#) that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

[Heb. 12:17](#) For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

- Esau felt great sorrow over his mistake of selling his birthright
 - He even cried over the mistake and sought his father's forgiveness
 - But his sorrow was entirely self-centered
 - He regretted losing the inheritance and regretted disappointing his earthly father
- Interestingly, the writer of Hebrews says despite his crying fit, Esau found no place for repentance

- Notice that while Esau was displaying one kind of sorrow, he was denied a different kind of sorrow
- Obviously, the two type of sorrow are independent of one another
 - It's possible to feel sorry without experiencing repentance, as Esau proves
- The language in Hebrews makes clear that the source of repentance is outside the person
 - Esau was "rejected"
 - By whom we might ask?
 - And he "found no place for repentance"
 - This implies that Esau never arrived at godly sorrow
 - Though he "sought it"
 - The only conclusion we can make is that repentance is a spiritual sorrow that only arrives when it is granted or permitted by God
- Back to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Paul says that in v.7:9 that the Corinthians were made sorrowful by Paul's previous letter
 - But Paul was more interested in the way his letter led them to a different kind of sorrow
 - Paul's admonishment made them feel badly, but it also produced a sorrow that led to repentance (i.e., godly sorrow)
 - And then Paul adds in v.10 that this godly sorrow came as a result of the "will of God"
 - This confirms what we read in the letter to the Hebrews
 - Godly sorrow or repentance is a spiritual regret that comes only when the will God permits it
 - And to sum up this principle, Paul says in v.11 that the worldly sorrow leads only to temporary regret that is powerless to effect spiritual change
 - But godly sorrow produces repentance, which is the precursor to salvation itself

- I often characterize the difference between these two types of repentance or sorrow with the terms big “R” and little “r.”
 - Repentance with a little “r” is the feeling of sorrow or regret we experience when we are convicted over our sins
 - This kind of sorrow is common to both Christians and non-Christians alike
 - It’s the normal reaction when we bear the consequences of our sin
 - Repentance with a big “R” is the unique spiritual awakening that the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the heart of a person as a preparation step to receiving faith
 - This kind of godly sorrow isn’t the same feeling as world sorrow
 - It isn’t fixed on a certain behavior or mistake
 - It creates a more profound sense of shame or regret
 - It is long-lasting
 - It is an awakening to a life of sin apart from God
 - It can only come if and when God grants it, because it finds its origins in a work of God in the heart
- So in Acts 11:18, the audience responds to Peter’s testimony with the correct conclusion
 - The response of Cornelius was prima facie evidence that the Spirit of God had “granted” the Gentiles the repentance that leads to eternal life
 - They confirmed that the kingdom of God had been extended to the Gentiles
 - And the proof of this change was the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the speaking in tongues
 - Once again demonstrating that this unique display of the Spirit was reserved for moments when grace became available to a new group of humanity

[Acts 11:19](#) ¶ So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.

[Acts 11:20](#) But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

[Acts 11:21](#) And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

[Acts 11:22](#) The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.

[Acts 11:23](#) Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;

[Acts 11:24](#) for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.

- Before moving forward with the story of Peter, Luke adds another important detail in the outward movement of the church
 - Some believe this narrative runs parallel to the events of Acts 8-10
 - But I believe Luke is describing events that occur both before and after and as a result of the events of chapter 11
 - Specifically, Luke backs up chronologically briefly in mentioning the persecution of Stephen and the evangelism that followed
 - That persecution caused the outward movement of the Gospel, and we discussed earlier
 - But it was not a uniform movement
 - Most of the disciples were only interested in preaching the Gospel to Jews in the Diaspora
 - But later, after Peter's experience with Cornelius, other disciples went out specifically seeking Gentile converts
 - Their ministry was to the Gentiles
 - This willingness to engage Gentiles was the result of Peter's testimony
 - And their success in finding converts was only possible because Peter had opened the kingdom for the Gentiles in chapter 10
 - Notably, they are preaching "Lord Jesus"

- Among the Jews they preached “the Christ”
- But among Gentiles they taught about the “Lord”
 - The distinction reflects the cultural and religious differences between pagan Gentiles and the god-fearing Jews
 - The Jews knew of the promises of a Messiah, the Christ of God
 - So they received the message that this Christ had arrived in the Person of Jesus
 - The Gentiles knew nothing of the promised Messiah, so preaching a “christ” would have meant nothing to them
 - But they certainly new of worship a lord, as they were required to do in worshipping the Caesar who was their lord
 - Now, they were taught of a greater Lord Who required their worship and offered eternal life
- As a result of this movement, the church in Jerusalem is still skeptical of this response and wants to verify it for themselves
 - So they send our Barnabas, a devout and learned Jew
 - Remember Barnabas was the friend of Saul who introduced him to the church in Jerusalem following Saul’s conversion
 - Since that early encounter, Saul has since returned to his home in Tarsus
 - While Barnabas has remained in Jerusalem in the church
 - Now Barnabas moves outward himself to investigate the reports from Antioch
- Antioch was an important city in its day
 - It was the third largest city in the Roman empire, after Rome and Alexandria
 - It was located about 15 miles inland from the Med sea in modern-day Syria

- About 300 miles north of Jerusalem
- It contained upward of 800,000 citizens
 - About 115,000 were Jews
 - With many Gentile proselytes
- Like many Roman cities, it was also notorious as a city of pleasure-seekers
 - Roman satirists claimed that the city was so corrupt, that its sewage contaminated Rome, which was 1,300 miles away
- It's in this city that the Gentile church first gains a foothold
 - Importantly, Antioch was also near Barnabas' home on the island of Cyprus
 - Which might explain why he was chosen to go to Antioch
 - Secondly, Antioch was only 90 miles from Tarsus, where Saul was living at the time
- When Barnabas arrives, he finds a growing, vibrant, genuine Gentile church
 - And begins a man under the influence of the Spirit, Barnabas receives them as brothers and encourages them
 - But he also must have wondered how the church would begin to disciple and encourage this budding group of believers
 - They lacked the knowledge of the Scriptures and they were heavily influenced by pagan practices
 - Who would care for this congregation so far geographically and culturally from the influence Jerusalem?
 - Barnabas knew where to find the answer

[Acts 11:25](#) And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul;
[Acts 11:26](#) and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

- As God would have it, the first Gentile church is founded near the Apostle appointed to the Gentiles: Saul
 - And Barnabas must have recognized, by the Spirit, that Saul was the right man for this job
 - Perhaps Saul had confessed to Barnabas that he felt called in that way
 - More likely, Barnabas simply recognized an obvious opportunity based on Saul's close proximity to the new church in Antioch
 - Nevertheless, we know that God has orchestrated these events so that when the keys to the kingdom have been extended to Gentiles, Saul would be in the proper position to begin his ministry
 - Remember, it's been about nine years since Saul's conversion, yet he hasn't yet begun his ministry to the Gentiles in earnest
 - His ministry opportunity awaited Peter's opening of the kingdom for that group
 - Now that barrier has been removed, and so circumstances will lead Saul into ministry in Antioch first
 - And in this place, the term "Christian" is established
 - The name is significant in that it reflects the establishment of a new, distinct religious party or affiliation
 - It was distinct from pagan Gentile and religious Jew
 - By adopting a new name, the Church recognized the fact that the family of God had changed and separated itself spiritually from either of the previous two distinctions
 - Though there were Gentiles in the Church and Jews in the Church, the Church was neither
 - It was an entirely new concept, created by God, and called into existence for a time and purpose
 - We are "Christians" by faith, regardless of our heritage beforehand

[Gal. 3:28](#) There is **neither** Jew nor **Greek**, there is **neither** slave nor free man, there is **neither** male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- Finally, Luke relates an interesting encounter

[Acts 11:27](#) Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

[Acts 11:28](#) One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.

[Acts 11:29](#) And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.

[Acts 11:30](#) And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

- Prophets come “down” from Jerusalem to Antioch
 - They come to deliver a message from God
 - The church has prophets during this period because the canon of Scripture was not yet complete
 - Until John’s letter of Revelation, the Spirit’s work of revealing God’s word is not finished, so prophets are still available to bring God’s word in this way
 - The prophets tell of a coming famine in the world, and the famine would bring destitution to the brethren in Judea and Jerusalem particularly
 - In a time of famine, and in an age without welfare, people had to depend on family and tribes to get through the tough times
 - But the church in Jerusalem, which was largely Jewish, would have been disowned by their Jewish families
 - So a famine would have been particularly devastating to believing Jews in that city
 - Luke says the Spirit sent these prophets to the church in Antioch to inform them of the need to send support to the church in Jerusalem during this time of famine
- Since we know the Lord is at work in producing these events, we must ask the question why does He do this?
 - God is bringing about circumstances to teach the Gentile church of their responsibility to honor and support their Jewish brethren in keeping with Israel’s pre-eminent role in God’s plan of salvation
 - Secondly, this act of goodwill helps cement the Jews acceptance of the new Gentile church in the family of God

Acts 12

- In chapter 12 we move to the next phase of persecution among the early Christians
 - Earlier in the book we found the church reaching out to the Jews
 - While being persecuted by the Jewish authorities
 - Now we have the church actively reaching out to Gentiles
 - And predictably, a new antagonist rises up from among the Gentile authorities
 - Herod Agrippa I was content to leave this new Jewish movement alone so long as it involved only the Jews
 - But as it begins to attract the interest and response of the Gentiles in the Roman empire, it now poses a threat to him

[Acts 12:1](#) ¶ Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.

[Acts 12:2](#) And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

[Acts 12:3](#) When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

[Acts 12:4](#) When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

[Acts 12:5](#) So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

- The timing for the events of Chapter 12 are tied to the events at the end of chapter 11
 - Luke records at the end of 11 that Saul and Barnabas are sent to the elders of Jerusalem with the financial gift for the church in the city
 - This is happening at the time of the great famine that impacted the entire world
 - So Saul and Barnabas may have been in town during this time or have just left
 - Herod lays hands on some of the church
 - The phrase in Greek really means he attacked or targeted

- And unlike the general persecution by the Jewish authorities, Herod is going after a selective group within the church
 - The leadership of the church
- The earlier Jewish persecution drove many believers out of the city but the Apostles themselves remained in the city
 - But Herod goes after the leaders
- A little background on Herod would probably be helpful at this point
 - Herod Antipas was the grandson of Herod the Great
 - Herod the Great was the descendant of Edomites who was made King over Judea by the Roman Senate
 - He was born in 11 B.C.
 - His father, Aristobulus, was murdered by his grandfather, Herod the Great, in 7 B.C.
 - Because Herod the Great was suspicious that his son would try to take his throne
 - After having his father killed, Herod the Great sent the four-year old Agrippa to Rome for an education
 - While Agrippa was in Rome, he became close friends with the grand nephew of the emperor Tiberius
 - That grand nephew was a boy named Gaius, who later took the name Caligula after he became emperor in AD 37
 - At that time, he appointed Agrippa as tetrarch of the present day Golan Heights, Southern Syria
 - Later he gave Agrippa the title King of the Jews and the territories of Galilee and Perea
 - Finally, Caligula was succeeded by Claudius, who gave Herod Agrippa Judea and Samaria
 - As king of Israel, Herod Agrippa ruled for four more years until his death in AD 44 at the age of 55
 - His son Agrippa II appears later in Acts in the story Paul

- First, Herod moves against James and puts him to death
 - This isn't James, the half-brother of Jesus who wrote the letter of James
 - This is James the Apostle
 - The phrase "with a sword" probably means a legal execution by beheading
 - Up until now, there have been martyrs in the church, but none of the leaders have been killed
 - Now we have the first of the twelve Apostles dying for their faith
 - James won't be the last of course
 - Interestingly, James and John both made a bold request of Jesus in Mark 10:39

[Mark 10:36](#) And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

[Mark 10:37](#) They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."

[Mark 10:38](#) But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

[Mark 10:39](#) They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized."

- Jesus asked the two Apostles if they could follow in Jesus' footsteps
 - It's doubtful they fully understood what He was saying
 - Jesus asked if they could die a martyrs death as He would
 - Both said they could
 - So Jesus said they would
 - James dies here
 - John dies in captivity on Patmos
 - James is the first to experience martyrdom, to sit on the left of Jesus
 - John is called to live out his life the longest in captivity, alone, and will sit on Jesus' right

- Every other Apostle dies in between
- Herod and his family of Kings were not Jews
 - They were semites descended from Esau, not Jacob
 - They were made Kings of Israel by Roman decree and might, not by Jewish law or acceptance by the people
 - But they forever retained a kind of insecurity complex among the Jewish people
 - They wanted to be accepted as the Jewish King by the people
 - So when Herod sees how much it pleased the Jews that he killed James, it caused him to go further
 - He found Peter and took him to prison as well
 - And certainly, Peter would have been quickly executed as well, but God ensured that circumstances would come to Peter's aid
 - It was the week of Unleavened Bread, the 8-day period that includes the day of Passover
 - Herod couldn't perform the execution of Peter during this time until the day of Passover itself
 - He planned to present Peter to the people as Pilate did for Jesus
 - Herod assumed the crowd would call for Peter to be crucified like Jesus was
- So for the third time Peter sits in a prison for his faith waiting for his execution
 - And Herod takes no chances that Peter would be freed by his followers
 - So he assigns four squads to guard Peter day and night
 - A squad was four soldiers
 - So we have 16 soldiers standing guard in 6-hour shifts
 - This was very rare and likely reserved for very dangerous characters

- Remember that the last time Peter was in prison, he was free miraculously
 - So in this delay, the church has opportunity to pray for Peter's release
- And what follows is so detailed and so comical at times that it immediately strikes us as both authentic and genuinely believable
 - We can even see ourselves reacting to the supernatural work of God in much the same way

[Acts 12:6](#) ¶ On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.

[Acts 12:7](#) And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.

[Acts 12:8](#) And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

[Acts 12:9](#) And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

[Acts 12:10](#) When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

[Acts 12:11](#) When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

[Acts 12:12](#) And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

[Acts 12:13](#) When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.

[Acts 12:14](#) When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

[Acts 12:15](#) They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."

[Acts 12:16](#) But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.

[Acts 12:17](#) But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

- Before we look at that account, take note of Luke's careful contrast of Peter and James
 - Both were leaders of the church in that day

- When Herod begins to persecute the church, both men become targets
- James is taken and almost immediately meets his end
 - It probably happened so fast, the church didn't know how to react
- And then Peter is taken, but God clearly prevent Herod from succeeding in killing Peter
- Passages like this go a long way to correcting any simplex notions we may harbor for how God may be predisposed to conduct our lives or answer our prayers for deliverance
 - No doubt there were prayers for James as well
 - No doubt James hoped for a miracle release
 - None came
 - Similarly, no doubt Peter didn't believe himself any more worthy of rescue than James had been
 - The answer is simple
 - We all die...sooner or later
 - Therefore, the day of our death, having been appointed by God for His own purposes, cannot be a measure of God's pleasure
 - Not only do the good die young, they also die old too (and the same is true for the bad)
- So God's decisions aren't necessarily a reflection of our "goodness" or of His displeasure
 - In this case, He determined that James' work was finished
 - But He didn't want to leave the church in Jerusalem without any leader in the city
 - So He spares Peter for now
 - But we know in the end Peter will meet an even worse fate
 - James' fate turns out to be the more merciful

- Looking at the passage, let's highlight a few details of this humorous account
 - First, notice Peter's disposition
 - He's sleeping
 - This is likely his last night alive and he would have known or at least suspected as much
 - Perhaps Peter understood what Jesus meant when He told Peter:

[John 21:18](#) "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go."

[John 21:19](#) Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"

- On the hand, Peter has a habit of sleeping when he should be praying (remember the garden)
- The squad of guards assigned to Peter included two chained to him and two more guarding the door of the cell
 - Then an angel appeared and lit the room, and commanded Peter to walk out
 - The chains fell from his wrists
 - The angel commands Peter to dress
 - Apparently, Peter wasn't even thinking clearly enough in the moment to recognize he needed to dress
 - And then the angel escorts him out of the prison
 - The main gate opens by itself
 - And all the while the various guards either sleep through it all or are prevented from seeing it happening
 - Once Peter was free, the angel departs
 - Reminds us of Lot being escorted from Sodom
 - The whole time Peter is thinking this is just a dream or vision

- I've had dreams I thought were so real that I didn't realize they were dreams until I awoke
 - I can't imagine having a dream but then finding out it was actually reality
- Once released, Peter comes to his senses and realizes that his escape isn't assured yet
 - The Romans will come looking for him by daybreak
 - So Peter looks for the closest home with Christians gathered
 - His desire is to pass information back to the other Apostles that he is no longer in prison
 - He goes to the home of John Mark
 - John is the Jewish name, Mark is the Greek name
 - John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas and he accompanied both Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey
 - When Paul and Barnabas split, John Mark went with Barnabas
 - He later rejoined Paul and also traveled with Peter
 - He wrote the Gospel of Mark
 - He was also Peter's interpreter when Peter traveled to Rome
 - Just as we say that Luke's gospel was heavily influenced by his traveling companion, Paul
 - Similarly, Mark's Gospel was Peter's transcribed Gospel
 - Church tradition says Mark founded the church in Alexandria, Egypt
- Then we see the most amusing part of the story
 - And it's so true to life in that we can see and feel the actors' excitement and doubt
 - Rhonda the servant comes to the door

- She's so excited at seeing Peter, she leaves him there to tell the others
 - Classic sitcom fodder
- The rest of the brethren are equally surprised and don't believe her at first
 - They say it must be an angel because Jewish belief at the time held that every person had a guardian angel
 - And that the angel resembled the person
 - So they assume she saw Peter's angel rather than Peter himself
 - I wonder which view requires more faith: that Rhonda really saw Peter or an angel that looked like Peter?
 - The fact that so many are gathered here and the fact that Peter knew to expect people here suggests it was a regular gathering place for the church
 - John Mark's mother must have been wealthy
- This scene also reveals that the church had moved into the house church phase
 - The church itself had grown much larger than one meeting place could accommodate
 - Plus persecution had driven the church to become more careful about it's activities in public
 - So it had changed to meeting in smaller groups in houses throughout the city
 - Peter as the leader would have known where these churches existed and probably visited them all regularly
- Peter has no intention of staying here and endangering the church, so he tells them simply to spread the news
 - And in particular, tell James (the half-brother)
 - James will now rise to a prominent position in the Jerusalem church after Peter's departure from the city

- With that, Peter leaves Jerusalem
- Scripture doesn't give us a clear understanding of where Peter went after this
 - Perhaps Luke kept that information to himself to protect those who helped Peter escape
 - Many of them might have still been alive when Luke wrote his account
 - Early church fathers wrote that Peter left Judea altogether and ministered to churches in the Diaspora
 - Paul says Peter had an itinerant ministry in 1Cor 9:5
 - And he spent time in Corinth according to Gal 2 and Antioch and Asia Minor according to 1 Peter 5:13
 - At one point he returned to Jerusalem at least once more for the Jerusalem council, which we'll study in chapter 15
- This account will end the story of Peter for the most part and with him the first part of the book of Acts
- Herod Agrippa discovers the escape

[Acts 12:18](#) ¶ Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter.

[Acts 12:19](#) When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

- Luke in typical understatement says there was no small disturbance at Peter's disappearance
 - Herod searches the city and then examines the guards
 - Examine means questions like in a trial, probably courtmartialed
 - He can only conclude they conspired to set Peter free
 - They were executed for their apparent failure
 - After Passover, Herod goes to his headquarters in Caesarea which would have been his procedure

[Acts 12:20](#) ¶ Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country.

[Acts 12:21](#) On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them.

[Acts 12:22](#) The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"

[Acts 12:23](#) And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

[Acts 12:24](#) ¶ But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

[Acts 12:25](#) ¶ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

- An interesting footnote on Herod's life
 - A political dispute broke out between Herod and his subjects in the Phoenician city states of Tyre and Sidon
 - These city states received their produce from the Galilee, which was also under Herod's authority
 - So in the course of his dispute with these cities, he restricted the food supply from Galilee as retribution
 - In response, they won over or bribed his chambermaid, the servant responsible for Herod's bedroom, to help them in their cause
 - This means the servant was probably lobbying on behalf of these cities for Herod to change his policy over restricting the food
- Then we hear of Herod's supernatural death
 - It happens during an address begin delivered to representatives from the cities
 - Josephus gives a much more detailed explanation of what happened on that day
 - The address Herod gives is an oration, which in the Greek means a long, scolding speech directed at the people of Tyre and Sidon
 - He's dressed in his finest apparel and is seated in his throne
 - The response of the people is to declare this is the voice of a god and not a man

- Whether they were saying this in sincerity or merely out of obligation doesn't matter

- What matters is how it enflamed Herod's pride and vanity

Clad in a garment woven completely of silver so that its texture was indeed wondrous, when he entered the theater at daybreak, there the silver illuminated by the touch of the first rays of the sun was wondrously radiant, and by its glitter inspired fear and awe in those who gazed intently upon it. Straightaway his followers raised their voices from various directions, addressing him as god."

-Josephus

- As he was speaking, God strikes Herod down for his pride in accepting the praise of the people as god
- Josephus says:

The king was struck with a deadly malady after being hailed divine. He was smitten one day and died five days later, and the rotting of his flesh produced worms."

- Whatever intestinal disorder killed Herod, it could have been something common in that day
 - But the point is the same: God would not have Herod's reign last a day longer
 - And his death opens the door for Peter to return to Jerusalem when the council of Jerusalem meets in a chapter 15
 - And to mark another division in his book, Luke inserts his characteristic line
 - The word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied
 - Not the church per se
 - But the word of God
 - The instrument of all God's work
- And curiously, the chapter ends as it began
 - Paul and Barnabas on the road again, this time leaving Jerusalem
 - Their arrival gave Luke the chance to move the story's focus back to Peter for a while
 - Their departure brings our attention back to Saul

Acts 13

- We begin the second half of Acts with Luke's focus moving to the Gentile movement begun earlier
 - We remember that the first Gentile church was established in Antioch under the guidance of Barnabas
 - Soon thereafter Barnabas recruited his friend Saul in Tarsus
 - Now we see what came next

[Acts 13:1](#) ¶ Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

[Acts 13:2](#) While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

[Acts 13:3](#) Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

[Acts 13:4](#) ¶ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

- The leadership in this early church consisted of five men, some prophets and some teachers
 - Based on the grammatical structure of this verse, the list is divided into a group of three and a group of two
 - The first three names are the prophets and the last two are the teachers
 - This division simply reflects the way these men were called to minister in this church at least to this point
 - Notice Barnabas is a prophet and Saul is a teacher
 - Barnabas was probably the leader
 - And based on the order of the names, Saul may be considered the least of the five
 - The other three men are diverse
 - A dark skinned man from Africa
 - A Roman named Luke

- And a man of privilege who was raised in Herod's court
- The unifying power of the Gospel is immediately evident in how so many different men were called together into the faith
 - This is an early indication of how thoroughly the Gospel would penetrate the Gentile world
- This group was in the midst of ministering to the church when the Spirit made a call to two of the leaders
 - The Greek for ministering is a unique word used only two other times in the NT
 - It means conducting a worship activity or service
 - They were actively serving the needs of this group when they were called to a new mission
 - Notice that the senior leader, Barnabas, was called
 - And the least of the leaders was called, Saul
 - God can call anyone at anytime to serve Him in anyway
 - Barnabas might have assumed he had reached the zenith of his ministry
 - Leading the first Gentile church in a the third largest city in the Roman empire
 - And Saul might have assumed that he was already serving in the perfect place for the Apostle to the Gentiles
 - But Barnabas wasn't destined to be a leader of churches
 - And Saul couldn't reach the greatness God intended if he stayed in one place
 - We won't see all that God is prepared to achieve with our lives if we mistake progress for obedience
- The group hears the call, fasts, prays and obeys
 - The fasting and prayer simply reflect careful consideration and seeking confirmation of what they've heard
 - And the laying on of hands reflects a commissioning of these men to perform the work God assigned

- This is a classic Biblical approach to a change in ministry
 - First, serve the people God has given you
 - Whether as a prophet, teacher, counselor, laborer
 - Don't be looking for the next thing if it means ignoring what you have been given
 - Secondly, listen for and be receptive to the Spirit's call
 - Be ready to move on when required
 - Don't be so attached to what you have that you miss what could be
 - Third, Seek community counsel, prayer and confirmation in the face of a potential call
 - We aren't supposed to contemplate these kinds of decisions in private
 - We need the Body's strengths to confirm the Spirit's words and prepare us for the change
 - Finally, the Body sends us out with a laying on of hands...we don't sneak off
 - Departures are reasons to celebrate the Lord's word and direction
 - If we can't leave a ministry in this way, it begs a question whether we're truly leaving under the Lord's direction
- Barnabas and Paul leave Antioch
 - First to Seleucia about 16 miles southwest on the Med
 - Then they sailed to Cyprus, a large island with a large Jewish population

[Acts 13:5](#) When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.

[Acts 13:6](#) When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-jesus,

[Acts 13:7](#) who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

[Acts 13:8](#) But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

- The first stop on the island was Salamis, today called Soli
 - Notice they first go to the synagogue and preached to the Jews
 - This is consistent with Paul's later teaching in Romans 1:16 that the Gospel was sent to the Jew first, and then the Gentile
 - Everywhere Paul would go, he would abide by this rule by preaching to Jews in synagogues before approaching the Gentile population
 - But almost invariably, the message would be rejected by the Jews
 - This then led to an opening for the Gentiles to hear
 - Paul was honoring His people by always giving them first shot to know the Lord
 - But as Paul himself wrote in Romans, he was painfully aware of God's plan to pass over the Jews,
 - And that except for a Jewish remnant, his message would only be received by the Gentiles
 - Traveling with the apostles was John Mark from chapter 12
- Now as they crossed the island, Luke records an interesting encounter
 - They reach Paphos, the center of Aphrodite worship
 - And they come upon a man called Elymas Bar-jesus
 - The name Bar-jesus simply means son of Yeshua
 - The name Yeshua was a common Jewish name of the day, and this man was the son of a Yeshua
 - The name is notably ironic since he is a false prophet and magician
 - He is employed by the proconsul, Sergius Paulus
 - The man's name was Paul and he was a smart man

- And he heard of Saul and Barnabas, and asked to hear the word of God
- But Elymas was working to thwart the meeting
 - He was working to turn the proconsul away from the faith
 - We already know the man is a false prophet and a socerer, which means he doesn't know the Lord
 - He must be operating under the enemy
 - Remember, anyone who is not a child of God by faith is automatically a son of disobedience or child of the devil

[Eph. 2:1](#) ¶ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, [Eph. 2:2](#) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

[Eph. 2:3](#) Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

- Now the moment of Paul's ministry begins

[Acts 13:9](#) But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him,

[Acts 13:10](#) and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?"

[Acts 13:11](#) "Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.

[Acts 13:12](#) Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

- Luke writes that Saul, who is also called Paul...
 - An obvious transition takes places here
 - If Luke's purpose was merely to clarify Saul's full name, he would have given this information early
 - Instead, he waits until 6 chapters later
 - Obviously, this information has a greater significance

- Luke introduces Saul's Greek name to signify Paul beginning his ministry to the Gentiles in earnest
 - For everyone who comes to faith, hears the calling of the Spirit and answers that call by stepping out into a ministry of the Gospel, there is a point like this
 - A point where we "discover" the true call God has on our life
 - Before that point, we may serve in ministry and even have some degree of success
 - But once we step into the ministry that God has uniquely prepared for us, we become a new person
 - I can remember that moment in my life as if it were yesterday...
 - As Paul steps up to assume his calling, he also takes the leadership role over Barnabas
 - Luke will generally list Paul's name ahead of Barnabas from this point forward
- So the Apostle Paul emerges from the Ashes of Saul, the Pharisee
 - And he confronts Elymas directly, looking intently at him as Paul speaks
 - Paul calls him out as a deceitful fraud
 - As a play on his name, Paul says he is the son of the devil
 - Not the son of Yeshua
 - He is an enemy of righteousness
 - These are charges we can level at every unbeliever
 - By nature, every unbeliever can fairly be described as a fraud and full of deceit
 - As the son of the devil and an enemy of righteousness
 - Paul pronounces a temporary judgment on the man
 - He becomes blind and must be led by the hand
 - This is a temporary blindness

- Interestingly, Saul was persecuting the truth and was an enemy of righteousness when God struck him with temporary blindness
 - He too was led by the hand for a time, unable to see the sun
- Makes you wonder if Paul has been waiting for the chance to return the favor to someone
- The effect of this encounter is Paul's first recorded conversion
 - The proconsul of the island of Cyprus becomes a Christian
 - And notice the circumstances
 - He invited Paul and Barnabas...they didn't come to him
 - He was being advised against believing by one of his own
 - His belief arrives because his advisor is struck with blindness
 - Hardly a textbook evangelistic outreach
 - Goes to show that the spread of the Gospel is entirely under God's hand
- Paul's first journey outward began with him following Barnabas
 - And it ended with Him leading, performing miracles and preaching boldly to Roman leaders
 - Paul never looked back
 - And Luke writes this next section to show that transformation all the more clearly

[Acts 13:13](#) ¶ Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

[Acts 13:14](#) But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

[Acts 13:15](#) After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it."

- Notice immediately that Luke says Paul and his companions
 - Barnabas and the rest simply become "the others"
 - Paul is the star of the show at this point, by God's design

- They travel about 180 miles by water from Cyprus up the Cestius river in modern-day Turkey
 - And they arrive at Perga
 - In Perga, John Mark goes back to Jerusalem
 - We don't know why he left, but John Mark's departure was considered desertion by Paul

[Acts 15:37](#) Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.
[Acts 15:38](#) But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

- They finally reach Pisidia, a center of East-West traffic
 - Located near Lystra in Modern day Turkey
- As was typical, Paul and Barnabas visit the synagogue
 - Since they were visitors, they would have naturally been offered the opportunity to read from the Scripture during the service
 - And then in this case, the Synagogue official gave them an opportunity to offer the preaching as well
 - This was not unusual especially if the visitors looked learned in the Scriptures as these men likely did
 - So this is the invitation they expected and desired

[Acts 13:16](#) Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, ¶ "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:

[Acts 13:17](#) "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it.

[Acts 13:18](#) "For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.

[Acts 13:19](#) "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance — all of which took about four hundred and fifty years.

[Acts 13:20](#) "After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.

[Acts 13:21](#) "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.

[Acts 13:22](#) "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.'

[Acts 13:23](#) " From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,
[Acts 13:24](#) after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.
[Acts 13:25](#) "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

- Paul's first recorded preaching is similar in some respects to Stephen's famous preaching
 - Though it has a different tone
 - And it will result in a slightly different response
- Let's summarize Paul's message
 - Paul addresses a crowd of both Jews (Israel) and those who fear God (Gentiles)
 - Then Paul begins a historical recounting of Israel, beginning with the Exodus
 - He uses very specific and interesting highlights in the nation's history
 - First he uses Moses
 - Moses was a deliverer for Israel
 - A man who led the nation out of slavery
 - But then Paul reminds them that their ancestors spent 40 years in the desert
 - Every good Jew would clearly remember the reason for that unfortunate episode in the history of the nation: disobedience
 - So though Moses was a deliverer, he couldn't deliver the nation from their own disobedience
 - Then he cites the next phase of the nation's history
 - They enter the land under Joshua, defeat the nations of Canaan, and settle

- This took 450 years...from Isaac to the conquest of the land
- This then led to a time of judges, which ended when Samuel turned from judge to prophet
 - Though Samuel was a prophet, he was a man who couldn't rule an unruly people
- He then anointed the first king
 - Saul, the king the people wanted but who was not of the right tribe and not the right king
 - They endured this mistake for another 40 years, another period of trial
- Saul was a king who failed to rule properly and follow the Lord
 - His rule was another forty-year test for Israel
- So God gives them the proper king, David
 - The rightful line of kings come from David, of the tribe of Judah
 - And the messiah would be a "Son of David"
 - But even David's reign didn't last forever
- So the promise of a deliverer, a new prophet and king must be fulfilled in someone else
 - Because the Scripture says the Promised One will rule and will never decay
 - He is greater than John the Baptist was
- Paul leads up directly to a conclusion that Jesus is the ultimate prophet, priest and king and deliverer for Israel
- In v.26 Paul begins to drive the point home

[Acts 13:26](#) ¶ "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent.

[Acts 13:27](#) "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him.

[Acts 13:28](#) "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed.

[Acts 13:29](#) "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

[Acts 13:30](#) "But God raised Him from the dead;

[Acts 13:31](#) and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.

[Acts 13:32](#) "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers,

[Acts 13:33](#) that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.'

[Acts 13:34](#) "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.'

[Acts 13:35](#) "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.'

[Acts 13:36](#) "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;

[Acts 13:37](#) but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

[Acts 13:38](#) "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,

[Acts 13:39](#) and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

[Acts 13:40](#) "Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you:

[Acts 13:41](#) 'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH;
FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS,
A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE
SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'"

- Paul says this message of salvation has been sent to the Jews
 - And yet those who deny it fulfill the very Scriptures they ignore
 - Paul then retells Jesus' death and resurrection
 - And His appearance to the apostles as proof of his new life
 - Notice that Paul doesn't expect this point to convince the crowd by itself
 - He almost seems to assume that his message will be rejected, and so he speaks as if that will be the outcome
 - Paul then begins to quote from OT scripture to reinforce his point

- The second Psalm written by David declares that the “He” will be a son to God
 - Most Jews had come to believe that reference to “son” meant David
 - But then Paul skillfully references another Psalm by David in which the same “son” is said to not undergo decay
 - Meaning he is resurrected (v.37)
 - But they know David underwent decay in the grave
 - So if this “son” isn’t David, who is it?
- That’s the question Paul wants them to ask
 - The answer is Jesus of course
 - And belief in Jesus sets them free from everything that the Law of Moses couldn’t
 - But notice Paul’s ending
 - He quotes Hab 1:5
 - He says God foretold the Jews wouldn’t believe the testimony of the Messiah’s arrival
 - Not the usual evangelistic method
 - Paul isn’t trying to win these Jews with his clever words
 - He’s waiting for a work of the Spirit

[Acts 13:42](#) ¶ As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

[Acts 13:43](#) Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.

[Acts 13:44](#) ¶ The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord.

[Acts 13:45](#) But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.

[Acts 13:46](#) Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

[Acts 13:47](#) "For so the Lord has commanded us,
'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES,
THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'"

- Interestingly, this presentation of the Gospel resulted in the Jews asking for an encore performance
 - But a few believed and followed the men and Paul encouraged them
 - By the time another week rolled around, the word had got out and the synagogue was full
 - And predictably, when the Gospel began to earn a large audience within the Jewish population, it angered and threatened the Jewish leaders
 - And then they acted to put the message down
 - And like Jesus, Paul confirms the decision of the leaders on behalf of the people
 - He says he was obligated by God to bring the message to the Jew first
 - But now he would go to the Gentiles
 - As God planned
- Luke established once and for all that Paul's preference for the Gentile was not a reverse bias against Paul's own people, the Jews
 - It was the purposeful work of God, even as Paul did his best to approach the Jewish people time and time again

Acts 14

- Picking up where we left off in chapter 13, Paul and Barnabas have returned to the synagogue as requested
 - They preached a second time, or at least they tried to preach
 - The second trip to the synagogue resulted in the Jewish leaders in the synagogue to contradict Paul's teaching and blaspheme
 - Blaspheming here means they were speaking blasphemous things against the Christ, Jesus
 - Though the Jewish leaders themselves were unaware of their own blasphemy of course
 - As a result of their mistreatment of Paul and the message of the Gospel, Paul declares that they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life
 - Before we move into the rest of the chapter, let's take a moment to consider what Paul has just declared
 - Is Paul implying they have not earned eternal life?
 - Clearly, this isn't the proper understanding of Paul's words
 - Paul himself wrote on numerous occasions that salvation only comes by faith in Christ apart from any works
 - So what does "unworthy" mean in this context?
 - First, the word in Greek is actually two words: ou + axios
 - Ou is the negative prefix no, not or "un"
 - Axios, has a variety of meanings, all similar but subtly different
 - Usually it means fitting or in keeping with or deserving
 - We get the English word axiomatic from the same root, which means self-evident
 - When taking the negative of the word axios in this context, the meaning becomes "self-evidently not in keeping with"

- So Paul says that when the Jewish leaders heard the Gospel and responded with blaspheme, they were repeating the sins of the Pharisees in Jesus' day
 - And self-evidently, their reaction proved (or judged) them to not be those who were intended to receive the Gospel
 - They were unworthy in the sense that God had not determined to grant them his grace
- This interpretation will become even clearer in a minute as we read further and see Luke contrast the Jewish leaders with Gentiles

[Acts 13:48](#) ¶ When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

[Acts 13:49](#) And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

- In contrast to the Jewish leaders, the Gentiles in the synagogue react very differently
 - They gladly received the news of God's mercy through Christ
 - This is opposite of the Jewish leaders who received the news with jealousy
 - Then the Gentiles glorified the word of the Lord
 - While the Jewish leaders had contradicted it and blasphemed
 - Finally, those Gentiles who had been appointed to eternal life believed, Luke says
 - One of the clearest and most powerful affirmations of predestination found in the New Testament
 - Who is the One doing the appointing in this verse?
 - Luke doesn't mention the subject, but the answer is easy
 - The thing being appointed is eternal life
 - And Who can appoint someone to eternal life except God Himself?
 - So God is appointing certain Gentiles to eternal life
 - And because they are appointed to eternal life, they believe

- Notice the order here
 - Those who have been appointed (past tense) are the one who believed in this moment
 - Their belief didn't create the appointment, as if to suggest that they were the ones creating this outcome by their decision
 - Rather, Luke makes it clear that it was God's divine appointment to eternal life which precipitated their belief into the Gospel
- We can see further proof of this in the way Luke contrasted the Gentiles with the Jewish leaders
 - While the Jewish leaders were jealous, the Gentiles were joyous
 - While the Jewish leaders were blaspheming, the Gentiles were glorifying
 - And while the Jewish leaders gave evidence that God had judged them undeserving, the Gentiles gave evidence that they had been appointed to eternal life
 - Luke has taken the two scenes and intentionally set them in opposition to make a point about God's sovereignty
 - We can see the difference wasn't Paul's preaching style
 - Or differences in the audiences' intellect
 - The only difference to explain why one group rebelled and another received was that God rejected one and appointed the other
- Furthermore, we know this was God's plan from the beginning, according to God's word
 - The Jewish people will be given eyes to see not and ears to hear not
 - While God says He would be found by a people who were not His people
- And so Luke says on this basis, the word of God was being spread throughout the whole region

[Acts 13:50](#) But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

[Acts 13:51](#) But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.

[Acts 13:52](#) And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

- When the Jews see Paul and Barnabas receive a hearing among the Gentiles, it must have been intolerable
 - Not only were Paul and Barnabas teaching a truth that angered the Jews
 - But the Gentile dogs were actually believing and declaring Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah
 - This was too much to bear
 - So the Jews stir up two different camps against Paul and Barnabas
 - First, they stir up devout women of prominence
 - The Greek word for devout is literally God-fearing, which is a reference to proselytes
 - These were prominent Gentile women who followed the Jewish law and customs but did not receive Christ
 - Secondly, they stir up the leading men of the city
 - From the Greek, it's implied that these men were the husbands of these women
 - This makes sense because the women wouldn't have had power on their own to force Paul and Barnabas out of the city
 - The women were Gentile converts to Judaism and they convinced their powerful husbands, who were not proselytes themselves, to push Paul out of the city
 - Remember, this is a Gentile city so the Jewish leaders needed the support of these Gentile leaders to get rid of Paul
 - So they stir up the wives, to stir up their husbands, to get rid of Paul and Barnabas

- Paul and Barnabas then perform the apostolic ritual of judgment prescribed by Jesus
 - They take off their sandals and shake the dust in the direction of the town
 - Jesus gave these instructions in the Gospels, recorded in Matt, Mark and Luke

[Luke 9:5](#) "And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

- This was the instruction Jesus gave the apostles particularly in this day
 - As the message of the Gospel first arrives, there is an opportunity for the city
 - But if the city forced them out, then the apostles were to perform this symbolic act to break fellowship
- But despite the rejection, the disciples were continually filled by the Holy Spirit and were joyful
 - Take a moment to reflect on that fact
 - The joy of the early believers was a true spiritual joy found in their relationship with the Lord
 - They were persecuted, they were poor in many cases
 - And they were often rejected by their families and cultures
 - And yet they were joyful because of their faith and the hope it gave them for eternal life
 - How often do we say we're having a bad day or we experience a bad mood
 - That's normal, of course, but it shouldn't be for a Christian
 - The world's emotions and attitudes wax and wane with their circumstances
 - But a Christian's attitude shouldn't vary with what happens in the world

- Because our focus and source of happiness should be in the eternal heavenly realm
- Perhaps easier said than done, but the next time you feel a pity party coming on, ask yourself this
 - Are your circumstances worse than the first century believers who were dying for their faith?
 - And yet they were continually filled with joy because of their faith
- So Paul and Barnabas move on to Iconium
 - This town was about 85 miles southeast of Antioch
 - It was unique as a bastion of Greek culture largely unpolluted by the Romans
 - It had a reputation as resistant to Roman conquest and influence
 - It's modern-day Konia in Turkey
 - It was situated in an oasis-like setting
 - Surrounded by deserts, it occupied a fertile lush plain of orchards and farms
 - It was a successful town selling its produce on the busy road that ran through the town
- The story in Iconium will sound very familiar to us

[Acts 14:1](#) ¶ In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

[Acts 14:2](#) But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.

[Acts 14:3](#) Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.

- As always, Paul hits the synagogue first to preach to Jews
 - But as before, both Jews and Gentiles hear the message, and both groups see converts

- And like before, the Jews are disturbed by this development
 - And since it was a Greek city, their response was to appeal to the Gentile leaders and convince them to run Paul and Barnabas out of town
 - And this tactic also resulted in the Gentiles in the city becoming embittered toward the believers in the city (the brethren)
 - This means that the movement had reached a point where there was an active church body
 - But now they were a target of hostility among the Gentiles
- Interestingly, the apostles determined to stay there a long time despite the opposition
 - Apparently the opposition couldn't force the Apostles out of the city
 - And this was ultimately to the city's benefit since it meant there wouldn't be any "sandal shaking" in their case
 - But their stay was made possible by their reliance on the Lord
 - It was Christ Who allowed them to be bold in the face of opposition and to stand against it
 - And the word they preached was the word of grace
 - As the Lord granted signs and wonders
- Here again we have a wonderful testimony of God's sovereignty found in Luke's narrative
 - Compare Iconium to Salamis
 - In Salamis, the opposition succeeded in running Paul out of town
 - And the result was the town got the sandal treatment
 - In Iconium the Jews take the same tactic, yet this time Paul can remain

- And he remains in the face of opposition because the Lord makes the stay possible
- And they are given power to perform miracles and signs
- We should ask that if they can manage to stay in one city and perform miracles despite persecution, why did they have to leave the earlier city?
 - Luke gives us the answer
 - The Lord made it possible in one city while calling them to leave in another case
 - In fact, Paul's willingness to shake his sandal was a testimony that he believed his departure was the Lord's will for that city
 - So Paul was simply declaring by his symbolic act that the city's destiny had been set by God
- Eventually the opposition gets (or is given?) the upper hand

[Acts 14:4](#) But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.

[Acts 14:5](#) And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them,

[Acts 14:6](#) they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region;

[Acts 14:7](#) and there they continued to preach the gospel.

- Once a plot was uncovered to kill Paul and Barnabas, they decided it was time to leave
 - And they flee to surrounding cities to continue preaching
 - We might ask at this point how did Paul know to flee in this moment
 - Why didn't he assume he should stay in place and suffer death if necessary to preach the gospel?
 - The simple answer is run if you can
 - There is a difference between being willing to die for your faith and inviting it
 - Paul was always willing to die, and he knew one day he would

- But he made every effort to survive expecting that when the time came to die for the Lord, the outcome would be inevitable
- Then comes one of the more humorous and yet tragic moments in Paul's ministry

[Acts 14:8](#) ¶ At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

[Acts 14:9](#) This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well,

[Acts 14:10](#) said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk.

[Acts 14:11](#) When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us."

[Acts 14:12](#) And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

[Acts 14:13](#) The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

- Paul comes to Lystra with Barnabas and performs this miracle while preaching the Gospel
 - Lystra was south of Iconium and was very pagan in the Roman style
 - The man Paul heals here was crippled from birth
 - Imagine the miracle...not only is he healed but he learns to walk instantly
 - And the basis for his healing was his faith, which Paul surmised
 - The crowds respond to the sight of the healing in an appropriate but uninformed way
 - They see the healing as supernatural and credit it to the work of deity
 - But they wrongly credit it to the Roman and Greek gods
 - Notice they aren't speaking in Greek, which Paul understood
 - They speak in a language known only to the Lycaonian people
 - The significance of this is that Paul and Barnabas don't immediately understand what's happening around them

- The people give names to Paul and Barnabas
 - They say that Barnabas must be Jupiter, a Roman god
 - In Greek, Jupiter is Zeus
 - Statues of Zeus show a tall bearded man, which tells us something of Barnabas' physical stature and appearance
 - They say that Paul must be Mercury, the Roman name for the Greek God Hermes
 - They see Paul as Hermes because he speaks the most
 - Mercury is known as the herald of the gods
 - He was the son of Zeus and was also short
 - Perhaps Paul was not only shorter than Barnabas but also a younger
 - The people begin to prepare a sacrifice to these gods

The sudden urge to sacrifice to two human beings who were mistakenly identified as the gods Jupiter and Mercury can be understood from the background of the legend of Baucis and Philemon. This legend was recorded by the Roman historian Ovid. The legend says that Jupiter and Mercury came down disguised as men, but no one in that area was willing to provide hospitality to them except one elderly couple named Baucis and Philemon. The two gods destroyed the local population for its lack of hospitality, but Baucis and Philemon became the priest and priestess of the temple of Jupiter because of their hospitality. Because of the legend prevalent in that city, and because they had just seen a miracle, they felt that the two gods had come again. Not wanting to be destroyed, they were ready to offer sacrifices. - A. Fruchtenbaum

- And still Paul and Barnabas don't understand what's happening in their midst
 - At least not until they see the animals being prepared as a sacrifice
 - Perhaps some of the crowd were starting to prostrate themselves before Paul and Barnabas in worship
 - Whatever it triggered their understanding, Paul and Barnabas eventually figured out what was happening

[Acts 14:14](#) But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out

[Acts 14:15](#) and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.

[Acts 14:16](#) "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;

[Acts 14:17](#) and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

[Acts 14:18](#) Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.

- At the news of what was happening, the apostles tear their clothing as a sign of their intense dismay over the circumstances
 - And they tell the crowd to cease worshipping them
 - They declare themselves to be men of the same nature as the crowd itself
 - And they reiterate they bring the gospel for the very purpose that it would replace - not encourage - their idol worship
 - Paul calls their worship of these Roman gods vain, because idol worship is empty and self-serving
 - Consider the meaning of the word vain
 - Empty, void, prideful
 - All these things are true in describing the futility of worshipping objects made in our own image
 - Paul then goes on to describe the true God Who these Romans have never known
 - Paul says God is the Author of Creation
 - Who in generations past permitted the Gentiles to go their own way
 - This is the definitional distinction of the Church Age since Pentecost
 - Before the Gentile people of the world were largely outside the grace of God

- The Jewish people were the chosen people and Gentiles were not

[Eph. 2:11](#) ¶ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands —

[Eph. 2:12](#) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[Eph. 2:13](#) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

- Paul later says in Galatians that he was the one blessed to have the mission to usher Gentiles into the family of God

[Eph. 3:8](#) To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

[Eph. 3:9](#) and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

[Eph. 3:10](#) so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

- Paul's efforts to stop the crowd were only partially successful, since they were still trying to sacrifice

[Acts 14:19](#) ¶ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

[Acts 14:20](#) But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

[Acts 14:21](#) After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

[Acts 14:22](#) strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

[Acts 14:23](#) When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

- Here for the first time we see organized opposition to the Gospel
 - Paul and Barnabas have been moving from Antioch to Cyprus to Iconium and upsetting Jews in each place
 - Now those Jews have traveled 90 miles to find Paul and continue to persecution

- They succeed in convincing the populace in Lystra that Paul should be killed, and they begin to stone him in an act of mob violence
- We don't know where Barnabas is in all this, but apparently he escapes the crowd
- Paul is left for dead and dragged outside the city
 - Obviously, Paul wasn't dead but merely unconscious
 - Some believers come to his rescue outside the city, and he is revived
 - There is no suggestion of a miraculous return from the dead in these verses, so the the best interpretation is to assume Paul was simply injured but not seriously
 - Nevertheless, the speed with which Paul revives and returns to the city and continues his journeys does suggest a miraculous strengthening
 - He can re-enter the city because Paul's attackers would have returned to their home towns assuming Paul to be dead
 - The residents of Lystra were not Paul's enemies
- Finally, Paul uses this experience to teach a lesson to the church in Lystra, a lesson he will repeat many times in his letters
 - The church will undergo many tribulations as it awaits entry into the Kingdom of God
 - This is a basic principle of the Christian faith
 - All generations have and will experience tribulation at the hands of unbelievers who are driven by the enemy from behind the scenes
 - Satan opposes God and Christ and so he opposes you as well
 - And the world is filled with unbelief, children of their father the devil, who stand ready to do his bidding

Acts 15A

- Paul's first missionary journey with Barnabas is almost complete
 - Refer to the map of this initial journey
 - The journey has lasted nearly 2 years as best we can tell
 - After his first journey Paul wrote his first epistle, Galatians, shortly after attending the council of Jerusalem
 - Having just established a series of new Gentile churches, it makes sense that Paul would have been moved to write letters to these churches
 - The letter to the Galatians is written to the churches of Galatia, which refers to the churches Paul established in this first journey
 - And as the trip nears its conclusion, the apostles reach a few more cities, largely without opposition
- As we left last week, Paul had just recovered from his stoning
 - And He leaves the next day on a trip to the next town, Derbe

[Acts 14:19](#) ¶ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

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- In Derbe they make many converts and establish yet another Gentile church
 - Then they begin to retrace their steps back through the various churches in Asia Minor where they have established beachheads for the gospel
 - From Derbe they head back to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch
 - Antioch here is not the Antioch where the first church was established

- This is a different Antioch in modern-day Turkey (see map)
- As they revisit each church, Paul and Barnabas bring a message of comfort
 - Luke sums the message in v.22
 - Many tribulations will be the common uniting experience of the faith
- We must imagine that after Paul and Barnabas left each church, the persecution that fell upon the apostles transferred to the new believers
 - Either from Jews or Gentiles, the early believers were under attack
 - And these new believers were probably unprepared for this type of religious persecution
 - Such persecution was probably rare and they may have misunderstood its meaning
 - Perhaps it meant that God was unhappy or that the faith was not true?
 - Paul explains that trials and tribulations should be expected
 - And no doubt Paul pointed to his own experience as proof

[Acts 14:23](#) When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

[Acts 14:24](#) ¶ They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia.

[Acts 14:25](#) When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

[Acts 14:26](#) From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.

[Acts 14:27](#) When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

[Acts 14:28](#) And they spent a long time with the disciples.

- On the return trip, Paul leaves each church with leaders
 - He appoints elders
 - And Paul appointed them, they were not elected

- We'll never see a congregation form of church government in Scripture
 - The Biblical model is always a process of appointment by men who received their leadership roles by similar appointment
 - The church has always moved forward at the hands of men and women who answer the Spirit's call and anointing
 - Then are sent by elders to establish a new work
 - Once the work takes hold, the leader establishes new leaders, and so on
- The Bible never supports the view that there is a pope or utmost church leader on earth
 - But there is a chain of anointing and commissioning expected
 - We have "fathers" in the faith and church leaders who have been established by the Spirit's anointing and confirmed by earlier leaders
- Secondly, the elders are plural in each church
 - The concept of a single pastor-led model is not Biblical either
 - While a new church may rely on a single leader for a time, as the church in Ephesus did with Timothy or Titus
 - But as the church grows, the expectation becomes that the leader appoint co-leaders

[Titus 1:5](#) ¶ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and **appoint elders** in every city as I directed you,

- Finally, Paul and Barnabas commend these new believers to the Lord
 - When we think about how hard it was to communicate or travel over long distances
 - And then considered the threats and challenges these new churches must have faced as Gentiles in the early church
 - No NT, no large library of Christian writing or culture

- No support structure and history in the faith
 - We have to marvel that the church survived at all...until we remember that it exists and grows by the power of God
- And it was upon this truth that Paul rested as well
 - He commends the church to the Lord because he knows that the church is always in His hands
 - And Paul and Barnabas will be a long way away for many years and must depend on the Lord to take care of these believers
- Paul wraps up his victory lap in Perga and then heads over to Attalia
 - Finally, from there he sails back to Antioch of Syria where the first church is still present and growing
 - And they commend Paul and Barnabas on all they have accomplished and on the work of the Lord in opening a door for Gentiles
- Now we transition into chapter 15 to learn of an early challenge to the orthodoxy of the church

[Acts 15:1](#) Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

[Acts 15:2](#) And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

[Acts 15:3](#) Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.

- The scene begins in Antioch of Syria where Paul and Barnabas are still ministering
 - The men came from Judea and were of the circumcision party
 - These were the same men who had challenged Peter for being willing to enter the home of a Gentile
 - They come to Antioch of their own initiative

- The fact they decide to travel from Judea all the way to Syria to confront Paul's growing ministry to the Gentiles tells you how much this issue has become THE issue for them
 - In my personal experience, I run into this kind of obsessive single-mindedness within the church
 - I meet an individual or small group of people who define their Christian life and purpose by a single theme or idea
 - Sometimes the theme is hyper national patriotism
 - Or Gentiles trying to mimic or adopt Jewish practices and lifestyle
 - Or natural remedies and healthy eating
 - Or whatever the fad of the week may be
- The problem with this narrow focus is the way it creates selective attention
 - When we adopt a "thing" we see everything through the lens of that issue
 - Alistair Begg tells a story of an American pastor who asked him what his "thing" was...
 - And our focus leads to an unbalanced and uneven Christian maturing...or even a failure to mature
 - You will only attend to this topic of interest and ignore other important areas of Christian growth
- More troubling, this narrow focus can lead in extreme cases to a warped theology and even a false gospel
 - This has happened here
 - The desire to cherish a long-standing Jewish mandate leads to a expectation that Gentiles adopt it as well
 - And to force this outcome, these men teach that God Himself has made it a requirement for acceptance into the Christian faith
 - In other words, a work was required to be saved

- This same problem was also happening in other Gentile churches
 - While in Antioch the problem is circumcision, in Galatia it was the Law as a whole
 - Men were teaching that keeping the Law was required salvation
 - Which is why Paul wrote the letter of Galatians while in Antioch
 - Listen to Paul's opening words in that letter...

[Gal. 1:1](#) ¶ Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),
[Gal. 1:2](#) and all the brethren who are with me, ¶ To the churches of Galatia:
[Gal. 1:3](#) ¶ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
[Gal. 1:4](#) who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,
[Gal. 1:5](#) to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.
[Gal. 1:6](#) ¶ I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;
[Gal. 1:7](#) which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

- When these men reach Antioch, Paul and Barnabas confront these men
 - And they strongly resist this teaching
 - And they debate these men at length
 - The word for dissension means strife in Greek
 - The unity of Antioch that Luke described earlier is now threatened by wrong teaching
 - Knowing Paul's ability and track record in debating false teaching, it's surprising that the church didn't immediately accept Paul's point of view
 - But for the benefit of the church as a whole, God causes the argument to simmer for a while until the leaders in the church determine a course of action
- The church leaders decide that the issue should be resolved by a meeting in Jerusalem with the Apostles as a whole
 - Remember, that Peter has the keys to the kingdom and he had the power to bind and loose on earth as in heaven

- This refers to the power to permit or forbid certain practices or beliefs for the purpose of setting church doctrine and practice
- The discussion must move to Jerusalem for the apostles can meet and include Peter for the final decision
- So they send Paul, Barnabas, and other men
 - We know from Galatians that Paul took Titus
 - And we can assume that some representatives of the other point of view attend as well
- It's noteworthy that the leaders in this church do not include Paul and Barnabas at this point
 - They submit themselves to the authority of the elders
 - What a demonstration of submission to authority Paul and Barnabas demonstrate here
 - They are the founding members of the church and Apostles no less
 - They might have demanded the elders kick out the trouble makers and simply accept the Apostles' word as a final answer
 - Instead, they follow the instructions of the elders
- Since they have to take a long journey south through Phoenicia, the Galilee and Samaria, the Apostles take the opportunity to inform the church of all that was happening among the Gentiles
 - The Phoenician church were Gentiles while the Samaritan church was Samaritans
 - Both of these groups would have been greatly encouraged to hear of other Gentiles joining the church
 - But as they progressed to Jerusalem, Paul would have encountered more and more Jewish church
 - And they probably reacted differently to the news
 - And it must have concerned and excited the young Jewish church
 - Though it was a sign of the power of the Gospel

- And it brought the Jews comfort to know that they were not along
- Instead, they were begin joined by the world of Gentiles into faith
- Yet it brought concerns too
 - What would happen to the Jewish culture within the early church?
 - Would the Jewish church become overwhelmed by Gentiles
 - And would the Jewish traditions and customs be lost?
- This is likely at the core of why the Party of the Circumcision was trying to convert Gentiles to Judaism first
 - And out of fear, they were trying to stop the inevitable
 - They were resisting God's desire to create a Gentile bride for Christ
- We now see that motive in the first meeting of the Apostles in Jerusalem

[Acts 15:4](#) When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

[Acts 15:5](#) But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

- After giving their initial report on the rapid growth of the church among Gentiles, certain men objected
 - A sect of the Pharisees, which refers to the Party of the Circumcision from Acts 11:2
 - They demand both circumcision and the following of the Law
 - It makes sense that Pharisees would expect submission to the Law since they themselves defined themselves by their scrupulous adherence to the Law
 - This is an example narrow focus on a single theme of Christian living
 - And in this case, the theme wasn't a Christian theme

- It's an unChristian theme that distorts the Gospel
- In chapter 2 of his letter to Galatia, Paul describes how this meeting began
 - He arrived with Barnabas and Titus
 - He immediately met with Peter, James and John to see how they felt about the matter
 - Paul says he submitted to them the story of how he preached the Gospel to the Gentiles
 - When Paul says "how" he means not merely that the Gentiles were receiving the Gospel...that wasn't news to anyone
 - Rather, he means of how he preached faith without works was the mean to salvation
 - Paul wanted to find out if Peter and the rest of the Apostles were preaching the same Gospel
 - Paul's private meeting results in the Apostles agreeing that this is the true Gospel and they plan in secret for how they will conduct the public meeting with the Gentiles and others
 - When that meeting takes place, the Apostles are already of one mind to reject the Pharisees call for Gentiles to submit to circumcision and following the Law

[Acts 15:6](#) ¶ The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

[Acts 15:7](#) After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

[Acts 15:8](#) "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

[Acts 15:9](#) and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

[Acts 15:10](#) "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

[Acts 15:11](#) "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

- Luke says a meeting is held to consider the demands of the Pharisees
 - Luke indicates in v.7 there was much debate, but the debate wasn't among the Apostles
 - It was among the Gentiles and elders and Pharisees
 - According to Galatians 2, the Apostles have already met and agreed on a course of action
 - The Apostles observed and listened
- Finally, we finally see Peter end the debate and stand up and make his decision known
 - By allowing the room to voice opinions first, the Apostles gain a useful advantage
 - First, they learn who among the prominent men of the church understand the Gospel properly and who don't
 - Secondly, they give the body a chance to feel a part of the process and helps cement their acceptance of the Apostles' decree
 - Peter speaks for the last time in the book of Acts
 - Peter begins by reminding the crowd that it was God Himself Who made a choice over 10 years earlier to include the Gentiles in the church
 - The circumstances of Cornelius' salvation made clear to everyone that it was God Who decided to make this happen
 - And that choice was made clearest by the fact that God visibly gave Gentiles the same Spirit
 - Here again we see the unique significance for God making the arrival of the Holy Spirit visible at times during the early church
 - It was a watershed moment when Gentiles believed, and God made sure everyone knew that the Spirit had arrived
 - Peter goes on to point out that the arrival of the Spirit resulted in a cleansing that was universal and common to both Gentile and Jew

- And then Peter makes his turn with one of the most powerful statements against legalism in the Bible
 - First, he says why do they test God?
 - The word test here means that to doubt the Gentiles' entrance into the church on the basis of faith alone would be to call into question God's judgment in the matter
 - Since God Himself has made clear His intent to include Gentiles on the same terms He included the Jews already
 - When Pharisees asked Gentiles to do more than God required, they are testing God
 - Secondly, Peter compares the demands of the Pharisees as a yoke on the neck of the disciples
 - Notice that Peter uses the word disciple to refer to the Gentiles, clearly indicating Peter's view that they are brothers in the faith
 - And he sees the requirements levied by the Pharisees as a yoke or burden
 - And Peter adds that not even the religiously observant Jew was capable of bearing this yoke successfully, referring to keeping the law
 - Peter's statement is revealing because it indicates that the Pharisees in the church still believed they were keeping the Law
 - Peter correctly states that no one keeps the Law
 - Not the fathers and not us
 - So why think that the Gentiles could do it either?
 - Peter correctly states that salvation is by the grace of God alone
 - Grace means that God doesn't recognize merit or achievement
 - He grants a pardon for His own purposes
- When we ask someone to perform a work as part of their salvation that we ourselves are not even able to perform adequately, we are hypocrites and we sin

- And in this case, the sin is made worse because the Pharisees insistence that this work is a requirement for salvation
- Imagine how much damage would have been done to the early church is the Pharisees' view had prevailed?
 - How many Gentiles would have found the Gospel to be "good news" if it included the requirement to be circumcised and perform the Law?
 - Similarly, when our presentation of the Gospel includes any suggestion of legalism, we test God
 - If we propose new rules for living, new standards of behavior, new cultural expectations, we repeat the sin of the Pharisee
 - We are adding works, whether intended or not, and we are acting hypocritically, since we ourselves invariably violate any rule we offer
- Legalism is pernicious and easily overlooked in our evangelistic patterns
 - We should preach and teach salvation by grace through faith in Christ and nothing more
 - Any discussion of godly living and standard of conduct are premature for anyone who is considering the truth of the Gospel
 - And for those who have believed, any discussion of behavior must be divorced from a conversation of whether they are saved
 - They are saved by grace alone through faith alone
 - Behaviors are simply not a part of that conversation

Acts 15B

- This week, we'll rejoin the Council of Jerusalem
 - The council has been convened to address a central question: what is the basis of salvation?
 - The Apostles are not confused concerning the truth of the Gospel
 - They have been preaching it consistently and their letters reflect their understanding of the truth
 - But men within the part of the Pharisees have distorted the Gospel adding works of the Law and of circumcision as a requirement for salvation
 - This teaching has stirred up the emerging Gentile church naturally
 - And they requested the Apostles convene this counsel to answer the question authoritatively
 - Is it necessary to become a Jew before one can become a Christian
 - Last week we read through v.11
 - We will reread a few of those verses this week to remember how Peter responded to the arguments he heard in that meeting

[Acts 15:7](#) After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

[Acts 15:8](#) "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

[Acts 15:9](#) and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

[Acts 15:10](#) "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

[Acts 15:11](#) "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

- Peter had listened to the various arguments, but he already knew how he and the other Apostles would decide the issue

- They had met in secret prior to this meeting, according to Paul in Galatians chapter 2
 - In that meeting they had agreed that salvation was by grace through faith and not by works - both for Jews and Gentiles
- So Peter highlights the error in their thinking
 - To simply review Peter's logic, he says God made clear He was choosing to include Gentiles
 - And God also made clear that they received the same Spirit as the Jewish believer, the clear sign of salvation
 - So if Gentiles were saved by faith alone and received the Spirit, then we know they are not required to become Jew first
- Now this week, we pick up by looking at the crowd's response

[Acts 15:12](#) ¶ All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

- The first thing we notice is that Peter's words caused the room to fall silent
 - Both sides refrained from further argument or comment
 - It seems that Peter's statements have settled the issue
 - This makes sense for two reasons
 - First, Peter has the credibility of the chief Apostle and the one who God used to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles
 - Who can argue with a man like Peter?
 - If you feel his word isn't authoritative, then why would you even be a part of this movement?
 - Secondly, Peter has the power to bind and loose decisions concerning the doctrine of the church

[Matt. 16:18](#) "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

[Matt. 16:19](#) "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

- When Peter spoke in this moment, his authority was supernaturally evident and the other men in the room came to recognize him in this way
 - So as Peter spoke, the men fell into line behind him
- The second thing we notice is that this silence gives opportunity for Paul and Barnabas to relate some of their experiences in ministering to Gentiles
 - We are left with the sense that Paul and Barnabas see the chance to fill the silence with stories that will reinforce Peter's viewpoint
 - Peter says they are being saved in the Spirit just as Jews, and Peter and Barnabas have stories to tell that prove that point
 - So they share what they've seen
 - The lessons from Paul and Barnabas is that without God's direct approval and involvement, none of their accomplishments would have been possible
 - Thus proving that Peter's statements are true
- Now another Apostle stands up and speaks

[Acts 15:13](#) After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me.

[Acts 15:14](#) "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.

[Acts 15:15](#) "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

[Acts 15:16](#) 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return,

AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN,

AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS,

AND I WILL RESTORE IT,

[Acts 15:17](#) SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD,

AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,'

[Acts 15:18](#) SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO.

[Acts 15:19](#) "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

[Acts 15:20](#) but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

[Acts 15:21](#) "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

- Here we see James speaking

- James is the brother of Jesus and the leader of the church in Jerusalem
 - This would also have made him the senior leader at the council
 - Interesting that though Peter was the Apostle chosen to have the keys to the Kingdom and to have the power to bind and loose, nevertheless James was chief elder of the church
 - This may have been because Peter was required to flee the city
- James calls for the group's attention, and then says that Peter's words agree with Scripture
 - Specifically, that God spoke beforehand that He would select from among the Gentiles a people for Himself
 - This is comparable to the way God has reserved for Himself a people from among the Jews
 - The remnant, in other words
 - So the Gentile nations will produce a remnant of sorts for God
 - The Church is mostly a Gentile organism taken from the world as a people for God
- James quotes from Amos 9:11-12
 - Amos declares that God will return after the Tribulation, the Lord will return to rebuild the Temple
 - And it will be beacon to all the nations so that come to it seeking the Lord
 - Amos is describing the way the temple of God acts like a giant lighthouse in the days of the Kingdom calling all nations to worship the Lord
 - James' application here is simply to prove that the OT scriptures have always looked forward to a day when the Gentiles would be included in God's plan
 - James isn't saying that this passage in Amos is speaking of their time specifically
 - He's simply saying that God's affinity for Gentiles is evident in Scripture

- Thus proving that God doesn't intend to make everyone Jewish before they can come to Him
- So James likewise concludes that the Apostles and other leaders "not trouble" the Gentiles who are coming to the Lord
 - The reference to troubling reflects the Pharisees' insisting that the Gentiles be circumcised
 - We can be sure this was a troubling requirement that many men would have resisted
 - But James says this isn't a helpful or necessary requirement
 - Therefore, don't place the burden on the Gentiles
 - But then James addresses the Pharisees' demand that the Gentiles follow the Law
 - James offers a compromise here, but one designed to help the Gentiles integrate successfully into the new church with the Jewish brothers
 - James says write a letter to Gentiles and tell them to abstain from four practices common in Gentile society
 - Three of the items deal with eating and one deals with sexual behavior
 - These areas of daily life were central to maintaining fellowship with Jews
 - It would be difficult enough for Jews to accept the arrival of Gentiles within their congregations
 - But if those Gentiles continue engaging in practices that were abhorrent to Jews, it would make fellowship impossible
 - It would threaten the successful integration of the Gentiles into the body of Christ
 - The eating restrictions were to not eat meat sacrificed to idols, not to eat meat that had been strangled and not to eat blood
 - All three of these things were prohibited under the Jewish law, yet believers (both Jewish and Gentile) were

free under the liberty they gained in Christ to eat these things

- Still, James knew how offensive these items would be to Jewish believers
- If Gentiles were to continue in these practices, fellowship with Jews would be impossible
- Secondly, James says no to fornication, which refers to various sexual practices common to pagan worship
 - Because of their association with sexual immorality, it would have been particularly distasteful to Jews
- We need to understand that James isn't proposing that these rules are binding rules on Gentiles or suggest that the Law is still in effect for Gentiles or Jewish believers
 - If there was ever a moment in the history of the church when the opportunity existed to declare that the Law was still in effect for the Gentile, this would have been the perfect moment
 - Instead, James says don't trouble the Gentiles with things that the forefathers couldn't live up to either
 - Clearly, James was not interested in reinstitution the Law for believers
 - But he did ask them to restrict their liberty in four key areas for the sake of the Jewish brethren
 - This is a prime example of what Paul teaches when he tells us not to allow our liberty to become a means for stumbling our brother
 - It's also important to note that our eldership may from time to time make requests of the body to accept restrictions on liberty for a greater good
 - The Bible teaches we are to respect the judgments of our elders and receive their instruction with humility
 - Sometimes their instructions may be wrong or unhelpful, but for as long as we congregate under their leadership, we must respond to their requests as obedience to the Lord

- If their instructions should contradict Scripture, we reach out to them offering correction in the Biblically correct manner given in Scripture
- Finally, in v.21 James gives his justification for making these requests of the Gentile believers
 - He says that in every city from ancient generations there are people who proclaim and read Moses
 - Moses refers to the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible
 - More specifically, it refers to the Law found within those books
 - James is reminding the crowd that in every city where the Gospel is being preached, there are Jews hearing the preaching of the Law
 - If the church was to coexist with Jews in these cities - and perhaps even win a few for Christ - it must remain sensitive to the culture of that day
 - And with Moses read and preached routinely, the church must expect that observant Jews will be found living next to Gentile believers in every town
 - If these Gentiles continue in repulsive practices done in the name of Christ, it will work against the purposes of the Gospel
 - James smartly concludes that it would be better to avoid upsetting the Jews by removing these practices from among the Gentiles who will be congregating with Jews in the new church
 - It will also ensure the harmony and unity of the new church
 - And reduce the possibility of persecution by those same Jews
- So following James' instructions, the plan is put into action

[Acts 15:22](#) ¶ Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas — Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, [Acts 15:23](#) and they sent this letter by them,

“ The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

[Acts 15:24](#) "Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,
[Acts 15:25](#) it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,
[Acts 15:26](#) men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
[Acts 15:27](#) "Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.
[Acts 15:28](#) "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:
[Acts 15:29](#) that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

- We remember that this counsel took place because the first and most prominent Gentile church in Antioch had requested the meeting
 - The Gentiles in Antioch wanted a final decision from the Apostles concerning the truth of the teaching that they be circumcised and follow the Law
 - So James' pronouncement must be delivered to the church in Antioch
 - And from there it would be distributed to other Gentile churches in the region
 - In this case, Paul and Barnabas were on one side of the argument, and so the counsel didn't want the church to doubt the truth of their report (since they had a conflict of interest)
 - So they select two men, Judas and Silas, to accompany Paul and Barnabas and testify to the truth of James and and counsel's judgments
 - We know nothing more about Judas but Silas appears frequently in the book
 - He will accompany Paul on his second missionary journey
 - He was gifted as a prophet and an elder in the Jerusalem church
 - As recognized leaders in the Jerusalem church, these men would be accepted as authorities and their word would be accepted without challenge in Antioch

- Together they carry a letter explaining the decision
 - The first part of the letter renounces the actions and instruction of the men who had visited the church earlier
 - The Pharisees who came preaching circumcision were not men sent with the authority of the Apostles and the Scripture
 - And therefore their teaching should be rejected
 - In their place, the James repeats the instructions agreed upon in Jerusalem
 - Notice in v.28 James credits the Holy Spirit with being the One Who delivered these instructions to the church leaders
 - This is in keeping with Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit would guide the church into all truth, according to John 16:13
 - Finally, notice the end of the letter
 - James says that observing these four restrictions will result in the Gentile church "doing well"
 - He didn't say it would result in righteousness or holiness
 - Or even that it meant they would avoid sin, since these restrictions are not in all cases sin
 - Rather, he says the church will do well, which means the church will prosper and remain united and strong
 - It reflects the fact these instructions were given to unify the body, not for the purpose of ensuring personal holiness or righteousness
- It falls to Paul and Barnabas to deliver the message in the letter to the congregation

[Acts 15:30](#) ¶ So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

[Acts 15:31](#) When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

[Acts 15:32](#) Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.

[Acts 15:33](#) After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out.

[Acts 15:34](#) [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.]

[Acts 15:35](#) But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.

- The occasion for delivering the decision of the counsel is a large congregational meeting
 - We can imagine the tension and anticipation in the room, particularly among the males
 - Would Paul announce that circumcision was a requirement for salvation?
 - Would the Gentiles be required to follow the Law?
 - And in the meantime, were they not saved until these things took place?
 - What a terrible fear to carry, especially after having already trusted that they were saved by faith
- So Paul and Barnabas read the letter, and the crowd rejoices
 - That must have been an understatement
 - Here was an edict of freedom delivered from the head of the Jewish center of evangelism to the head of the Gentile center of evangelism
 - The room was encouraged, and it gave occasion for the two visitors from Jerusalem to give the church a long message
 - Interesting that a long message was an encouragement to the church
 - Remember that the next time your pastor runs long on Sunday
 - These men have the gift of prophecy, so their message probably included both teaching and reports from the church in Jerusalem
 - You can probably compare the experience to a visiting missionary speaking on Sunday
 - After they spoke, the two men hung around the church for a time, and then the church sent them back to Jerusalem
 - In v.34, you may find a statement declaring that Silas remained

- There is good evidence to suggest this was not in the original text written by Luke
 - Instead, some well-meaning scribe added it thinking it would clear up a confusion in Luke's text
 - Notice in v.40 Paul takes Silas from Antioch on his second missionary journey
 - The scribe assumed that Silas couldn't have returned to Jerusalem as described in v.33 since Paul takes Silas with him
- This addition was well-intentioned but unnecessary
 - It is reasonable that Silas would return to Jerusalem after this trip to report to the elders in Jerusalem
 - But then later he returned to Antioch before Paul departed on his journey
 - The scribe made an addition that wasn't correct or necessary
- Before Paul leaves for his second missionary journey, the events of Galatians 2 occurred in the city during this time
 - Peter came up to Antioch and while he was there, elders from Jerusalem visited...perhaps Silas was among them
 - And at their arrival, Peter withdraws from eating with Gentiles
 - It was probably the case that a faction in the Jewish church continued to press for a separation of Jew and Gentile
 - Refusing to accept the decision of the counsel of Jerusalem
 - And though Peter disagreed with them and knew that they were contradicting the Gospel, still he sought their approval at least at times
 - So when these men arrived in Antioch, Peter changed his attitude and stopped eating with the Gentile brothers
 - So Paul says in Galatians 2 he confronted Peter to his face over the hypocrisy

- Speaking of the missionary journey...

[Acts 15:36](#) ¶ After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."

[Acts 15:37](#) Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.

[Acts 15:38](#) But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

[Acts 15:39](#) And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

[Acts 15:40](#) But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

[Acts 15:41](#) And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

- Paul gets the bug to move out again and see what has become of the churches he planted
 - He encourages Barnabas to accompany him again
 - Barnabas agrees but he makes a suggestion that upsets Paul
 - Barnabas wants to take John Mark with them
 - John Mark had abandoned the first missionary journey in Pamphylia, and Paul thought this was reason enough to prevent John Mark from joining the second journey
 - Barnabas stuck by his guns, and this led to a sharp disagreement and separation
 - The words for separation in Greek has a root from which we get the word schism
 - There was a divide between these men over this issue
 - So Paul chooses a new partner in Silas and Barnabas takes John Mark
 - We never hear about Barnabas and John Mark again in the book of Acts
 - They head to Barnabas' home town in Cyprus
 - Though Paul says in 1Cor that they reconciled to a degree and Colossians 4 says they maintained fellowship

- Paul also describes reconciliation with John Mark in 2Tim 4 and Phil 24
- We can make several observations and conclusions from this scene
 - First, those on the frontlines of ministry need partners they can work with and trust
 - We shouldn't work on our own
 - Paul and Barnabas thought it so important who accompanied them that it led to a permanent separation
 - Secondly, fellowship can still be maintained at a distance
 - The fact that they separated didn't require hard feelings
 - Third, the effect of this separation appears to have been similar to the effect of persecution in the church in Jerusalem
 - It resulted in two missionary teams going out instead of only one big one
 - In ministry, our goal shouldn't be to grow but to replicate, and there is a difference
 - Growth by itself becomes just weight and baggage and stagnation
 - Replication produces copycats who want to do the same thing
 - And copycats don't like competition, so they move to new places
 - We want copycats
- This separation also gives opportunity for a new missionary, Silas
 - He is similar to Paul in numerous ways
 - A leader in the Jerusalem church and prophet like Paul
 - He's also a Roman citizen
 - And he is sent out by the church in Antioch with Paul

Acts 16A

- Paul has selected his next traveling partner, Silas, and he departs on his second missionary journey
 - The final verse of 15 last week told us Paul departed by heading north by land
 - He first passes through Syria and then Cilicia
 - Antioch was in Syria, so they pass through this region on their way out of town
 - Then Cilicia was next and included Paul's home town of Tarsus
 - The stated purpose of this trip was to reassure the existing churches
 - But of course Paul continues to evangelize as he moves, especially into new areas
 - As we start the journey in chapter 16 today, we notice Paul picks up another traveler

[Acts 16:1](#) Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, [Acts 16:2](#) and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.

[Acts 16:3](#) Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

- After Tarsus, Paul moves westward among the Mediterranean Sea toward the churches he planted
 - Derbe and Lystra
 - In Lystra Paul encounters a young believer names Timothy
 - Timothy was a son of a mixed marriage, Jewish mother and Greek father
 - And Timothy had a good testimony among the brethren in the region
 - As a result, Paul decides he wants Timothy to accompany him from this point

- Character was always the first test for suitability in service to the Lord in Acts, and this moment is no exception
 - Even before Timothy was taught or mature enough for service, Paul evaluated his character
 - And with a good testimony, Paul decided he was an eligible partner in ministry
 - So often, we get this backwards in the church today
- Timothy is a notable character in the New Testament (two of only four books of the New Testament names for someone other than the author)
 - From those two books written by Paul, we can learn much more about Timothy
 - Lystra was Timothy's home
 - Paul says in 1Tim 1:2 that he led Timothy to faith during Paul's first visit
 - Timothy was taught to study the Scriptures from an early age by his Jewish mother, Eunice who was also converted by Paul
 - He also had a Jewish grandmother names Lois
 - We don't know his Greek father's name, and Luke writes about him in the past tense, so he was dead or gone by this point
 - As the son of a Greek, Timothy's identity as a Jew was probably in question
 - This was especially true since Timothy had never been circumcised
 - Timothy was a young man and seemed to suffer from a nervous or weak stomach
 - Paul advises Timothy to drink wine rather than water only to help his stomach
- Because Paul is planning to carry the Gospel to the Jew first and then the Gentile, he tells Timothy he will need to be circumcised
 - As the text tells us, Timothy's mixed family roots were well known among the Jews in this area

- The mixed marriage was probably a bit scandalous and Timothy was never fully accepted among Jews
- Timothy could have identified himself with either camp
 - He could have remain uncircumcised and adopted a Greek heritage, renouncing any claim to Jewishness
 - But with his knowledge of the Jewish scriptures and his potential to assist Paul in Jewish evangelism, Paul persuaded Timothy to side with his Jewish roots
 - Yet if Timothy were to be accepted by Jews as Jewish, he would first need to confirm to that most Jewish of all rituals: circumcision
 - In fact, if Timothy is to call himself Jewish, he MUST be circumcised according to the requirements of the Abrahamic covenant
- So Paul circumcises Timothy prior to taking the trip so that Jews in the area would receive both men as adequate Jewish representatives
 - This is a pointed example of Paul's own statement in 1Cor 9:20 that Paul was willing to become whoever he needed to win men to Christ
 - Here we see Paul asking Timothy to follow the same standard for the sake of reaching Jews for the Gospel
- Later Paul will encounter another man named Titus
 - In Titus' case, Paul prohibits circumcision in the face of demands by Jewish believers who demanded that all believers receive circumcision
 - Paul wanted to debunk their false teaching, and since Titus was a Gentile he had absolutely no reason to submit to circumcision
 - The situations were very different, so Paul's demands were very different
 - This difference by itself proves that circumcision is not a requirement for salvation

[Acts 16:4](#) Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.

[Acts 16:5](#) So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

- As Paul and Silas and now Timothy move on from Lystra, they deliver the decision of the Jerusalem Counsel
 - Specifically, the relief from following the Law but for the four restrictions asked of the Gentile believers
 - This brought rejoicing all over again in each new location
 - And it allowed the church to grow without hesitation
 - Notice the grow was two-fold
 - The church was strengthened
 - The Greek word means to be made stiff like a strong muscle
 - The church was solidified in its understanding and confidence and boldness to follow Christ
 - And the church was growing numerically
 - The proclamation that salvation is by faith and not works encouraged more growth
 - This is a historical pattern even to today
 - The preaching of the true Gospel and sound doctrine will always strengthen the church in both ways
 - The church will become spiritually stronger as the Gospel is preached boldly and the Word taught consistently
 - And the church will experience some measure of growth
 - But there are other methods that can grow a congregation numerically even faster than preaching the Gospel and teaching the word
 - Slick marketing, games, entertainment, appealing pulpit messages and other nonsense will attract an audience

- While the numerical growth may rocket forward, the spiritual growth will be superficial at best and non-existent at worst
- Seeking numerical growth without spiritual growth is a sin
 - God alone receives credit for the establishing of new faith
 - So we aren't going to receive credit for numeric growth
 - Rather our role as Christ commanded was to disciple believers
 - If we fail to fulfill this mission, disobey the Lord and we sin
- As Paul navigates through Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), Luke describes how Paul came to decide where he should turn

[Acts 16:6](#) They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;

[Acts 16:7](#) and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;

[Acts 16:8](#) and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

[Acts 16:9](#) A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

[Acts 16:10](#) When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- As Paul moves out of Iconium, it seems Paul was intent on moving into West Asia Minor, in the direction of Ephesus or Laodicea
 - But before they could move to these cities, the Holy Spirit forbids that movement, sending Paul eastward instead
 - Then Paul reaches Antioch again
 - Directly north lay Bithynia, northern Turkey
 - In Bithynia was a town called Niceae, from where we received the Nicene Creed at the first ecumenical council in AD 325
 - This is also the likely hiding place of Peter after he fled from Jerusalem
 - Both of Peter's letters are thought to have been written from Bithynia

- But again, Paul is prohibited from traveling north
- We see Paul trying to move west and then north, but having his progress blocked each time
 - And he can't move south due to the Med sea
- Take a look at the text of Acts again and notice that the Holy Spirit never tells Paul where to go
 - The Holy Spirit simply tells Paul where NOT to go
 - And each time, Paul had to pick a new direction and then keep moving
- Have we ever considered that this is the usual method the Spirit uses to guide us in following the Lord's will?
 - As we face decisions and questions in our daily walk, we seek God's counsel in one way or another expecting to here Him say, "Here's what you should do."
 - And yet Scripture would suggest that the Holy Spirit is more inclined to say no to bad options rather than simply laying out the right option
 - This process makes perfect sense when you consider the Spirit's purpose
 - He wants us following, moving, acting
 - He doesn't want us evaluating the "rightness" of God's plans
 - And He doesn't want us to obey on a conditional basis, depending on whether we like His plan
 - So the better approach is to encourage us to move out and then teach us to see the world and our choices and priorities from the Lord's point of view
 - With each turn we learn God's perspective more clearly
 - I think of it like the game pin the tail on the donkey
 - We're blind to God's purposes at least at first

- But as we move, the Holy Spirit is guiding us with hints of “getting hotter” or “getting colder”
 - And as we see the pattern, we get better and working our way to God’s intended target
- This is a slower, more error-prone process for God, but it brings Him glory in the way weak vessels testify to His power in the world
- In Paul’s case we don’t know how the Spirit communicated these prohibitions to Paul, but I assume it was in the same way the Spirit communicates to us
 - A feeling, a sense, a closed door in our planning
 - Reading our circumstances and feeling a peace or hesitation in our heart, we discern the Lord’s leading
 - And so Paul moves the only direction he can: West toward Troas on the Aegean Sea
 - And this was God’s purpose
 - For the Lord desires to expose an entirely new region to the Gospel: Macedonia
 - Macedonia is modern day Greece
 - You can see the shores of Greece from Troas and it was a major sea port connecting Asia Minor with Greece
 - Finally, the Holy Spirit gives Paul a positive indication of where to go
 - This specific direction was necessary for Paul at this point because he had reach a limit on land and needed to know how to proceed next
 - It’s a reminder that God will speak with enough details and in a timing suited to His purpose
 - Notice in v.10 that Luke uses the pronoun “us” for the first time
 - From this point forward, Luke will say “we” or “us” to describe the events of Paul’s ministry
 - This tells us that Luke was likely Paul’s convert from Troas

- And at this point, Luke joins Paul's growing traveling party
- From his exposure to Paul, Luke not only writes the book of Acts, but he also pens the Gospel
 - He accounts for 25% of all the New Testament
 - And he was likely a Gentile

[Acts 16:11](#) ¶ So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;

[Acts 16:12](#) and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

[Acts 16:13](#) And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

[Acts 16:14](#) A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

[Acts 16:15](#) And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

- As Paul responds immediately to the Spirit's direction, we begin a new section in the book of Acts that takes us through chapter 19
 - We're going to see a number of important developments in the this next section
 - Paul is going to advance the Gospel into three major regions of Greek civilization
 - Macedonia, Achaia, and eventually Asia
 - And each area is dominated by it's respective capital city
 - Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus
 - Each city being preserved in the canon of Scripture by their respective letters
 - The letters to the Thessalonians will be written during this trip while Paul stays in Corinth

- Many scholars remark that Paul's work to plant churches in these major centers of Western civilization represented his greatest achievement
 - These cities and their regions covered the northern, western and eastern coasts of the Aegean Sea
 - And together they represented the cradle of Western civilization in that day
- In fact, when we consider that the events of Acts 11-19 represent only 5 years of Paul's life, it was easily the most impressive evangelistic five-year period in the history of the church
 - If you have a five-year plan for your ministry, this is your gold standard against which to measure your progress
- On the way to Macedonia, Paul makes a stop on an island called Samothrace and then on to Neapolis and finally Phillipi
 - Phillipi is the capital city of one of the four Roman districts in Macedonia region
 - Luke says the Paul waited a few days before beginning their ministry
 - This was because the city's Jewish population was so small that it didn't have a synagogue
 - Therefore, Paul had to wait for the Sabbath to find Jewish prayer groups meeting to observe the Sabbath
 - Remember, Paul would never depart from his call to preach to the Jew first and then Gentile
 - Jews would never be more than a remnant, but they are a critically important part of God's plan
 - Once Paul began to work with Gentiles in a given location, the Jews would have turned off to the message en masse
 - So Paul always began with the Jews
 - On the Sabbath Paul widely heads to a river where he assumed Jews would congregate
 - Jewish customs required at least 10 men age 13 or older in a given city before a synagogue could be established

- So if a town lacked that many male Jews, the Jewish customs required the Jews present to congregate in an open area, preferably near a riverside
- Paul knew this custom and went to the nearest river by Phillipi
 - There he finds women in observance of the day
 - This makes sense, since if only 10 men were available, a synagogue would have been in operation
- As Paul spoke to these women, Lydia was given the ability by God to receive the Gospel and she believed
 - Notice in passing the emphasis in Luke's narrative on God's sovereignty in salvation
 - Clearly, the actor Who makes faith itself possible is God Himself
 - Lydia becomes the first European convert to Christianity
 - Yet another prominent woman in Luke's account
 - His record in both Luke and Acts highlights the equal importance of woman in God's plan for the church
 - It's interesting that Paul was drawn to Macedonia by a dream of a man in Macedonia who needed to hear the gospel
 - And yet the first convert was a woman
 - Was she the "man" in the dream?
 - It's also notable that she was a seller of purple dyes
 - Purple was the most difficult die color to obtain since natural sources of the color purple are rare
 - Purple was a part of Royal dress for this reason
 - And the most common location for purple fabric production was in Thyatira, one of the cities receiving a letter in Revelation
 - Not coincidentally, Lydia hailed from Thyatira
 - Lydia was likely a successful business woman in her day
 - And she was also a woman who worshipped God

- This means she was a believing Jew or at least a God-fearing Gentile, believing in the promise of a Jewish Messiah
- As a result of her conversion, she was baptized along with her household, probably in that river
- And she offered the Apostle and entourage a place to stay

[Acts 16:16](#) It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

[Acts 16:17](#) Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."

[Acts 16:18](#) She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.

- Later, Paul is returning to this place of prayer, probably because his earlier trip had resulted in numerous women becoming Christian
 - And now Paul has made a routine of going to this place to minister to these early believers
 - On his way he was joined by a slave girl
 - Luke says the girl had a spirit of divination, but the phrase in the Greek is very different
 - The phrase is literally a python spirit
 - The reference to a snake reminds us of Satan in the Garden and tells us this is a demonic spirit
 - Luke uses the word python because of Greek mythology at the time
 - The belief at the time was the girl was occupied by the Greek god Apollo and spoke prophetically by his power
 - The python was a serpent that guarded the Delphic Oracle and was killed by Apollos, who then obtained the Oracle's powers for himself
 - Later, all diviners came to be known as pythons

- So this girl is indwelt by a spirit that can speak prophetically, but we know this spirit is not one of Greek mythology but is demonic
 - All occult practices and beliefs, including those of ancient civilizations trace their power back to Satan, whether they realize it or not
 - This is the sorcery or divination that the Bible warns against
- As we'll learn next week, unscrupulous men had discovered this slave girl's demonic powers and had trapped her in a money-making enterprise of fortune-telling
- The girl declares publicly that Paul is preaching the true gospel
 - The announcing continues for several days, and we can assume it helped draw crowds to Paul's message
 - Finally, Paul becomes annoyed by it all and casts the demon out of the girl
- This passage raises two immediate questions
 - First, why does this demon-possessed girl proclaim this God-glorifying truth
 - Wouldn't the demon want to do anything BUT glorify God?
 - The answer is that God will use everything in His creation to bring Himself glory
 - The demons inside this woman could no more resist God's will than we can
 - Remember Balaam in NUMbers 22? He is intent on cursing Israel but ends up blessing them instead?
 - Or the patriarchs who tried to bless the wrong child against God's wishes
 - Or Satan Himself who indwelt Judas and brought Jesus to the cross only to learn that was God's purpose from the beginning?
 - So God has directed the demon to act in this way to suit God's purposes in Paul's ministry

- This also goes to prove what James says concerning demons
- They know the loving God and they know Jesus, but they do not have the God-given capacity to follow and worship Him
- As Hebrews says, God does not give help to angels (meaning demons)
- This leads us to the second question
 - Why does Paul tolerate the girl's outbursts for a time but then change his mind and run the demon out of the girl later?
 - The text says Paul was annoyed or worn out
 - The answer for why is probably equally simple
 - At some point the woman stopped being an advantage to Paul's minister work and started becoming a hindrance
 - Before Paul's message in the city was widely heard and understood, the heralding was helpful to Paul's mission
 - But once the work of the Gospel has taken hold in the hearts of the people, signs and miracles cease
 - Eventually, Paul doesn't want the truth of God's word to compete with sensational proclamations or sideshows
 - Plus, the woman is associated with pagan religious power and beliefs, so associating too closely with her begins to complicate Paul's message after a while
 - And of course, Paul was human and the prospect of a woman screaming this announcement over and over would have driven anyone crazy after a while
 - The lesson is that while the Gospel can be introduced through sensational, attention-grabbing means, the long-term growth of the Gospel can't depend upon it
 - The growth of the church is dependent on the word of God and the saving work of the Spirit to bring faith

- This story is sandwiched between the quiet saving moment of Lydia and a remarkable story of the jailor's salvation in the second half of the chapter
 - It would seem Luke has linked these events to show that miracles and side shows are merely secondary to the real mover and shaker: the Holy Spirit and the word of God

Acts 16B

- We step back into a moment with Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke as Paul confronts a slave girl indwelt by a demon

[Acts 16:16](#) It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

[Acts 16:17](#) Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."

[Acts 16:18](#) She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.

- Last week we focused on why Paul tolerates the girl's outbursts for a time but then change his mind and run the demon out of the girl later
 - We know Paul was annoyed (or the Greek literally means worn out)
 - We concluded that at some point the woman's yelling stopped being an advantage to Paul's ministry in the way it attracted a crowd
 - And it became a hindrance
 - Once the work of the Gospel has taken hold in the hearts of the people, the signs and miracles and demonic marketing cease
 - Paul doesn't want the truth of God's word to compete with sensational proclamations or sideshows
 - Nor would he have wanted the woman's demonic and fortune-telling past to become too closely associated with the message of the gospel
- So Paul acts to rescue the young woman and himself from this predicament
 - But that's not the end of the affair

[Acts 16:19](#) ¶ But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities,
[Acts 16:20](#) and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,
[Acts 16:21](#) and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."

- This story is part of a larger narrative that Luke is just beginning
 - The basic theme is Paul preaching, the Greek believing, the Jews persecuting
 - Here we see the seeds of that pattern
 - First, Paul is preaching, but in this case his preaching included a healing that upset some locals
 - From this encounter comes an accusation that starts the pattern
 - The problem that starts the encounter is simple enough
 - The girl had her demon removed, so she can no longer speak prophetically
 - Consider this simple event for just a second
 - God has the power to direct the demons, and did so through Paul's words
 - Paul simply spoke words that we assume he felt the Spirit giving him
 - And based on words alone, the spirit realm was moved against its will
 - And as the demons left, so did her powers to tell fortune
 - This event is a powerful reminder of two facts
 - First, the demon realm is real
 - As real as this pulpit and our own bodies
 - We can't see demons and we don't normally encounter them, but they are around

- And they operate through the physical realm including in the bodies of other people
- These people aren't necessarily aware of the demon's presence and they are not able to push the demon away
 - They are unwitting hosts

[Matt. 12:43](#) "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it.

[Matt. 12:44](#) "Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order.

[Matt. 12:45](#) "Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation."

- This is still their pattern today
 - When we encounter people who seems to access supernatural power, remember that they may be accessing a power other than God
- Secondly, the God we serve can direct them as easily as He directs anything in His creation
 - They do not hold equal power with Him
 - If they make their mark in our lives, it is merely because God permitted it
 - And when God is ready to dismiss them, they obey without exception
- In this case, the departure of the demon rendered the girl useless to her masters, so they attack back to Paul and Silas
 - There is an important detail to notice in vs.20-21
 - They note that Paul and Silas are Jews
 - And that they were throwing the city into confusion
 - Teaching things that are unlawful for Romans to do
 - If these charges had any merit at all (doubtful), it would have been because it was illegal under Romans for someone to persuade a Roman to leave Emperor worship

- So perhaps Paul was accused of teaching something illegal because of this law
- More importantly, the accusers essentially claim that it is a Jewish problem
 - By pointedly noting Paul's Jewishness, the men are appealing to anti-Semitism
 - They are claiming that the problem is more than just a Christian message
 - After all, they didn't understand the distinction at this point
 - They were just mad about losing their income
 - So they say this is a Jewish problem, potentially stirring up the city against the Jews as a whole
- This accusation is so important to this section in Acts because it goes a long way to explaining the persecution that will come from the Jews
 - Remember these are Hellenistic Jews, and as such they were much less likely to be upset at Paul's message
 - Wherever Paul has gone so far in the Diaspora, he has seen relatively little Jewish persecution
 - Some received his message, most ignored it, a few Jews were upset at times, but there was little organized opposition
 - Now we have the seeds for organized Jewish persecution that was about to rise within the Hellenistic Jewish population
 - As these men declared that Paul's words were a threat to the Roman empire, they laid blame at the feet of Jews as a whole
 - The Jewish religion was the only religion within the entire Roman empire that was exempt from the requirement to worship the Emperor
 - The Romans had discovered that the Jews were largely unrulable if they were prevented from worshipping according to their Law
 - So to keep the peace in a compromise, Rome made a rare exception for the Jewish religion
 - This was a delicate balance

- The Romans didn't want their generosity to become excuse for the Jews to disrupt the peace or mock Roman rule
- The Jews didn't want zealots or troublemakers to antagonize the Roman authorities and risk losing their special status
- Furthermore, other religions were jealous of the Jews and would have loved to end their dispensation out of spite
- Finally, there is the spiritual dimension of the Enemy warring against God's people in any way he can
- So against this backdrop, here's Paul and Silas preaching a new religion
 - Yet to untrained ears it seems to be another version of Judaism
 - And when it runs into conflict with the fortuneteller's income, they strike back at all Jews
 - This was a time of growing Jewish persecution
 - The Emperor Claudius had recent expelled all Jews from Rome and set the stage for greater anti Semetism
 - Here the men claim that the Jews are using their special dispensation to disrupt Roman peace and teach unlawful things
 - Of course, this wasn't the true story, but it was believed and it had two immediate effects
 - First, it gave the Gentiles authorities permission to act upon their anti-Semitic bias and attack Paul and Silas
 - More importantly, it struck fear into the hearts of the Jewish leaders who then had reason to silence Paul and distance themselves from his teaching
 - Here we have the basis for the next several chapters of Jewish persecution
- The immediate effect of their accusations, however, was an uprising among the Gentiles

[Acts 16:22](#) The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.

[Acts 16:23](#) When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely;

[Acts 16:24](#) and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

- Each Roman colony city was ruled by a pair of magistrates or city leaders, and these leaders respond to the crowd's concerns and order an illegal punishment for Roman citizens
 - They order that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods
 - They were stripped of their outer clothing - essentially into the underwear of that day
 - The magistrates themselves take the lead in the stripping
 - This stripping was a shameful acts for Jews
 - In fact, Paul mentions being shamed in Phillipi in his first letter to the Thessalonians

[1Th. 2:2](#) but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

- Paul will head to Thessalonica after leaving Phillipi
- Even the magistrates themselves participated in the violence against Paul and Silas
 - The actual beating would have been done by what were the equivalents of police in the Roman system, called lictors
 - This is another Rodney King moment
 - I wonder if Silas is having second thoughts about accompanying Paul at this point?
 - They were struck with many blows
 - In Jewish law, the limit was 40 minus 1 (39)
 - Under Roman law, the limit was set by the judge, but in this case there was no judge...just mob violence

- So we're left to imagine how many blows Paul and Silas were subjected to
- After the beating, they are placed in prison under the guard of the jailor
 - This kind of treatment was a crime in itself, since Romans citizens were to receive due process before punishment
 - By beating Romans before a hearing or pronouncement of guilt, the city officials were committing a serious crime
 - We don't know why Paul and Silas don't reveal they are citizens before the beating
 - Or perhaps they never had a chance, though that seems unlikely given that Paul has opportunity to do so under similar circumstances in a later moment
 - Perhaps Paul wanted the leverage over the magistrates or felt he was ordained by God to receive this treatment
- The jailor was ordered to hold them securely
 - Under Roman law, if the jailor allowed an escape, he was subjected to the death penalty
 - To be sure they didn't escape, he placed them in the inner prison
 - This was a room deep within the prison that lacked windows and no light
 - The only air that made its way inside came when the door was opened
 - And then to top it all off, they were placed in stocks
 - Their feet were locked through holes in a large wood log, to prevent them from standing
 - Given their painful beating, this kind of forced positioning would have been agony

[Acts 16:25](#) But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;

[Acts 16:26](#) and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

- The men endure this situation for a few hours, but then the Lord shakes things up, so to speak
 - Before we look at the earthquake, we can't help but marvel at how Paul and Silas are spending their time
 - They are praying and singing hymns
 - Obviously, both the prayers and singing is done out loud
 - Interestingly, their position in the inner room has placed them in the perfect place to reach all the residents of the prison
 - Being in the center of the prison, the inner room was the perfect place to be heard throughout the building
 - These were not the kinds of sounds the other prisoners would have expected to hear coming from this place
 - In fact, when Paul and Silas were led into this room, the other prisoners must have been thinking that these guys were going to be miserable
 - Instead, they're holding a church service
 - Soon, what these men have heard changes the life of one man
 - We should remember that Paul is in Phillippi
 - And his letter sent back to this city is built on a theme of being content under any circumstances, finding joy under any circumstances, and keep looking to your eternal reward
- A strong and sudden earthquake strikes the prison
 - By the nature of the circumstances and what follows, it's obvious that this event is supernatural in origin and purpose
 - God is working to release Paul and Silas so that He might accomplish a greater work through the experience
 - But the event itself is entirely natural
 - A strong earthquake shakes the entire structure

- It forces open all the doors by breaking their jams and hinges likely
- Even the chains that held the prisoners to their cell walls were set loose from the walls
 - They likely remained locked around their wrists, though that's unclear from the text
- And under any other circumstances, every prisoner would have run out of the prison while they had the chance
 - Unless of course they perceive the source of the earthquake as supernatural and attribute it to the worship of Paul and Silas
 - In which case, the prisoners would have been attracted to Paul and Silas to understand what kind of power they had to accomplish such wonders

[Acts 16:27](#) When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

[Acts 16:28](#) But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"

[Acts 16:29](#) And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas,

[Acts 16:30](#) and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

- At the earthquake, the jailer awoke
 - We can note immediately that he wasn't hearing the worship that Paul and Silas were conducting for the benefit of the rest of the jail
 - He's heard nothing until the earthquake
 - Now as he surveys the damage and learns that all prisoners were set free by the earthquake
 - The jailer immediately understood what this meant
 - The penalty for losing even one prisoner was the death penalty, much less the entire jail
 - Romans had a very black and white view of such things
 - So the jailer decides that a self-inflicted wound would be better than waiting for the inevitable sentence from his superiors

- Paul somehow learns of the man's predicament, probably anticipating what he might conclude
 - But Paul knew something that the jailor didn't know
 - The cells were empty, but the prisoners hadn't moved outside the prison
 - They have moved deeper into the prison to join Paul and Silas
 - Having been a captive audience to Paul and Silas' singing and prayer, they had been converted to the Gospel
 - And now they were drawn to these men
 - What a powerful example of Romans 8:28
 - God turning all things to good for those who love Him
- Paul calls the man over, and he arrives to see an astonishing sight
 - Can you imagine the expression on his face when he turned on the lamps and took in the scene?
 - He has been the jailor for each of these men and we can trust he was stern with each of them
 - And now they have been set free en masse in a way that would have made it difficult for anyone to find them and recapture them
 - And instead of fleeing, they are sitting in and around Paul and Silas's cell
 - Remember, that Romans didn't incarcerate criminals for very long
 - There was no long term prison population
 - If you were in prison, it was just a waiting period, usually until you were sentenced to death
 - So remaining in jail was essentially suicide
 - What does the jailor think when he comes upon this scene?
 - Stunned isn't strong enough

- In fact, the scene is so striking and unexpected, that he immediately asks Paul and Silas the most important question anyone can ask
 - How can I be saved?
- I think the thing that motivated the jailor to ask this question was love in a way
 - Consider that had Paul and Silas left the prison, then the rest of the prisoners would have certainly followed
 - And as the jailor looks upon this scene, he must have immediately recognized that the prison population was following Paul and Silas
 - Furthermore, Paul himself was the one who called out to the jailor and called him by saying here “we” are
- And yet Paul and Silas remained, and with them all the prisoners
 - This is a kind of love in action as far as the jailor is concerned
 - He realizes that not only has Paul and Silas determined to remain in the prison and thereby save the jailor’s life
 - Secondly, they called out to him and prevented him from committing suicide when they didn’t have to intervene
- This is the love that the jailor experienced
 - And as he contemplates it all in a moment, the Spirit moves him to ask the fundamental question every man should ask
 - How can I be saved?
 - We’re not sure if he meant it in the full soteriological sense
 - Did he mean how can I be saved from the judgment for my sins? Perhaps he heard some of the praying and singing and felt this was the time to ask
 - Or did he mean how can I be saved from the punishment of my superiors? Perhaps he still wondered if some prisoners had escaped

- Or maybe he meant how can I be saved from your power to bring about earthquakes.
- Regardless of what he thought he was asking, Paul gives him the one right answer

[Acts 16:31](#) They said, " Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

[Acts 16:32](#) And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.

[Acts 16:33](#) And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.

[Acts 16:34](#) And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

- First, Paul gives the jailor the Gospel accounts in simple terms
 - But he adds that both the jailor and his household would be saved
 - What is Paul implying? Will one man's salvation save everyone in his family?
 - We know this isn't the general testimony of Scripture, so the meaning must be elsewhere in this content
 - The likely explanation is that Paul had foreknowledge or other insight to conclude that God intended to work through this man and the rest of his family
 - Paul was essentially speaking prophetically to this man concerning God's plans for him and his family
 - We can't give equal assurances to other people concerning their family unless we have received a revelation from the Lord concerning His plans
- Importantly, Paul and Silas speak the word of God to the jailor in conjunction with the call to believe
 - Just as Paul himself wrote later that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ
 - The man believes in this Gospel, and as a result he changes from being their jailor to their nurse
 - He washes their wounds

- And they baptize the jailor
- Can you imagine the emotions in that night?
 - A man who was inflicting their wounds is changed by the words of the Gospel into a man who feels compassion for those same wounds and treats them
 - Can you imagine what it must have been like to receive the Gospel from the man you were persecuting just a few hours earlier?
 - And isn't the love of God amazingly powerful in the way it changes hearts and leads men to a new walk?
- The jailor takes Paul and Silas to his own house, which was probably located on the prison grounds
 - He feeds them, and they rejoiced together, both the jailor and the rest of his household

[Acts 16:35](#) ¶ Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men."

[Acts 16:36](#) And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace."

[Acts 16:37](#) But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out."

[Acts 16:38](#) The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans,

[Acts 16:39](#) and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.

[Acts 16:40](#) They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

- At this point, we are forced to conclude that after this night of rejoicing, Paul, Silas and the rest of the prisoners return to their cells
 - Despite the earthquake damaging the prison, they voluntarily return to their places
 - This means that likely some of the other prisoners were led to the deaths
 - Were these new believers? In at some if not all cases, the answer would be yes

- And yet God asked them to remain in prison and go to their deaths so that the jailor could be brought to the point of his own salvation
- Just as Paul himself later, Christians were required in the early church to go to their death for the sake of the spread of the Gospel
 - We may be asked to do the same to the glory of God
- The next morning, the leaders determine to let Paul and Silas free
 - The magistrates send policemen, lictors, to set them free
 - These are the same kind of men that beat Paul in the first place
 - When the jailor tells Paul he is free, Paul drops the surprising news that he's a Roman citizen
 - And indignantly, he asks that after a beating and imprisonment, they just expect him to leave quietly
 - Paul says let them come and get me out
 - Paul was quite bold, but he was very much within his rights
 - A crime had been committed against him, and he was demanding justice
 - When the lictor or policeman relayed this news to the magistrates, they realize how much trouble they are in
 - Now the situation is completely reversed
 - They ask Paul for forgiveness and mercy
 - And they ask Paul to leave the city so that the news will not spread about their actions
 - Paul doesn't seem interested in leaving too quickly, so he visits Lydia again before moving on
- We said last week that Luke uses this chapter to link Lydia, the slave girl and the Roman jailor
 - Look at the spectrum represented here

- A Jewish woman business owner dealing in the richest fabric in the Empire
 - A woman at the very top of the economic ladder
- And a slave girl possessed by a demon and exploited by unscrupulous men
 - The absolute lowest station in Roman society - a slave woman
- And finally, a representative of the Roman state
 - The decidedly Greek middle class of the society
- Paul has entered Europe for the first time and has influenced all levels of society as Luke reflects in the narrative
 - And along the way, Paul has sown the seeds for Jewish dissent that will become a continual problem for his ministry

Acts 17A

- We rejoin Paul's second missionary journey
 - He's left Philippi and he's headed west-southwest along the northern coast of the Aegean Sea
 - He still has Timothy, Silas but Luke stays behind in Philippi
 - Notice that Luke no longer writes in the first person plural ("we" has become "they")
 - Luke rejoins Paul in Acts 20 when Paul reaches Philippi on his third missionary journey, and first person plural returns

[Acts 17:1](#) ¶ Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

- We're stopping on verse 1 only briefly to note that Paul does not stop in the first two towns he visits
 - Given Paul's route, we know Paul is walking along a stretch of Roman highway known as the Egnatian Way
 - A major Roman road that crossed East-West from the Black Sea to the Adriatic Sea
 - A distance of about 600 miles
 - Like all major Roman roads, it was about 20 feet wide and lined with polygon stones covered with hard packed sand
 - It passed through modern day Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, and Albania
 - By the time Paul walked its length, it had already existed for nearly 300 years, and it was a major avenue for commerce
 - Connecting the Eastern parts of the Empire with Rome itself
 - As Paul walks from Philippi, he passes through two towns without even bothering to stop
 - The first two towns are not insignificant cities, yet Paul moves through them

- Then Luke pointedly says that Paul stops in Thessalonica where a synagogue of Jews existed
 - We know there is no record of a synagogue in either of the first two towns
 - So it seems that when Paul couldn't bring the Gospel to the Jew first, as God directed, he kept walking until he reached a town with an audience of Jews
- So Paul lands in Thessalonica
 - It was a large city, about 200,000 strong and the capitol of Macedonia
 - While Paul stayed here, he lived initially from support sent to him from the church in Philippi
 - Paul mentions the Philippian's support in his letter to that city in chapter 4
 - Before the support began to arrive, Paul supported himself through tent making, as he describes in both his letters to Thessalonica

[Acts 17:2](#) And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

[Acts 17:3](#) explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

[Acts 17:4](#) And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

- As as we've seen before, Paul first goes to the synagogue to give the Jews the opportunity to know that their Messiah had come
 - Luke says something noteworthy in describing Paul's technique in this town
 - Paul reasoned with the Jews in this synagogue
 - The Greek word for reasoned has a root word from which we get the word dialog
 - This is rational discourse on Paul's part
 - And then Luke says Paul explained and gave evidence that Jesus was the Christ

- What kind of “evidence” do you think Paul offered?
 - First, Paul would have offered his eye-witness testimony from having seen the resurrected Lord
 - Secondly, Paul used the Scriptures to make his arguments
 - Notice that Paul works to explain that Jesus HAD to suffer and die
 - This would have been the sticking point for the Jewish audience, which would have been confused to learn that the Messiah had come to die
- Paul is working from Scripture to preach the Gospel by reason to a Jewish audience
 - Paul never gives a miracle, raises someone from the dead
 - Paul never offers to heal someone to prove his story
 - Weren’t those miracles given to Apostles so that they could use them to validate their story?
 - And since Paul has used them for Gentiles, why doesn’t he use them now for the Jews?
 - For that matter, we haven’t seen Paul making efforts to reason with the Greeks from Scripture as he is doing here
 - He makes the presentation and often it’s accompanied by miracles to gain their confidence
 - It seems Paul uses tow opposite approaches depending on his audience
 - But the one common denominator is that both hear the message of that Christ was crucified for our sins
 - This is in keeping with what Paul said in 1Corinthians

[1Cor. 1:22](#) For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;
[1Cor. 1:23](#) but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,
[1Cor. 1:24](#) but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- Paul knew the Jews wanted to see miracles and Greek loved to debate ideas, but these fleshly pursuits only served to distract them from the truth

- So Paul resisted giving them what they wanted
- Instead, he offered them the message of the cross
- A message that was - and is - a message of foolishness to anyone other than those who are called
- In this case, the message finds a receptive audience with some of the Jews, a large number of the Greeks who attended the synagogue, and a few of the leading women of the city
 - Remember, a leading woman usually men the wife of a leading man, an official of some kind
- A period of time goes by, which Luke skips over
 - Though we can read about some of the intervening events in Paul's two letters to this city
 - By v.5, a large and committed church has been established in the city

[Acts 17:5](#) But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

[Acts 17:6](#) When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also;

[Acts 17:7](#) and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

[Acts 17:8](#) They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.

[Acts 17:9](#) And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

- As we've seen many times already, the preaching of the Gospel stirs the Jews to jealousy and they react with hatred
 - They organize a conspiracy and set the city in an uproar
 - Remember, we're talking about a city of nearly 200,000 people, so it's likely that they incited pockets of hostility in every areas of the city where the church was operating
 - Paul alludes to this period of persecution during his first letter to the city

[1Th. 2:13](#) ¶ For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

[1Th. 2:14](#) For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,

[1Th. 2:15](#) who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men,

[1Th. 2:16](#) hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

- The men hired by the Jews were actually a regular fixture in many Roman towns
 - They were unemployed or underemployed low class individuals who loitered in marketplaces and offered themselves for hire
 - One curious odd job common within Roman society was professional heckler or professional fan
 - These men could be hired to follow someone around and heckle them or applaud them, depending on whether you wanted to harass an individual or compliment them
 - The KJV translates their description as “men of the baser sort”
 - Some older Bible translations translate it “as wicked men of the lowest rabble”
 - This is where we get the term “rabble rouser”
 - Someone who rouses up the rabble is someone who hires the rabble to heckle or cause a disturbance
 - In this case, the Jews hired the rabble rousers, and the effect was to start an uproar
- Looking for Paul, the crowd starts at the home of the man who has been hosting Paul and his traveling companions
 - They search the home but cannot find Paul so they do the next best thing...they take his host, Jason
 - They announce charges before the city officials

- Jason is associating with men who upset the world
- The Greek word for “world” means the inhabited world, and it probably refers to all of the Roman empire
- In other words, they are accusing Paul and Jason by association with causing a disturbance of the peace in the Roman Empire
- Secondly, they are accused of treason for convincing people to worship someone other than the Caesar
 - Both of these charges are political in nature, so these Jewish leaders have learned from their forerunners in Jerusalem
 - The Jewish leaders in Jesus day also prompted the Roman authorities to act against Jesus on the basis of political charges, rather than religious charges
- By this point, you can be sure that Jason and the other believers caught up in this melee are pretty nervous over what’s happening
 - In a very real sense, Jason’s life is on the line
 - So they offer him the opportunity to escape punishment if he makes a pledge, or literally a payment of a bond
 - Jason posted bail, with the understanding that Paul and Silas would leave the city
 - If Jason failed at his word, he would forfeit his bond and be subject to prosecution

[Acts 17:10](#) The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

[Acts 17:11](#) Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

[Acts 17:12](#) Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

- Clearly, Jason didn’t want Paul to leave, but Jason had little choice under the circumstances except to post the bond and agree to the terms
 - Likewise, Paul himself wouldn’t have wanted to leave, but he must have seen the situation as God’s will and obeyed

- Not wanting to jeopardize Jason further, Paul and Silas leave quickly
- In fact, they leave at night, which was unusual and showed great urgency
- If we look at what Paul says in 2Thess, we find what may be a evidence that Paul never returned for Jason's sake

[1Th. 2:17](#) ¶ But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while — in person, not in spirit — were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

[1Th. 2:18](#) For we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, more than once — and yet Satan hindered us.

- Paul travels further down the Egnatian Road to Berea
 - Paul is willing to stop in Berea because this is a town with a synagogue
 - This town is mentioned only here in all Scripture, and its role is relatively minor in the story of Acts
 - In fact, Cicero referred to Berea as the “out of the way city”
 - And yet many Bible students have heard of the Bereans because of one comment Luke makes regarding the Bereans’ unique practice of fact-checking their teachers
 - Luke compares them to the Thessalonians calling them more noble-minded
 - It’s hard to tell if the comparison was intended as a criticism of the Thessalonians or a way of complimenting of the Bereans or both
 - Luke uses the term “noble” to describe the Bereans to mean they were at a higher level than the Thessalonians
 - In the sense that they were practicing their faith at a higher state of maturity
 - We need to look carefully at why they receive this famously unique commendation
 - First, they received the word with great eagerness

- The Greek word for eagerness actually has a more subtle meaning
- A better English rendering would be receiving the word with all readiness of mind
- The Bereans were ready to receive what Paul preached
 - They had prepared their minds for the truth of the Gospel
 - Obviously, the Bereans were good students of Scripture and knew the OT prophecies concerning the Messiah
 - So when Paul began to reason from Scripture, they were already familiar with the OT prophecies concerning the Messiah
 - This made it much easier for them to accept what they were hearing from Paul
- Imagine yourself a teacher lecturing to a room of students
 - Would you rather lecture to a group that has done its homework and is familiar with the material?
 - Or to a group that didn't do the reading and hasn't got the foggiest notion what you're talking about?
 - Which one makes your job easier?
- The Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians because they had done their homework
 - So they were prepared to hear about the arrival of a Messiah
 - They had read the OT prophecies and knew what to look for in a Messiah
 - Once Paul explained Jesus, they would have recognized the fulfillment of prophecy instantly
- Today, we still have the need to be prepared students of the Word
 - But today the emphasis is in understanding how to live a life that hears the Spirit's call and responds to His direction
- Secondly, Luke says they are in the habit of checking the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true

- They aren't letting anyone get away with teaching error
 - This is an outgrowth of their devotion to study
 - They are always ready to learn, but they insist on checking for themselves
 - They don't take someone else's word blindly
 - They want to see it for themselves in God's word
- These two qualities made the Bereans noble
 - They pleased God by studying the word intently on a regular basis, while remaining always ready to learn more
 - And checking the facts of other teachers
- This brief mention of the Bereans has gained so much attention in the church over the years because it clarifies the importance of knowing God's word
 - In this case, their knowledge ensured they were ready to receive the Gospel when it appeared
 - And they were ready to contend with false teaching any time it appeared
 - This kind of noble-mindedness has fallen out of fashion in the church, and it probably explains why the church suffers so much at the hands of false teachers and bad doctrines
- But in a pattern that we've seen before, the Jews begin to harass Paul again

[Acts 17:13](#) But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

[Acts 17:14](#) Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there.

[Acts 17:15](#) Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

- In this case, these weren't even Berean Jews
 - They came from Thessalonica about 50 miles away

- And they begin using the same tactics again to stir up crowds
 - You can see how spiteful and hateful the Jews were when you consider the trouble they took to stop the spreading of the Gospel
- In response, the newly established church in Berea send Paul away from the city
 - They send him as far as the sea, meaning to a sea port on the Aegean Sea
 - But this time he leaves Timothy and Silas behind hoping they will go unnoticed
 - It's likely that the Jews came so quickly this time that Paul hadn't been in Berea long enough to fully establish the church in doctrine and practice
 - So Silas and Timothy have the job of continuing the discipleship in Berea for a little while
 - We see some evidence of Paul's hasty departure in his letters back to the city when he has to work hard to correct their poor understanding concerning the end times and other issues
- Paul leaves under Berean escort and eventually catches a ship bound for Athens
 - The reuniting of Paul with his three companions is a bit complicated, and the details aren't recorded in this chapter
 - But we can piece it together from other chapters in Acts and from many of Paul's letters
 - Paul reached Athens alone, but then later sends for Silas and Timothy to join him in the city, which they do
 - After they join him in Athens, Paul sends Timothy back to Thessalonica and Silas to Macedonia
 - Then Paul himself leaves Athens and goes to the next major city around the Aegean Sea: Corinth
 - Paul reaches Corinth alone but Timothy and Silas later return to join him there

- Finally, Luke rejoins Paul when he comes back through Philippi in Acts 20 on his third missionary journey

[Acts 17:16](#) ¶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

[Acts 17:17](#) So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

- Athens was the intellectual capital of the Roman Empire
 - It had once been the most developed city in the world, but at this point it had fallen down
 - Still, it retained it's intellectual pride
- While in Athens, Paul can't help but notice that this city was a center for idol worship
 - And it provokes or stirs him to respond
 - It's unlikely that the idol worship Paul witnesses was common among the Jewish population
 - Nevertheless he begins his ministry in the city by witnessing in the synagogue as usual
 - I find it helpful to remember that even when Paul was in a waiting mode, he never stopped the work of ministry
 - He's waiting in Athens for his friends to join him, but he was never idle in ministry, even when he waited
 - Ministry is what happens while you're planning your next mission trip
 - Paul continues his preaching in the marketplace for a number of days
 - The marketplace was a large square in the heart of the city surrounded by prominent public buildings and shops
 - This is classic street evangelism, and Paul's task was challenging, because he wouldn't have been the only one offering new ideas
 - Greeks congregated in places like this precisely to hear the latest thinking or engage in debate on topics of the day
 - Paul became just another voice, albeit one bringing truth

- Eventually, Paul caught the ears of some important men of the city

[Acts 17:18](#) And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities," — because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

[Acts 17:19](#) And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?"

[Acts 17:20](#) "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean."

[Acts 17:21](#) (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

- The Epicureans and Stoics represented two competing philosophical viewpoints within Greek society
 - The Epicureans were followers of the Greek philosopher Epicurus who lived at the end of the 4th century BC
 - They believed that it was impossible to find pure truth, so they maintained that the pursuit of truth was pointless
 - Therefore, the chief pursuit of life should be pleasure rather than knowledge
 - They also believed there was no afterlife, and the gods lived apart from men and had no contact with men
 - Thus Epicureans were effectively atheist
 - The end result was that life should be an attempt to maximize personal pleasure
 - The Stoics lived at the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum
 - They followed Zeno who lived in the 3rd century BC
 - He taught in the Stoa Portico, or porch, so his followers became known as the stoics
 - The highest goal of life for a Stoic was detaching from all emotionalism and live in perfect agreement with nature and reason
 - The only good in the world was to live virtuously with perfect reason

- And the only evil was to lack reason
- Death, pain were not evil; pleasure and joy were not good
- Stoics made a goal of maintaining a brave and indifferent attitude in the face of pain, suffering or death
 - Likewise, they repressed emotions of joy or happiness so as to project complete contentment regardless of circumstances
 - Roman society was attracted to stoicism because it valued seriousness, endurance and bravery
- When they hear Paul, they take note of his odd message
 - They say he is a babbler (literally: seed-picker)
 - And they say he is preaching about strange gods because he mentions Jesus and the resurrection
 - This is a play on Greek words
 - They think he is preaching strange gods because they hear about Jesus and another God called “resurrection”
 - The Greek word for resurrection is anastasis
 - There was a Greek god named with the same word, Anastasis
- So they judge Paul worthy to join them in a special debate society that met on the Aeropagus, or Mars Hill
 - As Luke says, this was a place where men met to debate ideas back and forth with no really purpose except the entertainment value
 - And into this setting, Paul has a huge open door to present the Gospel

Acts 17B

- At the end of chapter 17, Paul has filled his time waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him by street preaching to the pagan Greek city
 - On one day he caught the attention of two leading schools of philosophy, the Epicureans and the Stoics
 - Consequently, they invite Paul to join an elite group of privileged thinkers and debaters who met on Mars Hill and passed their time challenging each others' ideas
 - Into this setting where the blind lead the blind, Paul steps in with the truth..

[Acts 17:19](#) And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?"

[Acts 17:20](#) "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean."

[Acts 17:21](#) (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

[Acts 17:22](#) So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.

[Acts 17:23](#) "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

- Paul is at his best in this moment as he rises to the occasion and preaches the Gospel
 - Luke probably recorded this scene in part because it shows such fine example of how this short, Jewish Pharisee could adapt his approach to reach any audience
 - We could spend some time analyzing Paul's approach to presenting the Gospel, but for today we'll just hit the highlights
 - Before looking at Paul's statements in detail, we see a difference already from what we've seen Paul do in the past
 - Remember to the Jews in Thessalonica, Paul reasoned with the Jews and offered proof that Jesus was the Messiah
 - We said proof was Scripture from the Old Testament
 - In this scene, Paul never references Scripture at all

- Considering his audience, this makes perfect sense, right?
 - They didn't know the Jewish Scriptures and wouldn't have cared if Paul quoted them
- So Paul takes an entirely different, culturally appropriate approach
- Paul opens his statement with a wonderful comment that has two meanings simultaneously
 - Paul walks a fine line between flattery, which is a dishonest compliment, and criticism
 - He says they are "very religious" in all respects
 - The Greek word is deisidaimon, which has two meanings in Greek
 - It can mean religious as in pious or as in superstitious
 - By using this word, Paul gave his audience the chance to hear it as a compliment (i.e., pious)
 - While Paul himself meant it more as a statement of fact, though with a negative connotation (they were superstitious)
 - Undoubtedly, his opening gained their attention since Paul was clearly not from around these parts
 - As a visitor invited to join this elite group, Paul understood the need to be polite and respectful of his audience
 - Paul also appreciated that this group appreciated oratory skill
 - So he elevated his game, so to speak, to meet their expectations
- Next, Paul does something that every good preacher worth his keep will do when visiting a new audience
 - He looks for a "hook"
 - A hook is any device or prop taken from the culture or setting useful for giving the speaker an opportunity to place his message in a familiar context

- In Paul's case, the hook was the statue to an unnamed god
 - Greek documents often referred to altars to unknown gods, erected to appease the god whose name was unknown to men
 - Paul knew he needed a way to introduce the true God to a people who believed they had already accounted for all gods in their pantheon
 - Furthermore, Paul risked being charged with preaching a new religion, which would have been proselytizing, a violation of Roman law
- So Paul says I saw your altar to an unnamed god
 - And I know the name of that god
 - What a wonderful hook
 - Instantly, they are interested and feel no reason to be threatened by his message
 - It would be like someone saying they have discovered the name of the soldier in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
- This hook gives Paul the chance to make a sharp turn to the Gospel without leaving his audience behind
 - Before we look at what follows, let's consider what Paul's approach means for us
 - Paul knows that men are fickle and what they say they want to hear can change in an instant
 - He could have launched directly into the Gospel, but perhaps he would have been shouted down or ignored
 - Instead, he eases his audience into the truth hoping to hold on to as many as he can
 - I think of Paul pulling a wagon with his audience sitting inside
 - If he yanks the wagon ahead too quickly, everyone falls out the back
 - Instead, he moves steadily but slowly hoping not to lose anyone

- We might ask what about God's sovereignty in salvation?
 - Can't Paul preach anyway he wants without concern since God brings faith to the heart?
 - The answer is no
 - Yes, God brings faith, but in His wisdom He works through our efforts,
 - When our efforts lack care or effort, He commonly withholds His grace in that moment
 - No fewer people will be saved in the end, but our efforts go unrewarded in the moment
 - Paul worked hard to preach the Gospel and his methods were carefully tailored to his audience
 - Paul famously said he became all things to all people so that he might win a few
 - And Paul also said that he planted while others watered, but it was God who caused the growth
 - He understood both God's sovereignty over outcomes and man's responsibility to give God our best efforts

[Acts 17:24](#) "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

[Acts 17:25](#) nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

[Acts 17:26](#) and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

[Acts 17:27](#) that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

[Acts 17:28](#) for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'

- We're going to review Paul's remarkable presentation of the Gospel to these men, but first notice that Jesus name is never even mentioned
 - This preaching should challenge all our preconceived notions concerning evangelism

- Paul does not use any of the classic “Christian-ese” for presenting the Gospel
- Can someone be saved with the words Paul uses?
 - If you think not, then you’re placing too much emphasis on your words to save someone
 - Just as someone who assumes that God’s sovereignty doesn’t require they make any effort at all is placing too little emphasis on their own actions
- Let’s look at what says and why it meets the requirements of the Gospel presentation
- Paul begins by describing the one true God, Who might be known by His work in Creation
 - God made all things and is Lord of Heaven and Earth
 - In the language Paul chooses, he directly contradicts certain Greek concepts
 - In v.24, Paul is addressing the Stoics, who believed that all matter was eternal and had no beginning
 - But Paul says there is a God Who made everything
 - Greeks believed different gods ruled over different aspects of creation
 - The Paul adds that this God continues to rule over all that He has created
 - And therefore He doesn’t dwell in temples built by human hands
 - He is not one of the nearly 3,000 different temple gods found in the Greek pantheon
 - In v.25, Paul moves to the Epicureans
 - God is self-supplying
 - There is nothing men can offer God that will impress or please Him

- This was directed at the Epicureans who assumed that God viewed pleasure in the same way they did
 - God wanted them to please Him through sacrifice and other rituals
- Paul says this God is the source of all life and everything depends on Him
 - This directly contradicted both camps who felt the gods were far removed from the everyday lives of men
- In v.26 Paul moves to God's role in making humanity
 - All men came from one man, Adam
 - We have a common ancestor who was himself the creation of God
 - The Greeks had fanciful ideas for the origin of men just as today we have many who believe men evolved from animals
 - In a very real sense, we face a similarly situation when we preach that God created us from Adam
 - Today's audience would react little differently from this ancient Greek audience
 - Next Paul begins to hit at the center of Greek national pride
 - Paul says that this God was the One Who set the boundaries for every nation and appointed men to their respective nations
 - Greece wasn't great by virtue of better people, Paul says
 - It was determined by God
 - The boundaries for the nations were created in language
 - When God scattered the people at the tower of Babel, he scrambled language
 - The language differences became the barriers that led to the separation of nations
- In v.27 Paul says that God set men in nations with the language barriers so that they would seek Him

- Remember, the people were scattered from Babel because they were no longer seeking God
 - They had made themselves so powerful as a united people that they sought their own god at the tower
 - So God scattered them
- Now Paul clarifies that the scattering was intended to create a need that couldn't be filled in human power
 - A need to know the Creator and seek Him
 - Of course, the depraved human heart will never find a holy God in its own power
 - Paul acknowledges this reality when he says "if perhaps they might grope for Him"
 - Grope implies looking in the dark, the kind of blind reaching that men with darkened hearts do before the Lord reveals the truth
 - But then Paul adds that God is not far from any of us
 - Imagine you're standing with someone in a room, and they're blindfolded
 - They're trying to find you by exploring around in the room, but they grope without a way to find you
 - Meanwhile, you stand a short distance away, watching them
 - Until you want them to find you, their desperate groping will never succeed
 - But when you're ready, you can walk into their path and they stumble into you
 - This is the way Paul is describing finding the true God
 - They world is groping to find a God Who is nearby but can't be found unless He first reveals Himself to us

[Ezek. 38:23](#) "I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and **make** Myself **known** in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD."

- Finally, Paul says in Him we live, move and have our very existence, just as your own poets have said
 - Paul cleverly uses Greek literature to his own advantage
 - The Greek poet Cleanthes wrote a poem to Zeus saying “we are your offspring”
 - And Epimenides wrote concerning Zeus, “You live and abide forever, for in you we live, and move, and have our being.”
 - Paul moves those accolades away from the false god Zeus to the true God
 - But by using these quotes to serve his own argument, Paul kept the audience engaged and somewhat agreeing with his comments
- But so far, no mention of Jesus or the cross or belief in this “gospel”
 - Paul simply argues for God’s existence and sovereignty
 - But through this argument, he implies men have an obligation
 - If there is one God responsible for everything and to Whom we are obliged for life and existence, then we ultimately must answer to this God
 - Paul is working to create the awareness of need
 - Remember, the preaching of the Gospel is two parts: repent and believe
 - Too often we run to a presentation of the solution before explaining why someone needs it
 - We could continue to study Paul’s technique all night
 - The way in which he picked away at the cultural weaknesses while playing to the cultural expectations
 - But we needs to move on to the conclusion

[Acts 17:29](#) "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

[Acts 17:30](#) "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,

[Acts 17:31](#) because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

- So, now Paul moves to the solution to the dilemma
 - If we are calling ourselves children of God, then what does it say about us when we call a hunk of wood or stone our god?
 - It's an obvious contradiction
 - Greeks valued men above inanimate objects, certainly
 - But then they agree that they are the children of idols, inanimate objections fashioned by men?
 - Instead, Paul calls upon them to acknowledge they are product of a divine nature
 - A life that lives such a contradiction is a life of ignorance
- And Paul says that God has overlooked the times of ignorance
 - This was the time before Christ was revealed
 - Specifically, all history from the time of Adam until Christ's Judgment of men
 - The world's sin is "overlooked" during this time in the sense that the world is permitted to continue on
 - Obviously, individuals face their judgment upon their death
 - But the world as a whole is experiencing a period while God withholds judgment
 - But now during this time, God is giving opportunity for men to leave their godless ways
 - And more specifically, He has for the first time opened a window of opportunity for the Gentiles
 - Because a day of judgment is coming soon

- And on that future day, God has appointed a Man to conduct the judgment
 - And God offered proof of this truth by raising this Man from the dead
- Though you may not have realized it, Paul just preached the Gospel
 - Everything needed for God to bring saving faith was delivered to this audience
 - Remember Paul's words in Romans

[Rom. 10:9](#) that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God **raised Him from the dead**, you will be saved;

- The essential elements of the Gospel are a belief and confession that Jesus is the Lord, the only true God
- And a belief that He was resurrected from the dead
- In this presentation, Paul made a clear argument that there is only One true God above all
 - Paul never named the Lord by His earthly name
 - But a man convinced by Paul's testimony would only have to ask what was this God's name, and Paul would have gladly provided it
 - In other words, the lack of a name wouldn't by itself preclude saving faith, assuming they accepted everything else Paul spoke
- Secondly, Paul testified that this Man was resurrected
 - This becomes the sticking point, as it always does

[Acts 17:32](#) ¶ Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."

[Acts 17:33](#) So Paul went out of their midst.

[Acts 17:34](#) But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

- At the moment Paul mentions the defining proof of the Gospel, the resurrection of our Lord, some began to sneer at the idea of resurrection

- All the wisdom in the world couldn't come to grips with the prospect of a man returning from the dead
 - Truly this is the one demonstration of God's power that men stumble over
 - Remember the story Jesus taught of the rich man in Hades with Abraham, begging that a sign be sent to his brothers?

[Luke 16:31](#) "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

- Resurrection is proof for those brought to faith, but it is the stumbling block for the unbeliever
 - And Paul has made the essential presentation of the Gospel and it has had its intended effect
- A handful of the Greeks believed, which was a true miracle in itself
 - Consider nothing that Paul said was particularly forceful or convincing
 - It was simply a matter-of-fact (though carefully worded) presentation
 - But when the truth of the Gospel is joined with the work of the Spirit, it becomes the power of God to change a heart

[1Cor. 1:18](#) ¶ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the **power of God**.

- The ones who sneered at Paul say they will hear more of this later
 - It was a polite way of saying they had heard enough and the conversation was over
 - Isn't interesting that they could find ways to spend days on end discussing whatever ideas they could propose
 - But when Paul mentions a God Who proved Himself by resurrection, the conversation must immediately end
 - And they are done altogether with the matter
 - Why are they so suddenly put off in discussing such an intriguing subject like life after death?

- The word of the cross is instinctively offensive to the depraved man

[1Cor. 2:14](#) But a **natural** man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

[1Pet. 2:7](#) This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve,

“THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED,
THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,”

[1Pet. 2:8](#) and,

“A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE”;

for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

- Paul knows what’s happened, and he leaves at this point content with whom God has given him
 - Remember, he initiated this contact with the wise men of Athens out of pity having seen their depraved culture
 - And the opportunity came in a moment while he was waiting for his companions
 - He wasn’t in Athens primarily for ministry, and Paul seemed to know that from the beginning
 - This is merely a preaching of opportunity
- In the end, Paul doesn’t found a church in Athens and he never again returns to this city
 - It was a hardened Greek bastion of pagan belief that worshipped wisdom even more than the gods they pretended to follow
- The entire experience brings together several elements we should remember
 - First, we are workers in God’s field, and we owe our Master the best work we can give
 - Paul was waiting in Athens and yet still thought he could make an impact there
 - And his technique for delivering the message showed great deft and appreciation for the culture

- Secondly, no matter how much Paul played with the presentation or approach, he didn't change the heart of the Gospel message
 - The call to repent and accept the true God who raised His Son from the dead is the universal call of the Gospel
 - Men must understand that our message demands they walk away from their current belief system, whatever it may be
 - And in its place is a belief in the One true God Who raised His Son from the dead
- Finally, Paul never forgot that it requires the Spirit to make his message effective
 - When his speech produced but a handful of believers, he left satisfied
 - And he accepted that God never intended to establish something in that city beyond the handful mentioned
 - Paul never visited that city again or even wrote to it
 - In fact, according to Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he spent the rest of his time in Athens worrying about the church in Thessalonica
- We need to be ready to witness to Christ, even when waiting
 - We get our best effort, trying to find the most effective way to deliver the message
 - But we don't change the heart of the message: we preach Christ, and Him crucified and resurrected
 - Finally, we accept the fruit we may receive, and we move on

Acts 18A

- Paul is now moving to Corinth, and the next chapter of his second missionary journey begins

[Acts 18:1](#) ¶ After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.

[Acts 18:2](#) And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,

[Acts 18:3](#) and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.

[Acts 18:4](#) And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

[Acts 18:5](#) ¶ But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

- Corinth is the final major European city to receive Paul, and it's here that Paul has one of his greatest successes as a church planter
 - Corinth lay 50 miles west of Athens on a thin stretch of land called an isthmus
 - The isthmus separated the Peloponnesus from mainland Greece and had shores on two different seas
 - The city has an ancient past, probably dating back to time of Japheth, one of the sons of Noah
 - The city of Paul's day traced its history back nearly 1,000 years
 - It had been destroyed and its inhabitants enslaved by Rome in 146 BC
 - Later rebuilt by Rome in 46 BC and given its current name
 - Within a couple of decades it had already become a Roman capital of the region of Achaia
 - By Paul's day it was 500,000 strong with two major seaports, one in the Med and another in the Aegean Sea
 - It was the center of Aphrodite worship, the goddess of love
 - Her temple was located on a high hill 1,800 feet above the city and featured over 1,000 prostitutes for hire

- This was a sailors' favorite port making it the center of immorality in the ancient world
- In fact, it had the reputation as the Sin City of its day
 - Greek and Roman writers of the day coined a phrase for extreme depravity based on the city's name:
 - To "corinthianize" came to mean living an immoral life
 - Elsewhere it was known as the Corinthian life
 - And a prostitute was sometimes called a Corinthian Girl
- Into this setting, Paul enters with the Gospel, and by his own testimony in 1Cor 2 he was fearful and intimidated by what he saw
 - Paul immediately finds support in the form of a Jewish couple names Aquila and Priscilla
 - This couple becomes prominent in the early church and are mentioned in numerous letters of the NT
 - Often the woman's name is mentioned first, suggesting she was the more important member of the marriage, perhaps by position or gifting
 - Luke says they were originally from Pontus, which is in Asia Minor
 - This is significant because Jews from Pontus were reported to be at Pentecost
 - Perhaps Aquila was present at that moment or was converted by those returning from Jerusalem
 - This detail explains that they had been believing Jews for sometime
 - Additionally, we're told they were expelled from Rome by Claudius
 - In AD 49, a riot broke out among the Jews in Rome over the name of Christ
 - Believing and unbelieving Jews were rioting, but the emperor decided to expel all Jews from the city

- Later they were able to return
- These two believing Jews have come to Corinth and have met Paul
 - They probably met because both had the same purpose: they needed work
 - Tradesmen in that day had to belong to guilds to work in their trade, and men of like trade would visit their local guild to find work
 - Luke explains their meeting by saying they were both tentmakers, which means they were likely at the same guild seeking work
- Clearly, this relationship was a great blessing to Paul, and the Lord provided it to encourage him in his early days in the city
 - It's probably hard for us to appreciate how hard it must have been for Paul to enter that city alone
 - He had no financial support, no friends in the city, he was bringing a difficult message to a huge and famously sinful city
 - Naturally, Paul was trembling and fearful as he describes himself in 1Cor 2
 - But the Lord was kind to Paul and picked him up with the blessing of Jews who knew the Lord already
 - The Lord is still doing this today
 - Men and women who step out into the mission field can tell countless stories of God making an appearance when they most needed Him
 - Money from nowhere, strangers who lend a hand at just the right time, government bureaucracies that mysteriously bend the rules
 - Don't ever let the enemy convince you that you're alone in this work
 - Paul was given a couple who shared his faith, his Jewish culture and even his trade so that Paul was immediately comforted
 - Paul knew the Lord was providing every step of the way

- Strengthened for the hard work ahead, Paul again starts with the local synagogue
 - He is reasoning every week trying to convince Jew and Greeks (probably God fearers) to know the Lord
 - But from the text it's clear he wasn't getting very far
 - In fact, it seems he received not a single convert for weeks on end
 - Remember this moment in the Paul's life during the book of Acts the next time you find yourself working for the Lord but finding nothing to show for it
 - If the Apostle Paul could have dry periods with no converts, then why shouldn't we?
 - I'm sure Paul was getting a little discouraged too, but notice what Paul did
- When Timothy and Silas arrived, it gave Paul opportunity to double-down his efforts
 - First, the men bring reports of good news from the church in Thessalonica
 - Paul mentioned how encouraged he was by the news in his first letter to that city (1Thes 3)
 - Secondly, they brought donations from the church in Philippi
 - As Luke says, this allowed Paul to "devote himself completely" to word
 - The phrase in Greek is sunecho, which means to be seized by or to be taken custody by something
 - Paul became complete focuses on God's word
 - What Luke is implying is that Paul stopped working and lived on the donations and spent every waking hour on God's word
 - We can't overlook an obvious and Biblically founded principle here
 - Ministry as a profession is largely dependent on the financial gifts of those who receive the ministry

- Ministers shouldn't be without the ability to support themselves
- Even the Jewish Rabbis taught the need to be self-sufficient

"Paul was a Rabbi, but according to Jewish practice, every Rabbi must have a trade. He must take no money for preaching and teaching and must make his living by his own work and his own efforts. The Jew glorified work. 'Love work,' they said. 'He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him robbery.' 'Excellent,' they said, 'is the study of the law along with a worldly trade; for the practice of them both makes a man forget iniquity; but all law without work must in the end fail and causes iniquity.' So we find Rabbis following every respectable trade." Barclay

- Neither was Paul dependent on support, in the sense that he didn't want for money to arrive before he began to minister
 - He used his tent making skills out of necessity to feed himself so that ministry never stopped
- But Paul knew that self-sufficiency was the goal, but a means to an end
 - And as long as he worked to feed himself, he was taking time away from studying, teaching and preaching
 - So Paul expected the churches he planted to eventually step up and support his work
 - In that way, each church participated in the planting of the next
 - Paul commands this principle should continue in the church

[1Tim. 5:17](#) ¶ The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

[1Tim. 5:18](#) For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

- Paul points to a classic picture from farming for how to treat pastors, elders and teachers
- A farmer depends on the hard work of his ox
 - An ox who performs well ensures the farmer is well fed and satisfied and his work in the field is fruitful

- If a farmer were to restrict the ox's ability to feed itself, the farmer would be doing a foolish thing
 - He is undermining his own situation
 - His own work and prosperity suffers
 - He has held back a small thing (a bag of feed) but put at risk a much larger thing (a field of grain)
- Paul's application is obvious: don't make it hard for your elders, pastor and teachers to support you with what truly matters: the word of God
 - Support them to ensure they aren't distracted from that work and given cause to restrict what they provide us
- So Paul devotes himself fully to the word, but what do you think Paul was doing in the word?
 - First, we know he taught other churches
 - He wrote both 1 and 2 Thes in the span of a few weeks in Corinth
 - Paul also writes a letter back to the church in Rome, perhaps upon the suggestion of Aquila
 - Secondly, Paul probably did his homework to address the doubts and objections of the Jews in the synagogues in Corinth
 - He hadn't converted anyone yet, so he must have been looking for additional Scripture evidence to use in "reasoning" with the Jews
 - Finally, Paul would have studied to strengthen his resolve and confidence and attitude in the face of this opposition
 - Just the daily exposure to the sin and debauchery of that city must have weighed on Paul
 - Plus the discouragement of having no converts and hostile audience
 - If the thought of spending time in God's word doesn't strike you as a comforting place to go when life gets you down, then you don't know what you're missing

- And it may be a sign that you are still in an immature state of spiritual growth
- For the love of God's word and a reliance upon it in times of distress is the hallmark of the strong faith

[Acts 18:6](#) But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

[Acts 18:7](#) Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue.

[Acts 18:8](#) Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

[Acts 18:9](#) And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;

[Acts 18:10](#) for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."

[Acts 18:11](#) And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

- Despite his best efforts, the hardening of the Jewish heart is evident in their response
 - They resist Paul, but the word in Greek is stronger
 - It means battled against Paul
 - They eventually blaspheme the Lord, causing Paul to dismiss them with a classic gesture of shaking the dust out of his clothes
 - Paul is clearly frustrated here and he vows to give up on the Jews in this city
 - By giving the Jews so much of himself, Paul declares that he is free from his obligation to preach to the Jews here
 - Paul is frustrated because this is the first time he has failed to convert a single Jew in a establishing a church in a new city
 - Paul probably kept preaching waiting for at least some Jew in the waiting remnant to respond, but none did
 - So finally, he gives up

- Curiously, Paul marches out of the synagogue and directly into the home of a believing Roman Gentile living next door to the synagogue, Justus
 - This entire experience must have been unsettling for Paul
 - Was he supposed to plant a church in Corinth or not?
 - But then Paul gets his first Jewish convert
 - The text doesn't say, but my assumption is that Crispus followed Paul out of the synagogue and confessed Christ
 - Paul later writes that Crispus was one of the few people he personally baptized in Corinth
 - Here's more proof of how God likes to work
 - We exhaust ourselves working for Him, but when we stop and give it over to God, He begins to work
 - I might be wrong about how this transpired, but it seems that Paul was studying and working to convert at least a few Jews
 - And meanwhile God was waiting for Paul to stop trying to do this in his own power
- I don't want to appear to second guess the Apostle, but the timing of this conversion is suspect to me
 - I see God making clear that the conversion of Corinth - whether Jew or Greek - was in His providence, not Paul's skill
 - I'm particularly struck by two things in this regard
 - First, God appears to Paul in a vision and encourages Paul to continue to preaching and that no one will harm him
 - Paul must have been pretty down and out for God to present this vision
 - It's the only time Paul is encouraged in such a direct way by God
 - It suggests that Paul had been striving in his own power and was now feeling like he failed or was threatened
 - And then God adds that He has many people in this city

- Now when these words were spoken, there were virtually no Christians in Corinth
- In fact, there might have been less than two dozen or so
- So when God says He has “many” people in this city, He is clearly speaking in the future tense
 - Meaning that Paul will find many converts in the city eventually
 - But from God’s point of view, they are already out there, just waiting to be found
 - This is a great example of the “Easter Egg” hunt example of how evangelism works in light of God’s sovereignty
- So God has stepped in dramatically to reassure a struggling Paul that Paul’s ministry is destined to produce fruit
 - But God is also implying that He will bring the fruit when and where He wants
 - Paul can’t let his lack of results in a given context discourage him
 - To be discouraged is to think that we are the ones in control of the outcome
 - The second reason I believe Paul may have come to see himself as too important is what Paul says when writing about his experiences in Corinth

[1Cor. 1:26](#) ¶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

[1Cor. 1:27](#) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

[1Cor. 1:28](#) and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

[1Cor. 1:29](#) so that no man may boast before God.

[1Cor. 1:30](#) But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

[1Cor. 1:31](#) so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

[1Cor. 2:1](#) ¶ And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

[1Cor. 2:2](#) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

[1Cor. 2:3](#) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

[1Cor. 2:4](#) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

[1Cor. 2:5](#) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

- Perhaps this experience was Paul's own opportunity to understand this principle in practice
 - For the next 18 months Paul lived and taught in the city

[Acts 18:12](#) ¶ But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,

[Acts 18:13](#) saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

[Acts 18:14](#) But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you;

[Acts 18:15](#) but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters."

[Acts 18:16](#) And he drove them away from the judgment seat.

[Acts 18:17](#) And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

- The proconsul of Achaia was Gallio
 - He had a famous family
 - His father was a famous Stoic who tutored Nero
 - His brother was Seneca and his nephew was a famous Greek poet
 - Nero eventually executed him and his brother in a fit of madness
 - He was known as a pleasant and likable person according to ancient documents
 - As they have done in the past, the Jews decided to use the Romans to bring the law down on Paul's head
 - They drag him to the judgment seat or the bema in Greek

- This was the place where authorities passed judgment, like a courthouse
 - God has already promised Paul that he won't see harm come to him while in this city
 - So when Paul appears before the proconsul, the Jews charge Paul with violating Roman law by teaching something outside Judaism
 - Only officially sanctioned religions could be taught under Roman law, so the issue was whether Christianity was new or merely a sect of Judaism
 - When Gallio hears the charge, he immediately dismisses the complaint
 - He says he would have been willing to consider their charges if the matter involved a vicious crime or a matter of wrong, meaning against Roman law
 - But as a matter of Jewish Law, he says settle it yourselves
- Gallio's decision is significant for two reasons
 - First, it immediately establishes official Roman position that Christianity is a part of Judaism and therefore is legal
 - This removed the threat of Roman persecution for preaching the Gospel
 - Paul was now free to preach the Gospel without Roman interference at least for a time
 - Secondly, the fact that this decision was made by a proconsul meant it was respected far and wide in the Roman empire
 - Truly, God is at work protecting Paul's work in this city
 - And turning what seemed to be a bad situation into a good one for Paul
- At the end of the proceedings, Gallio has the Jews and Paul forcefully ejected from the bema seat
 - And as they are forced out, the Gentile crowd begins to beat the synagogue leader, probably as the result of an anti-semitic outburst following the ruling

- The proconsul showed no interest in religious battles even to the point of ignoring the beating
 - Interestingly, he said he was willing to hear a case if the charge was a vicious crime, but beating Jews didn't qualify
- Next time we find Paul leaving Corinth and headed back to Antioch to complete his second missionary journey

Acts 18B

- Paul leaves Corinth and is headed back to Antioch
 - But along the way he still has plenty of ministry to perform
 - In particular, Paul is going to visit two cities where the church is growing, though Paul was not the one to found them
 - And we're going to hear about a new character in the spread of the Gospel

[Acts 18:18](#) ¶ Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.

[Acts 18:19](#) They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

[Acts 18:20](#) When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, [Acts 18:21](#) but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus.

- Paul is headed East again, back home
 - He travels a short distance to Corinth's eastern sea port on the Aegean Sea, called Cenchrea
 - He brings Priscilla and Aquila with him, though Luke mentions nothing of Silas and Timothy
 - And in Cenchrea, Paul shaves his head because he was keeping a vow
 - Under the Law, a man was required to refrain from cutting his hair when he took a vow to God
 - The vow could be a vow of thanksgiving for something God had given
 - Or a vow could be a petition to God for something the man wanted
 - After the period of the vow was concluded, the person would cut their hair and take it to the Temple in Jerusalem where it would be burned
 - There are two possible explanations for what Paul is doing here

- Either he just finished the period of his vow
 - And he has shaved his head in preparation for his return to Jerusalem
 - We might imagine the vow was a request that his missionary journey would be fruitful
 - And now he departs for Jerusalem with his hair stored for the trip
- Or Paul is making the vow now, and he has cut his hair in preparation to begin the vow (wanting to start with short hair)
 - Then he will cut it in Jerusalem and burn it right away
 - In this case, the vow might be a vow of thanksgiving for the success of his journey
- Paul's taking of Jewish vows under the Mosaic Law reflect the liberty he had in Christ
 - Liberty means freedom to the Law, but it also means
- Ephesus was the gateway to the East and one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire (upwards of 500,000 people)
 - A close second to Corinth for moral corruption with the temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world'
 - The temple was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens
 - Over 200 columns 6 feet wide and 70 feet tall held up the structure
 - Center of pagan worship in the ancient world, including sacrifices and prostitution
 - Also a center for sorcery and black arts
- After arriving in Ephesus, Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquila to minister in this city
 - While Paul waits for his departing ship for Jerusalem, he spends time visiting Jews in the synagogue

- Once again, Paul is seen reasoning with the Jews from the OT concerning the identity of the Christ
 - To those who have been taught to expect a Messiah are to be shown proof that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies and His death and resurrection were part of the plan
 - Those who don't even know what a Messiah is are told the story of how God made a payment available for sinful men through the sacrifice of Himself
 - And the resurrection is proof of His claims
- Apparently, Paul makes no converts in Ephesus, though there might have been the earliest signs of faith
 - Nevertheless, they beg Paul to stay longer and help them understand better
 - Paul declines, evidently feeling pressed to return to Jerusalem while he has the chance
- Some have guessed that Paul wanted to get back to Jerusalem in time for Passover
 - Others wonder if his vow required him to keep moving
- In any case, he offers to return if the Lord wills
 - He does go back on his third journey
- Finally Paul lands home

[Acts 18:22](#) ¶ When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch.

- Paul's sea journey ends in the port of Caesarea, which is about 50 miles NW from Jerusalem
 - Notice the text says that Paul went "up" to greet the church
 - Then Paul went "down" to Antioch
 - The reference to up and then down tells us that Paul made a stop in Jerusalem before heading back home in Antioch
 - And so Paul's third journey comes to an end in Antioch
 - This will be the final time Paul stays in Antioch

- The start of Paul's third missionary journey begins mid-chapter and with a casual statement

[Acts 18:23](#) And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

- Paul spends about 6-8 months in Antioch before he decides to head out again in summer AD 53
 - Paul's successive missionary journeys becomes more about discipling existing believers than planting new churches, though Paul never stopped preaching the Gospel
- By saying Paul passed through Galatian and Phrygia, Luke summarizes roughly 1,500 miles of Paul's travels
 - This area includes names we'll recognize like Lystra, Iconium, Derbe
 - There is no indication that Paul stops in any one of these towns particularly, though he likely stopped in a few
 - He was strengthening the disciples rather than planting new churches through this stretch
 - Paul seems anxious to return to the outer limits of his second trip
 - Rather than cover worn ground again

[Acts 18:24](#) ¶ Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.

[Acts 18:25](#) This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John;

[Acts 18:26](#) and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

[Acts 18:27](#) And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace,

[Acts 18:28](#) for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

- This section introduces a new character, Apollos, with an intriguing story of two baptisms and an incomplete gospel

- I mentioned last week that some Bible students have come to this passage and thought it taught of a second Holy Spirit filling
 - As we'll see tonight, this is not the case
- Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt
 - The city was renowned for its universities and the world famous library
 - Alexander the Great founded this city in 332 BC and he brought a significant Jewish population there
 - Eventually, the Jews constituted a third of the city's population
 - They contributed substantially to the city's reputation as an intellectual center
 - The Greek language OT, the Septuagint, was translated here by Jews
 - The famous Jewish philosopher, Philo, lived in Alexandria
- Apollos would have been a Jew trained in the finest traditions and steeped in the Old Testament
 - He may have bested Paul in human accomplishments
 - And the text says Apollos was both eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures
 - Paul was mighty in Scripture, but by his own admission weak in speech
 - Apollos had the makings of a powerful servant in the spread of the Gospel
- On top of it all, Apollos is a self-started and a man who is fervant in spirit
 - The Greek word for fervant is zeo, from which we also get the Greek word for zealous
 - It literally means to boil, as in to boil water
 - Apollos is "boiling" in spirit, suggesting a man who is very zealous for God and for truth

- Looking at what Apollos is doing, Luke says Apollos was teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus
 - To understand what Luke means, we need to look a little further in the passage
 - First, notice at the end of v.25 Luke says Apollos was only acquainted with the baptism of John the Baptist
 - Luke implies that Apollos isn't acquainted with the baptism giving to those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord
 - Secondly, Luke says in v.26 that Pricilla and Aquila had to explain to Apollos the way of God more accurately
 - So clearly something in Apollos' preaching concerning Jesus was incorrect or at least incomplete
 - Putting these two comments together, we come back to v.25 and consider what Apollos was actually preaching
 - When Luke says Apollos was teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, he means Apollos was teaching about the Messiah accurately, but in a limited way
 - Apollos wasn't preaching Jesus by name
 - Rather he delivered OT prophecies accurately concerning the coming Messiah
 - In the same way that the John the Baptist accurately taught concerning the coming Lamb of God
 - In fact, when Luke says that he was acquainted only with the baptism of John, it means that Apollos only understood the message of repentance in preparation for the Messiah's arrival
 - He didn't understand the second half of the gospel message,
 - The good news of Jesus' death and resurrection for sin
 - We might assume that Apollos himself received the baptism of repentance from John himself

- Then Apollos likely returned to the Diaspora before Jesus' appearance, death and resurrection
- When Pricilla and Aquila heard Apollos' powerful preaching in the same Ephesus synagogue when Paul had preached a couple of years earlier, they knew they could help this man
 - They inform him that the Messiah did in fact come
 - He was Jesus and He died and was resurrected in fulfillment of the prophecies
 - Armed with this good news, Apollos was now ready to preach the full Gospel
 - At that point, Apollos felt the call to go to Achaia, which was the province that included Corinth
 - The brethren encourage Apollos to make the trip
 - And Luke says that Apollos was a great encouragement to the church
 - He was able to powerfully refute the Jews in Corinth
 - And notice Apollos is now preaching the full Gospel: preaching Jesus is the Christ
 - You might remember Paul's first letter to Corinth when he mentions Apollos by name
 - Apollos was so powerful as a teacher that some in the Corinthian church had taken sides in identifying themselves as his students
 - Others had responded by declaring they remained students of Paul
 - Paul wrote to correct the church by reminding them that we are not disciples of a human teachers
 - We are all disciples of Christ alone
 - Our teachers merely water or plant, but God causes us to grow
- The next chapter in the story of Apollos begins in chapter 19
 - And with chapter 19 comes an error in interpretation for some

[Acts 19:1](#) ¶ It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.

[Acts 19:2](#) He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

[Acts 19:3](#) And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism."

[Acts 19:4](#) Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

[Acts 19:5](#) When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[Acts 19:6](#) And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.

[Acts 19:7](#) There were in all about twelve men.

- Now Apollos has left Ephesus and traveled to Corinth where he's ministering
 - Meanwhile, Paul has been moving steadily westward toward Ephesus
 - Luke says Paul passes through the "upper country"
 - Paul elected to travel on a road that ran farther north than the more common Roman road
 - This northern route was a more direct path to Ephesus, bypassing many other town along the more southerly Roman road
 - Paul has promised the church in Ephesus he would return and he seems intent on keeping that promise, the Lord willing
 - When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found disciples, perhaps to his surprise
 - As Paul became familiar with these disciples, he inquired concerning whether they received the Holy Spirit when they were baptized
 - At this point we need to remember something Paul himself wrote in Romans

[Rom. 8:14](#) For all who are being led by the **Spirit of God**, these are sons of God.

- Paul knew that the sign of true faith was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
 - To receive the Holy Spirit is to become saved

- So when Paul asks if they had received the Holy Spirit, he was essentially testing to see if they were believers
- To Paul's question, they answer that they haven't even heard of the Holy Spirit
 - This is consistent with Jewish understanding prior to the Gospel
 - Jews then - and today - do not talk about the Holy Spirit and a separate person of God
 - And certainly Gentiles weren't acquainted with the Trinity
 - So it was natural for them to say what they said
- At this point, the question for some is how this group could be unbelieving at this point
 - First, they heard the powerful preaching of Apollos
 - Secondly, they are called disciples in 19:1
 - Third, Paul refers to them "believing" in v.2
 - How can we assume that they hadn't actually believed in the Gospel?
 - One way men have tried to answer these questions is to assume these people were, in fact, Christians
 - But they hadn't received the "filling" of the Holy Spirit
 - And until Paul arrived and lay on hands, they had merely received the Holy Spirit as believers
 - This is one key passage often used to support the errant view that believer should expect a second or subsequent filling of the HS after faith
 - From this perspective, false teaching originates calling Christians to pray for the filling of the HS
 - Some go as far to suggest that we haven't achieved the full measure of faith until we receive such a subsequent experience
 - This is particular common among some Pentecostal and charismatic traditions

- To anyone who looks to this passage to support such a view, let me assure you that this passage teaches no such idea
 - Looking again at this passage, there is easy way to make sense of what's happening here
- First, notice what Paul asks in v.3
 - Having heard that they know nothing of the Holy Spirit, Paul asks the next obvious question
 - What kind of baptism did you receive?
 - There were many forms of baptism practiced in that day for different ritualistic reasons
 - Paul is asking to know why received water baptism
- In answer to Paul, they say they have been baptized into the baptism of John
 - Remember again that John's baptism was a call to repentance in anticipation of the Messiah's arrival
 - It was not a baptism associated with faith in the Gospel
 - We also remember that these Christians in Ephesus were instructed by Apollos who was incomplete in his understanding of the Gospel
 - Only later did he come to understand the full Gospel
- Secondly, in v.4 Paul gives the full description of the Gospel
 - In particular, Paul explains that John's baptism was a call for them to believe in the One Who followed John
 - Paul goes on the explain that this One was Jesus of Nazareth
- Once they learned that Jesus was the One they were waiting for, they believed and were baptized in the name of Jesus
 - This is the only baptism of a believer
 - The earlier dunking performed by Apollos was not meaningful in the matter of salvation
 - Apollo's baptism of John was similar to the modern practice of infant baptism

- It neither had the effect of conveying salvation nor did it satisfy the requirement for water baptism following true faith
- Consequently, those who believed the Gospel as Paul preached it were still required to be baptized
- So they went into the water again
 - And this time the baptism they received was the baptism Jesus Himself commanded
 - The baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
- As Paul baptizes them and lays hands on them, they receive the Holy Spirit
 - In conjunction with the arrival of the Spirit, they begin speaking in tongues and prophesying
- Up to this point, we've seen only three times when speaking in tongues or other outward manifestations accompany faith
 - The first time was with Jews at Pentecost
 - The second was with Samaritans
 - The third was Gentiles
 - All three events were associated with Peter's ministry to open the keys to the kingdom
- But now we see another group of Gentiles receiving outward displays of the Holy Spirit's arrival
 - In the first three times we saw such displays because each represented the arrival of the Gospel to a new group for the first time
 - Here weren't not looking at a new group
 - Instead, we're seeing the Holy Spirit's display being used to distinguish the baptism of John from the full gospel message
- From this example, we learn a couple of principles regarding the way the Holy Spirit works in displays like speaking in tongues

- First, it's clear that even after the church had reached the three primary groups, God was still willing to show Himself through speaking in tongues and other signs
 - So we can't say that such outward signs of the Spirit never happen
 - We must always leave room in our theology for God to be God
 - He can produce whatever signs He wishes in keeping with His word
 - For example, Paul teaches in 1Cor that speaking in tongues is a gift that may be used on occasion but within very specific parameters
 - These parameters limit its use such that we would expect to rarely if ever see it today
 - Nevertheless, we must acknowledge it remains possible under certain prescribed circumstances
- Secondly, God's purpose in showing the Holy Spirit to us in these ways will always be for the same purpose: to glorify Christ
 - Notice here that the effect of these displays in Acts 19 was to confirm the truth of Paul's Gospel message
 - In contrast to Apollo's earlier incomplete Gospel presentation
 - They confirmed to this audience that Paul's message was the true Gospel and Paul preached the true Christ
 - Through this display, the Holy Spirit was directing men's worship to Christ
 - And this is always the role of the Holy Spirit in Creation
 - He will never work in such a way that He draws attention to Himself
 - Instead, He works to draw our attention to Christ, as the Father directs
- Other teaching that speaking in tongues or other displays of the Holy Spirit are necessary for believers to validate their faith is incorrect in interpreting Scripture

- In part because it violate these principles
- When we insist on that these displays will be common for all believer we ignore Scripture's teaching that they are uncommon and purposeful
 - In fact, the uniqueness of the HS's manifestations is what makes them useful to God in communicating that something different is taking place
- Secondly, by making these displays commonplace, we change their purpose from glorifying Christ to something lessor
 - We claim these signs to glorify ourselves: our confession, our faith or our prayer life
 - Or at least we are suggesting that we should seek such displays for the glory of the Spirit Himself, something He would never seek
- Since these purposes are not God's purposes, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit never participates in any supposed display based on these intentions
 - And if the Holy Spirit is not the One instigating such displays, then when they occur, we can be sure they are man-made

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Acts 19A

- Last week Paul had reached Ephesus and came upon men who had not believed in the true Gospel
 - He baptizes them after explaining the true Gospel to them,
 - And as a result, they receive the Holy Spirit, giving evidence of the indwelling with speaking in tongues and other supernatural displays
 - I explained last week that this was a fourth example of such displays, which stood apart from the first three in the book of Acts
 - The first three had come as a result of the Gospel reaching the three distinct groups of people God intended to reach: Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles
 - It was made necessary I explained because the men had thought themselves believers already, so the signs were necessary to confirm that Paul's Gospel was the true Gospel
 - But today I want to show you a second reason why God wanted to show Himself to the people in this city
 - In fact, God demonstrates His power in even greater ways through Paul's ministry in Ephesus

[Acts 19:8](#) And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

[Acts 19:9](#) But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

[Acts 19:10](#) This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

- Jumping back into the middle of Luke's narrative, Paul has begun his ministry to the city of Ephesus
 - He begins like usual, in the synagogue
 - Reasoning and persuading Jews
 - In Ephesus, Paul is able to stay in the synagogue for three months before things start to go wrong

- This is a very long time to preach the Gospel each week, and we can assume that at least some converts have been made
- But inevitably, the hardening of the Jews that Paul himself describes in Romans makes itself evident
 - Some were becoming hardened and disobedient (to the Gospel)
 - They spoke evil of the Gospel and specifically of Jesus (i.e., the “way, the truth and the light”)
- As he has done before, Paul withdraws the moment someone begins to blaspheme the Lord
 - This seems to be the dividing line for Paul
 - He would remain in the synagogue until the name of Jesus was blaspheme
 - Then he took that as his cue to leave
- We could do worse than to have a similar standard for determining our limits in evangelism
 - If our audience listens and even debates the points of the Gospel, then we should remain engaged
 - If our audience speaks evil or blasphemes the name of Jesus, we do not associate with them but move on instead
 - I wouldn’t consider this an absolute rule with no exceptions
 - But on the other hand, I would rarely depart from it
 - Jesus Himself cautioned against throwing pearls before swine only to allow them to trample them in the mud
 - That analogy is referring to just such a moment as the one Paul is facing
- Paul lands in the school of Tyrannus
 - Paul needed a place to meet
 - And the school became a convenient and available place

- Isn't it interesting that this practice continues today in many places
 - Thousands of small and even large churches are meeting each weekend in empty school buildings
 - This practice of using other facilities was the norm for the church for at least several centuries
 - Only after the church and state were combined in the fourth century did permanent buildings become commonplace
 - And this change brought many other troubles for the church
- Interesting, one early manuscript of Acts adds that the meetings took place between 11:00 am and 4:00 pm,
 - This time coincided with the customary break from work during the heat of the day
 - If this addition is accurate, then it tells us something about the dedication of those who followed Paul's teaching during his years in Ephesus
 - While their countrymen were enjoying a siesta in the heat of the day, Ephesus Christians were sacrificing their resting time to hear Paul teach in a hot building
 - This may seem like a small thing, and perhaps it is, but it teaches a general principle for discipleship that remains true today
 - We do not grow in our faith and walk without sound teaching in the Bible
 - Studying God's word is the means to growing in all aspects of our faith, whether in love, obedience, diligence, or personal holiness
 - And study takes time...in my experience, it takes significant time if we expect to really grow in our understanding of the Lord we serve
 - And that time has to come from somewhere
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- If we say we want to grow in the Lord, then we must ask ourselves what are we willing to give up to obtain that growth
 - Where do we make sacrifices in our schedule?
 - If we are unwilling to give anything up, then we shouldn't be surprised when we never seem to have enough time to pursue spiritual matters
 - And we should expect our progress to stall
- Luke says Paul taught in Ephesus for two more years
 - Later in chapter 20, Paul will say he spent three years in Ephesus
 - Suggesting that he has already been in the city one year by the point he starts using the school
 - Luke says the effect of this time was that the word of God reached all who lived in Asia, both Jew and Greek
 - What does Luke mean by that statement?
 - Is he simply speaking in exaggeration to emphasize that Paul preached boldly in Ephesus (which was located in Asia)
 - Or did he mean it literally, that somehow Paul's preaching in Ephesus impacted the entire region of Asia Minor
 - The answer is the latter
 - Paul's ministry in Ephesus essentially reached the entire region of Asia Minor
 - Most Christians lack a full appreciation for how important Paul's ministry in Ephesus was to the spread of the Gospel in Asia
 - From the work Paul did in this school, Christians were sent out to cities throughout the region
 - And many of them founded churches of their own
 - From the students of Tyrannus, the churches of Colesse, Laodicea, and Hieropolis were started

- There is also reason to believe based on Luke's statement that the churches in Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia also started as a result of Paul's time in Ephesus
- Additionally, the city hosted not only Paul but later saw Timothy and the Apostle John serve the city in ministry
 - The church in this city received not less than seven New Testament letters, including the one that bears its name
- Ephesus was also a source of important New Testament writing
 - Paul wrote all three of his letters to Corinth while in this city
 - He traveled on at least two occasions to visit Corinth while living in Ephesus
 - The church in Ephesus was the largest in the world in its day
 - And it eventually died when Jesus removed its lampstand in penalty for them losing their first love
- It's hard to overstate how important the city was to the spread of the Gospel in the first century
 - But consider the city itself again
 - It was the center of pagan worship in the world
 - It was a center for black magic and sorcery
 - And it was overrun with debauchery and materialism
 - And God chose this location to be the center of his biggest explosion of the Gospel after Pentecost itself
 - In fact, there parallels to the time of Pentecost are remarkable
 - First, notice that Paul's experience in this city begin with a gathering of twelve men who have received the baptism of John but are awaiting the baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - In the time before Pentecost, we had the twelve apostles waiting in Jerusalem for the arrival of the Holy Spirit

- Then the Apostle appointed to the Jews preaches on the truth of the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit arrives for all who believe, followed by outward demonstrations of the Spirit
 - When the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, arrives in Ephesus and preaches the Gospel, the Holy Spirit arrives as does the speaking in tongues
- And as Jerusalem became the center of the Jewish church, sending out men like Philip to bring the Gospel to the surrounding regions
 - And Ephesus became the center for the Gentile church, sending out many Christians to found churches in Asia Minor
- The parallels don't stop there...look at what follows

[Acts 19:11](#) ¶ God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, [Acts 19:12](#) so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.

- Luke records that Paul was performing miracles as he preached in the city
 - And the miracles take an extraordinary form
 - Paul's garments are capable of delivering God's power indirectly
 - They produce healing and remove evil spirits
 - Luke makes clear from the outset that the source of all these things was God Himself
 - He was choosing to work through these methods
 - We haven't seen this before in Paul's ministry, so it suggests that God is working in a special way here
 - This offers another parallel to the early time in Jerusalem after Pentecost
 - Remember Luke's earlier report on Peter's ministry in that city?

[Acts 5:14](#) And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,

[Acts 5:15](#) to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.

[Acts 5:16](#) Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

- God seems to have marked Ephesus for an experience similar to the one He presented in Jerusalem
 - In a sense, Jew is to Gentile as Peter is to Paul as Jerusalem is to Ephesus
 - And if so, then it reinforces why the demonstrations of the Spirit were made so commonplace in this city
 - God is communicating through these signs that something new and true has arrived for the world in Ephesus
- The power God was demonstrating had a side effect within the this culture obsessed with the occult

[Acts 19:13](#) But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches."

[Acts 19:14](#) Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.

[Acts 19:15](#) And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"

[Acts 19:16](#) And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

- Luke introduces a group of Jews who traveled from place to place
 - The reference to traveling Jews indicates they were gypsies, traveling fortunetellers
 - They practice sorcery in disobedience to the Mosaic Law
 - The term exorcist comes from a Greek word that literally means to cast a spell

- This seems to be another parallel to the early experiences within the Jewish church centered in Jerusalem
 - You remember in Acts 8 about the Samaritan Simon who tried to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit for his magic show
 - Now again we have a group of Jewish magicians who conclude that Paul's power was a kind of magic they could imitate if they cast a spell using similar words
 - They tried to repeat Paul's work by using his name and the name of Jesus in their spells
- Just as Simon revealed his unbelieving heart in his attempt to buy something that only comes by faith
 - These men likewise throw the name of Jesus around hoping for an effect
 - Today the same thing happens
 - Men use the name of Jesus or the Holy Spirit to claim power and fool many people
- In v.14 Luke mentions another group doing much the same thing
 - A man who has taken for himself the title of high priest, but now lived in Ephesus
 - Perhaps he is here instead of in Jerusalem because he and his son practice sorcery
 - He would have been prevented from practicing such things in Jerusalem
 - We know he was never a true high priest because those name are recorded in Jewish writings, and this man was not among them
 - Now that they have seen Paul at work, they come to the same conclusion as the gypsies
 - They try their hand at casting out demons with Paul's words
 - Unsurprisingly, it doesn't work but it ends in a surprising way
 - The demon answer them, speaking through the man's voice they inhabit

- First, they say they know or recognize Jesus
 - In Greek, the word for know is ginosko, which means to know through experience
 - The demon had personal knowledge of Jesus, as all demons do
 - The demonic realm knew Jesus before we did, and yet they still rebelled against Him
 - And then in speaking about Paul, the demon says he knows again
 - This time the Greek word changes to epistamai, which means to understand through knowledge
- The demon was acquainted with Jesus and the demon had heard about Paul
 - These are sobering realities, especially for any Christian who steps out in ministry
 - The demon realm may eventually be able to say the same thing about us...they have heard about us
 - And this realization shouldn't cause us to hesitate in serving the Lord, but we should remain on the look out for the enemy's schemes, as Peter warns
- Finally, the demon concludes that he doesn't know them and precedes to whup 'em, as we say in Texas
 - These men had no power of their own, and their attempts to invoke the names of Jesus and Paul were empty and useless
 - So they find themselves at the mercy of the demon, who has much greater power than they
- In the way the demon responds, we are left with the impression that the demon would have reacted differently had he known these men
 - For example, had it been Paul speaking, the demon would have known who he was dealing with
 - In fact, we know Paul was casting out demons regularly, so it's reasonable to assume the demon would have had reason to avoid Paul entirely

- But because these men were unknown to the demon, the demon has no fear and no hesitation to attack them
 - This is the other side of the coin for us as Christians
 - When we step out in ministry, we may become a target because the demons know about us
 - But if we DON'T step out in service to Christ, then the demon realm will have no reason to fear us
 - Of course, we are never without some measure of power, having the Holy Spirit in us,
 - But we cannot expect to conjure the Spirit up like a genie when we need Him in a time of trial
 - He doesn't respond to our orders or desires
 - We must be practiced in reliance upon the Spirit if we expect to see the Lord working through us to defeat the enemy
- So our choice is to step out in faith and attract the attention of the demon realm
 - Or stay on the sidelines in our Christian walk and remain unknown the demons
- But as we attract attention, the Lord delights to show His power through us to defeat these attacks or give us the strength to go through them
 - But when we face trials as an undercover soldier for Christ, we are taking even greater risks and the danger is even greater
 - Because of the obscurity of our Christian witness, we give the demons nothing to fear

[Acts 19:17](#) This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.

[Acts 19:18](#) Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.

[Acts 19:19](#) And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

[Acts 19:20](#) So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

- God uses this event to profit the church in Ephesus
 - Fear of the Lord is the first result followed by the name of Jesus being magnified
 - Furthermore, many accept Christ and confess their sins
 - Many repudiate the occult and burn their magic books
 - The fact that so many had these books shows how many people were actively practicing sorcery in this church
 - We can see God's wisdom in the way He turns this situation to the church's benefit
 - Many in the church as well as the unbelievers have witnessed or heard about this event and it caused them to realize that faith in Christ was the true source of power
 - By the way, the value of these books as Luke describes it would be is hard to appreciate
 - Fifty thousand drachmas represents about 137 years of average wages in that day
 - Take your annual salary today and multiply by 137 to get an equivalent value
 - Millions of dollars
 - Even at minimum wage, we're talking about over \$2M
 - Have you seen believers willing to give up so much of what the world offers to please the Lord in obedience?
 - Finally, Luke adds his key marker phrase
 - The word of the Lord multiplied and prevailed
 - This is the natural result from obedience to the Gospel
- Now the narrative moves away from Ephesus and into the last major section of Luke's book
 - In this last and longest part, Paul sets his sites on making his way to Rome

[Acts 19:21](#) ¶ Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

[Acts 19:22](#) And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

- Paul perceives new direction from the Spirit
 - Specifically, Paul intends to travel through Macedonia and through Achaia confirming the churches he planted in those places in his previous trip
 - Eventually, he intends to make his way to Jerusalem
 - Paul carried donations from the Gentile churches for the poor Jerusalem church, and he wanted to deliver the money personally
 - Ultimately, Paul's intent was to make his way to visit Rome, the most notable church to never have seen from Paul
 - Remember, we said at the beginning of this study that Luke's narrative moves outward from Jerusalem and eventually reaches Rome
 - Luke is now beginning that final push in describing how Paul reaches that great city
 - Ironically, when Paul set this trip in motion, he tried to make adjustments to these original plans
 - According to things Paul says in 1 & 2 Cor, he intended to go across the Aegean Sea and see Corinth first
 - Then Paul expected to wind his way northeast through Macedonia
 - Eventually, turning East and going back to Asia Minor and on to Jerusalem
 - Instead, through a series of events Paul follows the exact plan he outlines here: Macedonia first, followed by Corinth
 - Eventually Paul reverses course and goes back the way he came then onto Jerusalem and finally Rome

- Before setting out, though, Paul sends Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia and then stays in Ephesus a little longer

Acts 19B

- Paul has determined to make his way to Rome
 - And the story of how he gets there dominates the rest of the story of Acts
 - Last week we ended on v.22 as Paul is making preparations to leave Ephesus after nearly three years

[Acts 19:22](#) And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

- But Paul isn't quite ready to leave the city, and before he leaves an incident breaks out

[Acts 19:23](#) About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way.

[Acts 19:24](#) For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen;

[Acts 19:25](#) these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business.

[Acts 19:26](#) "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.

[Acts 19:27](#) "Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence."

- Luke uses his typical understatement to set the scene
 - There as no small disturbance concerning the Way
 - What Luke meant to say was there was a really big disturbance
 - The phrase in Greek can be understood to mean a great riot
 - The reason for the riot in Ephesus was the Way, or the preaching of Jesus
 - More specifically, the riot was the product of a silversmith Demetrius
 - Luke says the man made shrines to Artemis

- These were amulets or small icons that represented the massive temple for Artemis or Diana
- Remembering that the temple was the center of the city's commerce and many historians believe it was the most beautiful building ever built
 - The worship of the goddess Artemis dominated this part of the world and brought many visitors and drive the city's commerce
- When Luke says the silversmith brought no little business to the craftsman, it means this man was the leader of the guild of silversmiths
 - Remember we learned in a previous week that craftsmen operated under the authority of a guild, like a union, and the work was assigned by the guild
 - Craftsmen couldn't work without the approval and direction of the guild
 - So this man could control the livelihood of all the silver craftsmen in the city of Ephesus
- Demetrius uses his authority to command an audience among the silver craftsmen
 - They probably assembled in the guild at first and Demetrius warns the men that their prosperity was at risk
 - Notice that his concern is first and foremost about his income
 - Later he will appeal to the religious pride of the city, but his real interest is money
 - He begins to describe the reason for his concern in v.26
 - He reminds them that they have all seen and heard of Paul's preaching of the Way in Ephesus
 - And he says this message has reached all Asia
 - While this statement may be exaggerated slightly, it's largely accurate as we described last week
 - And he adds that it has influenced a considerable number of people to say that idols like Diana are no gods at all

- What a remarkable testimony for Paul's ministry
 - Can there be a better testimony for our efforts to serve the Gospel than that of Demetrius
 - So many people were forsaking idols that the business of idol makers was suffering
 - It's hard to know how many people this represented, but considering the city was nearly half a million, the number of believers must have been significant
 - Demetrius' statement is also a reminder that the Gospel is by its nature a disruptive force
 - The truth comes to divide and interrupt the normal course of life
 - A course that leads to judgment and destruction
 - So if we desire to serve the Lord in meaningful ways for the purpose of building His kingdom, we should be prepared to cause a riot or two
 - If we don't, maybe we're not trying hard enough
- Demetrius ends his short speech by sanctimoniously appealing to a higher principle
 - He says if something isn't done, the temple of the beloved goddess Artemis will be regarded as worthless
 - After all, Diana is the goddess worshipped in all Asia and the world
 - That last statement is an exaggeration for effect
 - Diana was a popular idol, and evidence of Diana worship has been found in places as far away as Spain and France
 - But it's an overstatement to say she was worshipped in all the world
 - Nevertheless, Demetrius' tactic is obvious enough
 - He hopes to incite religious fervor as a result of his appeal
 - Yet his true cause is the economic concerns of losing business
 - Notice he says that their trade might fall into disrepute

- The word for disrepute comes from two Greek words that literally mean to be subjected to exposure
- He is literally saying that their trade of making false idols might be exposed for what it is...merely silver trinkets
- It's also important to understand that Ephesus was experiencing a period of economic decline in the latter half of the first century
 - And when economic conditions deteriorate, everyone looks for scapegoat
 - Hitler successfully redirected German discontent following the first World War against the Jewish population
 - Here we see a similar tactic taking place
 - Demetrius is redirecting the general economic decline in Ephesus against the Jews, which in this case they assumed to be the ones associated with Christianity
 - So Demetrius is laying their economic troubles at the feet of Christianity
- Demetrius' speech to the guild had the intended effect
 - He was throwing red meat to a bunch of blue collar guys who probably were easily agitated, especially by the rhetoric of their guild leader

[Acts 19:28](#) ¶ When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

[Acts 19:29](#) The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia.

[Acts 19:30](#) And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him.

[Acts 19:31](#) Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.

- In response to what they heard, the guild members get angry and begin to chant a popular rally cry
 - They chant Great is Artemis of the Ephesians

- There have been archeological discoveries that bear inscriptions with this phrase, so it must have been a popular phrase in the day
 - The men chant it with zeal here, and the excitement spills out of the guild and begins to move rapidly through the city
- Of course, when you have something this disorganized and built on emotion moving through a large city, the sense of it is lost almost immediately
 - And so we see in v.29 that the city is filled with confusion
 - I have to wonder at this point if the guild leader himself is taken aback by how big this gets
- Because the crowd grows quickly with chanters and lookers on, the crowd instinctively moves toward a larger venue: the city theater
 - The text says they rushed...this is a mob gaining size and a sense of urgency quickly
 - The ancient Ephesus theater has been excavated and we know it to be another impressive Ephesus structure
 - It held 25,000 people in 66 semi-circular rows, and it's now filling up
 - So we have a very large, very angry crowd looking for blood and ready to use mob violence to right the perceived wrong
 - Into this den of iniquity, the crowd drags two men known to associate with Paul
 - They grab Gaius and Aristarchus
 - These companions of Paul are mentioned at different places in Paul's letters
 - They are in mortal danger in this situation
 - With so many angry people and so much opposition to the Jewish people, these men could be killed in a matter of minutes if the crowd descended upon them
- Eventually, Paul hears of the disturbance and tries to go into the theater to address the crowd

- Knowing Paul, he probably wanted to come to the rescue of his friends
 - And he probably couldn't resist the opportunity to preach to 25,000 Gentiles assembled in a theater
- Fortunately, some of Paul's disciples in Ephesus restrain Paul from making his way to the theater
 - This should tell us something about the seriousness of the situation
 - First, the text in Greek makes clear that Paul was pressing to go and the disciples were physically restraining him
 - Secondly, the fact that Paul's own disciples would act to hold him back in this way indicates how certain they were that Paul would have been killed had he entered that assembly
 - This was mob violence and the level of danger was extreme
- Finally, we hear that some Asiarchs repeatedly urged Paul not to enter the theater
 - These men were considered the elder statesmen of the province and of the religious life of the city
 - They were like ambassadors of the city and worked to protect the name and reputation of the city
 - Along the way, they had made friends with Paul and now they acted to protect him
 - We can safely assume that their motivation was as much an issue of maintaining civic reputation as it was assisting Paul himself
 - Look at how big this incident is becoming in a matter of hours
 - These civic leaders aren't even at the scene themselves
 - They send word to Paul not to enter the theater
 - Apparently they have heard of the commotion and that Paul was intending to enter the theater
 - And they had time and interest to send their instructions to Paul

- This is quite an incident
 - The very fact that Luke chose to highlight it among the three years Paul spent in the city is also an indication of how big a deal this has become
- What might happen if we preach the Gospel or serve in another capacity with consistency and passion and seriousness?
 - In Paul's case it mean he converted many in Asia Minor
 - He turned many against idol worship
 - He threatened the livelihood of an entire industry
 - And of course, Paul didn't achieve these things, but God did through Paul, yet the point remains the same
 - We can do all things through Christ Who strengthens us, but notice Christ strengthens...He doesn't do it for us so to speak
 - But let's not forget that when we work for the Kingdom, we are also opposing the enemy
 - And this world is his for a time
 - And until that time is up, we must acknowledge the enemy's power and his determination to frustrate God's work and God's workers
 - To the degree we are successful in ministry, we will see increasing waves of persecution, trial and testing
 - Based on missionary organization statistics, 80% of believers globally who practice their faith live in an environment of persecution
 - When Christians are obedient to the calling to be bold and faithful witnesses, they will experience persecution
 - For example, China prohibited Easter services this past week for any church that publicized their intent to hold services
 - They placed all church leaders under house arrest
 - In fact, the litmus test for selecting church leadership in China is not spiritual gifting, talent, nor education, but whether they having experienced persecution for their witness

- It's been said that in our country today, it's acceptable to send our children to die for our country, but we hesitate to send our children to countries where they might die for their Christian witness
- It's been said that if your local body of believers hasn't had anyone in the previous 12 months
 - Refused for promotion
 - Fired from their job
 - Corrected by an authority
 - Or harassed by a co-worker for talking about Jesus
- Then your church is serving the American Dream, rather than Jesus the Messiah
- Paul was serving the Lord, and it has brought him to this point, where either his friends or he himself might die this day for daring to preach the Gospel
- Now we have a theater filled with angry artisans but no clear leader and no clear target for their anger
 - And then a possible target emerges

[Acts 19:32](#) So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together.

[Acts 19:33](#) Some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly.

[Acts 19:34](#) But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

- It's almost a comical scene at this point
 - The whole purpose for the gathering has become lost in the hubub
 - People are shouting at one another and saying different things
 - We can easily imagine the scene and understand how it would break down like this

- As the scene deteriorates, somehow some in the crowd came to think that their anger was focused at Alexander
 - He was a Jew in Ephesus and he wasn't a believer
 - And as he senses he might become a victim in all this, he motions to speak in his defense
 - Before he can even speak, however, the crowd recognized he was a Jew
 - And that precipitated a new round of Great is Artemis of the Ephesians lasting for two hours
- The reason they shouted Alexander down was because they saw any Jew as part of the problem
 - Remember Jews did participate in idol worship either, through they didn't work to convince Gentiles to follow suit
 - Nevertheless, the Gentile world made little distinction between the Jew and the emerging Christian faith or the Way
- Had Alexander had the chance to speak, we can image he would have tried to make that distinction if he was able
 - In fact, we can assume he would have tried to implicate Paul as the real villain
 - We can assume this because it's clear Alexander was an enemy of the faith
 - Paul himself indicts Alexander in 2Tim 4

[2Tim. 4:14](#) Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

[2Tim. 4:15](#) Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.

- The shouting of the chant went on for what must have seemed like forever
 - When a city official arrives to take charge

[Acts 19:35](#) After quieting the crowd, the town clerk said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven?"

[Acts 19:36](#) "So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.

[Acts 19:37](#) "For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.

[Acts 19:38](#) "So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another.

[Acts 19:39](#) "But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly.

[Acts 19:40](#) "For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering."

[Acts 19:41](#) After saying this he dismissed the assembly.

- A town clerk arrives to take charge
 - It's likely at this point the assembling had begun to worry the city officials, since it was unclear what the cause was and where it was headed
 - So this town clerk is sent
 - The title sounds like a low level bureaucrat to our ears
 - But in reality it was the chief officer of the city
 - He was the mayor, the comptroller, the librarian, city administrator, and leader of the city council all in one
 - He was elected and he would have been the city's ambassador to the Roman authorities as well
 - Literally, the most important man in the city has arrived to end this controlled riot
 - When he takes the stage, the crowd quiets in respect for his position
 - He shows his skill as a politician in how he takes charge
 - He begins by soothing their religious concerns
 - He argues that surely everyone knows and respects the city and it's role in guarding the temple to the goddess Diana

- The temple was probably the largest Greek temple ever constructed
 - It could hold 50,000 people inside it's walls
 - The goddess Diana was portrayed as a woman with many breasts
- Her image originated with a meteorite that landed nearby and was thought to resemble a multi-breasted woman
 - I'm guessing the meteorite was found by a man
- This meteorite was quite large and it was the prominent feature in the middle of the temple itself
 - That's why the town clerk mentions the image that fell from heaven
 - He's referring to the meteorite
- The temple in Paul's day was actually the second temple to Diana
 - The first had been built 600 years earlier, but it was destroyed on the same day that Alexander the Great was born, October 13, 356BC
 - Later, the temple was rebuilt and the new structure was one of the seven wonders of the world
- The mayor then advises the men that since the world's respect for Diana and Ephesus was in no danger of disappearing, they should do nothing rash
 - Specifically, the men they grabbed and brought to the theater had neither spoken against the goddess herself nor had they robbed the temple
 - Remember the temple was also a bank, so it's importance was as much financial as it was religious
 - In fact, the religious activity was merely pretense to generate the commerce
 - So there was no proof that they were acting to tear down Diana and the activities at the temple, the mayor says let it go
 - But if there is a complaint to be made against them, go to court

- Press charges and do it in the right way
- And then he adds a veiled threat: disband or be at risk of charges of disorderly conduct
 - And with that the mayor successfully ends the meeting and the threat against Paul and his companions
- What do we learn about this odd experience?
 - Well, among other things perhaps, we see the truth of Paul's teaching concerning our actions in bringing the Gospel in society

[Rom. 13:1](#) ¶ Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.
[Rom. 13:2](#) Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

[Rom. 13:3](#) For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;

[Rom. 13:4](#) for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

- Paul himself wrote those words, and he wrote them during the years he ministered in and around Ephesus
 - It's likely Paul thought back to this moment, when a city official came to his aid, though not for reasons of faith
 - But as Paul says in Rom 13, this official was acting in the interests of justice and did so because these men had a good testimony
 - Had Paul's companions resisted or fought back, the this official might have had a different decision
 - Secondly, Paul recognized the hand of God in this circumstance
 - Persecution eventually broke out throughout the Roman empire against Christians, but these things are all under God's authority
 - When government comes to our aid, it is a sign of God's protection
 - When it becomes an instrument of the enemy, it is a sign of God's willingness to test the church in trials

- Either way, we resist God when we resist the authorities over us
- Finally, remember the eventual fate of Ephesus

[Rev. 2:1](#) "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

[Rev. 2:2](#) 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;

[Rev. 2:3](#) and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

[Rev. 2:4](#) 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

[Rev. 2:5](#) 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent.

- Ephesus was known as a church that resisted false teachers and false teaching
 - Probably because of Paul's long time spent teaching the church and giving them a strong foundation
 - And they have perseverance and endurance, probably in the face of the city's never ending debauchery
 - But they lose their first love
 - And this can only mean they lose a focus on knowing and serving Christ
 - The church becomes something else, probably focused on it's own existence as an organization
 - Given how much the city prided itself in its structures and commerce, the church might have been tempted to see themselves in a similar way
 - Our churches today are threatened with the same sin and therefore with the same outcome
 - The church in Ephesus ceased to exist at a later point once the city lost it's harbor and temple and commerce dried up

Acts 20

- Paul last days and weeks in Ephesus caused quite a stir, and almost led to a riot over lost income by local idol makers
 - Paul no doubt took this as a sign that it was time for him to move on as he had already planned to do
 - He has set his mind on going to Rome, but first he wants to visit Macedonia and later Jerusalem for Passover
 - Chapter 20 tells of the final leg of Paul's third journey

[Acts 20:1](#) After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia.

[Acts 20:2](#) When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.

[Acts 20:3](#) And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

[Acts 20:4](#) And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.

[Acts 20:5](#) But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas.

[Acts 20:6](#) We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days.

- In vv.1-2 we have the shortest account for any leg of Paul's missionary journeys
 - In two verses, Luke summarizes months of travel
 - Fortunately, we have Paul's own writings in 2Cor and Romans which fill in some pieces (and consult your map of the 3rd journey)
 - First, he goes to Troas and spends some time there
 - Yet he remained troubled over things he heard about the church in Corinth, down the road
 - Earlier Paul writes a stern letter (1Cor) to the church
 - He sends it to Corinth with Titus

- Paul is concerned for how the church in Corinth has received his rebuke, so he begins to move out of Macedonia toward Corinth, probably impatient to get news
 - On the way westward, Paul runs into Titus returning from Corinth and receives a positive report concerning Corinth
 - In the Fall of AD 56, Paul writes 2Cor while still in Macedonia
- Finally Paul reaches Greece, which is Achaia or Corinth
 - After 3 months in his return to Corinth, Paul intended to sail to Jerusalem for the Passover
 - There are three Jewish feasts that were supposed to be celebrated in person in the city of Jerusalem and Passover was one
 - It was a common to see Jewish pilgrimage ships chartered in foreign ports to ferry Jews back to Jerusalem for the Spring Feasts
 - Paul had evidently planned to board one of these chartered ships for a direct route back to Jerusalem in time for Passover
 - This would have been the perfect opportunity for Jews to conspire against Paul and throw him overboard one night
 - He would have simply disappeared with no trace
 - So Paul decides to return the way he came, through Macedonia
 - And in doing so, Paul gives up hope of reaching Jerusalem for Passover
- As he leaves Corinth, Paul has a special delegation in tow
 - The men listed were representatives of the various Gentile churches
 - The men listed represented the newly established believers in Macedonia, Galatia and Asia
 - Paul likely was representing Achaia himself
 - And Luke may have represented Philippi

- In fact, the trip took Paul back to Philippi, where he meets up with Luke, as we notice the appearance of “we” again in v.5
- These men were joined with Paul because they were carrying monetary gifts from their respective congregations to the Jewish church in Jerusalem
 - The Gentile churches has been taught by Paul that giving in this way (e.g., giving by the wealthy Gentile churches to the impoverished Jewish church in Jerusalem) was important to their testimony
 - Paul teaches this in 2Cor 8-9
 - The church in Corinth had plenty and Paul notes that much poorer churches in Macedonia had given to a greater degree
 - So Paul uses this fact as a measuring stick to test the maturity and sacrificial nature of the church in Corinth
 - Now Paul leads a delegation of men back to Israel to show the church’s generosity
- By the time this delegation meets up with Luke in Philippi, the Passover has come
 - So Paul, Luke and probably a few other Jewish companions of Paul remain in Philippi to celebrate the 8 days of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - While the Gentile members of the delegation continued on to Troas to secure a ship
 - After the feast is over Paul and the rest continue to Troas

[Acts 20:7](#) ¶ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

[Acts 20:8](#) There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.

[Acts 20:9](#) And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead.

[Acts 20:10](#) But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, “Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.”

[Acts 20:11](#) When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left.

[Acts 20:12](#) They took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted

- From here on through the end of Luke's narrative, the storyline reads more like a travel journal, in keeping with Luke's point of view as a traveling companion
 - Luke will remain with Paul from this point forward, and he records what he sees along the trip
 - So be prepared for discussions of ports of call, nights in hotels or other travel vignettes
 - Luke opens with a remarkable story...
 - A group of Gentile Christians are gathering to break bread on the first day of the week
 - The reference to breaking bread is a mention of the Last Supper remembrance incorporated into a worship service
 - Notice that the meet time on this occasion was the first day of the week
 - This is a Sunday on our calendar
 - Though Luke doesn't say whether this was a weekly practice or simply a special occasion, it does suggest a change from typical Jewish practice
 - Naturally, these were Gentile believers, so in their previous life they would have cared little for the Jewish tradition of meeting on the Sabbath, the last day of the week
 - Instead, they established a day that made sense to them, the day of the week Jesus was resurrected, the first day of the week
 - There is no indication that these Gentile believers ever thought of this day as a "sabbath" since that term only had meaning to Jews
 - Today, Christians still worship on Sundays for the most part
 - But we must be careful not to go beyond what Scripture provides concerning the meaning of that day
 - It is not a special day, much less a "sabbath"

- It was just a day that worked for the early Christians
- There is no obligation in Scripture for a believer to observe the Jewish Sabbath nor any other special day
- Paul reiterates this truth in Col 2:16:

[Col. 2:16](#) Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day —

[Col. 2:17](#) things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- Since the first day of the week was a work day in the ancient world, this worship meeting takes place at evening
 - The timing of the meeting leads to a strange incident
 - Apparently, Paul was capable of preaching for far longer than even I can, something that must be hard to believe
 - Fortunately, I've never killed anyone with my preaching...yet
 - Luke sets the scene by saying that there were many lamps lit
 - The room was upstairs in a two story building and these oil lamps would have produced smoke
 - And over time the room would have needed ventilation, so the windows would be open
 - And as young boys are want to do, he took a seat in the window sill to hear Paul
 - Paul prolongs his preaching until midnight
 - The word in Greek literally means to extend or stretch
 - Perhaps this was the perspective of the audience, that Paul was stretching his message
 - Or perhaps it was Paul's practice to give long preachings
 - Having read Paul's letters, I can't imagine growing impatient listening to him preach...what a privilege, second only to hearing the Lord Himself preaching

- In fact, some preachers have said, in all sincerity, that they view Paul's practice here as scriptural authority if not mandate to deliver long messages
- While I agree that we could all stand to have more in depth and demanding Bible teaching than we are likely to get on an average Sunday, nevertheless the book of Acts isn't a prescriptive book of theology
 - If Acts were seen to prescriptive, then we would have to conclude that it's also scripturally acceptable for our preaching to result in snoozing congregants
 - I don't think so
- Rather, we must conclude that long preaching has it's dangers, as witnessed in the fate of Eutychus
 - The boy's name is an irony of sorts, since it means "fortunate"
 - Ultimately, the boy finds a favorable outcome, but not before he experiences tragedy
 - Tired from the late hour and probably lulled by Paul's voice, the boy simply falls asleep and tumbles backward out of the window
 - The fall to the second floor kills him
 - Luke, the doctor, would have been an excellent source to record whether the boy had died, so we can take his report at face value
 - Naturally, this moment would have led to temporary chaos in the meeting
 - Women crying, men rushing to aid the boy
 - And Paul himself goes down to the boy
 - Paul then fell upon the boy
 - The word for fell in Greek is a word for embrace or press upon
 - The scene reminds us of Elijah and later Elisha laying on the body of the of the dead boys
 - Paul then announces that the boy's life is in him again
- How did Paul raise the boy from the dead?

- Obviously, Paul didn't do it of his own power; he was used by God to perform this miracle
 - Did Paul know that God would accomplish this miracle in that moment?
 - Or was it that Paul could perform this kind of miracle at will in keeping with his Apostolic authority?
 - We don't know for sure but I'm inclined to believe Paul had this ability as he felt the leading to use it
- Perhaps Paul felt some responsibility for causing it or simply mercy for the boy
 - Or he saw an opportunity to stir up the faith of this congregation and the church in Asia
 - It seems God would have used something like this in that very way
 - We get a hint of that outcome in noticing what Luke says next
 - After the revival, Paul heads back upstairs, conducts the communion meal
 - And then he preaches for another 6 hours or so!
 - Presumably, everyone gave Paul their full attention following this display of God's power
- When it ends saying they were greatly comforted, I think the intent is beyond the obvious that the boy survived
 - I believe they were comforted in seeing Paul perform this miracle, as it would have strengthened their faith in all Paul said

[Acts 20:13](#) ¶ But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for so he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land.

[Acts 20:14](#) And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene.

[Acts 20:15](#) Sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus.

[Acts 20:16](#) For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

- Luke quickly covers Paul's journeys from Tros to Mitylene near Ephesus
 - Paul has adjusted his goal from attending Passover to attending Pentecost
 - So only a few weeks have past since Paul left Philippi
 - Paul travels by land because it was actually faster than by ship in this case due to the difficult waters in that area
 - This would have allowed Paul to spend a little longer in Troas while his companions preferred the easier journey by ship so they left earlier
 - Once Paul catches up, they sail down the coast
 - he decides he doesn't have time to stop in Ephesus and still make Pentecost
 - So they continue to Miletus

[Acts 20:17](#) ¶ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

- When the ship docks, Paul sends word to Ephesus about 20 miles up the road that the church elders should come down to the port to meet with him
 - This way Paul could deliver a message to the church without making the trip up himself
 - And Paul delivers a message in person that closely mirrors Paul's writing style, so much that it reads to us like a mini Pauline epistle

[Acts 20:18](#) And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, [Acts 20:19](#) serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; [Acts 20:20](#) how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, [Acts 20:21](#) solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. [Acts 20:22](#) "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, [Acts 20:23](#) except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

[Acts 20:24](#) "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

[Acts 20:25](#) ¶ "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.

[Acts 20:26](#) "Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

[Acts 20:27](#) "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

- Paul sets the tone of his speech in the first four verses
 - He says that from their own experiences they should know how Paul is a man of courage when it comes to preaching God's word
 - He served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials
 - Paul emphasized he was a man who operated in sincerity, not thinking too highly of himself and not profiting from his ministry
 - Rather he experienced heartache and trials and persecution
 - And Paul reminds them that nevertheless he refused to shrink back from his duty to preach
 - He never held back anything that would be profitable or from being seen publicly moving from house to house in ministry to the people
 - Then Paul looks into the future and alludes to more trouble
 - He is headed to Jerusalem,
 - And the Holy Spirit has given Paul the knowledge that he will face trouble everywhere and that trouble is growing stronger]
 - Paul didn't know the details but he must have had revelation that opposition was growing against him, and he knew that God would let it overpower him eventually
 - What a burden to carry
 - Still Paul marched on
- Paul is setting the stage here for his exhortation to the church leaders

- He wants them to emulate him and remember his example in this specific way
 - Contending with persecution and enemies of the Gospel
 - And to do so with one particularly response: preaching the truth boldly without fear or compromise
- Notice in v.24 Paul gives an important cause and effect to explain his ministry
 - Let's look at the effect first, found after the word "so"
 - Paul says he was able to finish his course and ministry given to him by Jesus
 - The ministry to preach the Gospel in all its detail
 - Remember, preaching the Gospel doesn't mean just preaching John 3:16
 - It means preaching the entire testimony of salvation, which is Gen 1 - Rev 22
 - The Gospel is the Word of God
 - Paul was able to bring a message of grace to all Asia even though he faced daily persecution and stiff opposition
 - And he traveled endless distances and endured considerable hardship
 - This was his course and he has stuck with it, as Paul says
 - Why?
- In the first half of the verse, Paul gives the cause, which enabled him to have this kind of sustained ministry in Asia
 - Paul was able to run this course as Jesus assigned it to him because Paul didn't consider his life of any account
 - You'll be interested to know that the Greek word for "account" is logos, the word
 - Paul is using a play on speech here

- He says he didn't consider his own personal life to be of much testimony or account
 - So he was able to devote himself to preaching the life of Jesus, the account of the Gospel
 - His own life was not the point and therefore it didn't cause him to hold back
 - Paul was only able to preach effectively and consistently because he wasn't interested in his own life story, his own legacy or reputation, much less saving his own skin
 - He was concerned only with the glory of God even when it meant facing death or other trials
 - The contrary, therefore, is also true
 - If we are too concerned with our life and earthly rewards, we put at risk our willingness to seek the ministry God has assigned to us
 - Paul could be a servant of Christ because he didn't serve himself
- Speaking with divine insight, Paul declares that he won't see them again
 - And Paul adds that he has no regrets nor obligations unmet
 - How can Paul be so confident that he is without blame in the exercise of his ministry?
 - The answer is simple again
 - He didn't fail in his calling to preach the entire counsel of God's word
 - I love this verse for its simplicity and clarity
 - Paul was confident he was blameless in his ministry in Asia because he said everything God told him
 - He held back nothing, the whole purpose of God
 - A better translation for purpose is counsel
 - Shouldn't that be every teacher's and preacher's goal?

- In fact, Paul's statement argues for corollary: if we fail to deliver the full counsel of God, we risk being guilty in some fashion for what comes from our work
 - After all, Paul was confident he was innocent of the blood of all men because he delivered the truth in whole
 - We should strive for the same personal testimony
- Finally, Paul moves from using his own testimony as an example to giving a warning and instructions to these leaders

[Acts 20:28](#) "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

[Acts 20:29](#) "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

[Acts 20:30](#) and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

[Acts 20:31](#) "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

[Acts 20:32](#) "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

[Acts 20:33](#) "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

[Acts 20:34](#) "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.

[Acts 20:35](#) "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

- This is classic Pauline exhortation
 - In light of the opposition to the Gospel, Paul says be on guard
 - Expect false teachers and false teaching to appear
 - It strikes me that perhaps this is the best explanation for how false teaching takes hold in any church
 - Leaders aren't guarding against it
 - They don't expect it, they don't look for it, they don't set up protections against it

- They don't enforce the protections they do have, they don't assess teachers and deal with the problems they find
- Of all the instructions Paul could have given leaders in his last meeting, Paul chose to emphasize the importance of maintaining the purity of the church's teaching
 - The one and perhaps only responsibility that distinguishes church leaders from the rest of the congregation is the unique responsibility to guard against false teaching
 - Every other duty can and should be shared with other members of a church
- Leaders are not uniquely appointed in any other way except to guard teaching
 - Jesus Himself told the first leader in the church that if he loved Jesus, he must feed Jesus' sheep
- Paul says they must be on guard over teaching if they are to do their jobs well as leaders
- We know from Jesus' letter to this church in Revelation, He commends the church in Ephesus for not tolerating false teachers
 - So it seems the leaders heed Paul's warning
- Finally, Paul leaves them with a commendation and reminder
 - Paul says the word of God will edify them and lead them into an inheritance
 - That their faith to the word brings its own rewards, including eternal rewards
 - Then Paul reminds the church that he didn't come with a selfish financial interest himself
 - In fact, Paul took care of himself through the work of his own hands
 - Even taking care of those who traveled with him
 - Again, setting an example for others to follow

- Finally, Paul uses this opportunity to reinforce the need to be charitable and willing to help believers in need
 - Paul was likely seeking donations for Jerusalem even as he had this meeting with the Elders
 - He quotes Jesus, though the quote doesn't exist anywhere else in Scripture, so it must have been left for Paul to record it
- And so Paul leaves for Jerusalem with the elders mourning his departure

[Acts 20:36](#) ¶ When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

[Acts 20:37](#) And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him,

[Acts 20:38](#) grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Acts 21

- Our study of Acts picks up again today in the travel journal style that will mark the remainder of the book
 - Luke chronicling Paul's movements and experience
 - Beginning with chapter 21 tonight, the rest of the book of Acts sees Paul in captivity
 - First Paul is captive in Jerusalem
 - Later he will move to Caesarea
 - Finally, the book ends with Paul in prison in Rome

[Acts 21:1](#) ¶ When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara;
[Acts 21:2](#) and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

[Acts 21:3](#) When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo.

[Acts 21:4](#) After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.

[Acts 21:5](#) When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

[Acts 21:6](#) Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

- Tonight we begin where Luke left off at the end of chapter 20
 - Paul is in Miletus, having given the elders of Ephesus a departing exhortation
 - Remember, Paul is escorted by men representing the various Gentile churches and bringing gifts for Jerusalem
 - After Paul delivers his message, he gets on the ship again and continues toward Jerusalem
 - Paul has felt compelled to reach Jerusalem for some time
 - And as he approaches, he will receive numerous warning signs that something terrible awaits him there
 - And yet Paul continues on

- Leaving Miletus, Luke records the ship's progress along the Pamphylia coast
 - First, the ship goes to Cos, then to Rhodes and on to Patara
 - Once again, I recommend you consult the map for Paul's third missionary journey to trace these stops along his route
 - In Patara, they switch ships for one headed to Phoenicia
 - They needed a larger ship to cross the open sea
 - They head toward Syria and specifically, the ship was headed to the ancient city state of Tyre
- When Paul reaches Tyre, Luke says they stayed there a week
 - This stop was probably not of choice for Paul, since we know he was rushing home for Pentecost
 - Paul was riding on trading ships, which took time to off load and take on cargo in each port
 - Plus sailors wanted time in port and off the ship
 - While in the city, they go seeking for disciples
 - Paul knew that a church had begun in this city at the hands of disciples spread during the first Jerusalem persecution
 - But Paul has never visited them and doesn't know where they are, since they are Gentiles and not in the synagogues
 - So Paul goes looking for them
 - When he finds them, they eventually tell him through the Spirit that he should not set foot in Jerusalem
 - This statement is potentially confusing
 - Because it seems to suggest that Paul will be disobeying the Spirit to enter Jerusalem
 - Remember, we must understand it in light of all we've read so far and in light of how the story of Paul eventually ends

- When the text says the warning came “through the Spirit,” it helps us understand what is really going on here
 - Luke doesn’t use the more common phrase “by the Spirit”
 - Saying “by” would indicate that the words spoken were according to God’s Spirit
 - If that were so, then we would have to conclude that Paul was being told by God not to enter Jerusalem
 - Instead, Luke says “through” so that we might understand the brothers in Syria were speaking based on a revelation of the Spirit
 - But the conclusion they drew from their revelation was their own
 - Through the Spirit, they came to know of the danger in Jerusalem
 - But by their own estimation, they determined that Paul should not go into that danger
 - The Spirit never gave that prohibition
- Since Paul was determined to leave, they followed him to the ship and prayed with him before he left
 - We’re going to see this pattern repeat again
 - Paul will receive warnings from well-meaning brothers who worry for his safety
 - But in each case, Paul recognizes that the revelation of the Spirit was intended to help Paul prepare for what was coming
 - It was not intended to stop him

[Acts 21:7](#) When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day.

[Acts 21:8](#) On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.

[Acts 21:9](#) Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.

[Acts 21:10](#) As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

[Acts 21:11](#) And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

[Acts 21:12](#) When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.

[Acts 21:13](#) Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

[Acts 21:14](#) And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

- Paul has nearly reached Jerusalem
 - After a brief stop in Ptolemais and a visit with the church in that town, Paul arrives at Caesarea
 - It sounds as if they made the trip to Caesarea by land rather than by ship, since the towns are only 30 miles apart
 - This was a modern city rebuilt by Herod the Great and it served as the Roman capital of Judea
 - Paul chooses to bring his entourage to the home of Phillip the evangelist
 - We remember Phillip from chapter 8 as the one who brought the Gospel to the Samaritans
 - That happened roughly 20 years earlier from this point, and he has settled down in Caesarea
 - Luke met Phillip here for the first time, and it's likely that Luke learned many of the details of Phillip's time in Samaria from this encounter
 - We also hear that Phillip has four daughters who are virgins and have the gift of prophecy
 - The mention of their virginity would have been unnecessary if it simply meant they had not had relationship with men
 - That would be expected unless they were married
 - The real point of the statement, therefore, must be that they are committed to a life of singleness in service to the church

- And so they live with their father
- The daughters are also prophetesses which demonstrates that spiritual gifts of all kinds are available to both men and women
 - Bothe men and women have speaking and teaching gifts along with all other gifts, except apostleship
 - Scripture only places limits on the exercise of our gifts when such use would be counter to a high spiritual purpose
 - For example, Paul teaches in 1Cor 14 that a woman is not to exercise her gift of prophecy or teaching when doing so would challenge male headship in the church
 - This is why women are not given apostleship
 - Also, men cannot exercise speaking in tongues when an interpreter is not present because it does not edify the Body
- Luke says that while Paul was staying in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus came from Judea to see Paul
 - We saw him earlier in chapter 11 foretelling the famine in Antioch
 - Now the prophet visits Paul in Caesarea and uses this elaborate display with Paul's belt to communicate to Paul what will happen when he enters Jerusalem
 - Through the man's symbolic display, he communicates that Paul will be bound as a prisoner
 - In fact, this binding will begin a period of fives years in which Paul will remain bound in one sense or another as a prisoner
 - Notice in this example the prophet speaks exactly what the Spirit says
 - The Spirit gives another warning, but not a prohibition to travel to Jerusalem
 - We also see that the warning had two very different effects on the crowd and on Paul
 - First, the crowd takes the warning and interprets it much like the earlier group

- They see the reality of this misery as reason not to venture into Jerusalem
 - We can assume why they would have this point of view
 - They believe instinctively that the highest value in life is preserving our physical lives
 - If Paul knew that he was going to be endangered in Jerusalem, then certainly that argued for avoiding the danger
- Such a view is the natural and common one in the world, especially among unbelievers
 - And it is shared by many believers, both here in this story and in the world today
 - It seems sensible to conclude that protection of our life is the highest goal we can have
 - But the Bible gives Christians an even higher goal than protecting our physical lives
 - We're told that obedience to God is the highest goal of a sanctified life
 - It is even more important than preserving our physical life
 - In keeping with the example set by our Lord himself
 - But when we place our physical lives over obedience to God, we stand to lose something much greater than our physical bodies
 - Jesus said it this way:

[Mark 8:35](#) "For whoever wishes to save his life **will lose** it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

- There are eternal implications for our disobedience, especially if the disobedience is an attempt to
 - Then we have Paul's reaction to the news
 - Paul gently admonishes them telling them they are breaking his heart

- The phrase “breaking my heart” in Greek carries the meaning of “weakening my will” or “lessening my resolve”
- Paul is correcting the crowd by pointing out that they are working against Paul’s best interests and making it harder for him to obey the Lord
- In a way, Paul is saying something similar to what Jesus told Peter when they were nearby in Caesarea Philippi

[Matt. 16:23](#) But He turned and said to Peter, “**Get behind** Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

- When Paul asks the brethren what are they doing, he is really saying “Do you know what you’re doing to me?”
 - As Paul demonstrates his resolve, it has a teaching effect on the crowd
 - They see his resolve and then in v.14 they declare that the Lord’s will be done
 - Now we see clearly where the Lord’s will is in this matter
 - God is calling Paul into Jerusalem and into chains for the sake of the Gospel
 - And the brethren are now understanding this call, made clear by Paul’s teaching on that point
 - So now they turn from a somewhat selfish desire to preserve his life to better desire to obey God’s will
 - Remember, the book of Acts told us earlier that Jesus confided in Paul concerning the many things he would suffer for the name of Christ
 - And now many of them are about to take place and Paul is ready to be obedient to that call
- What can we learn from the fact that God is revealing Paul’s coming suffering even as Paul moves toward the city
 - Obviously, the more God reveals, the harder it gets for Paul to move onward

- Yet it's also interesting that these revelations continue to come in very public moments before church gatherings and leaders
- It's as if God wants the church to witness Paul's obedience even in the face of certain persecution and death
- And that was in fact the purpose, or at least one purpose
 - Remember, not long after Paul dies the church enters a period of hundreds of years of persecution
 - And many Christians are soon to be called upon to face death for their faith without retreating from their confessions
 - And leading into the period, the Lord has decided to parade Paul through his own period of captivity and martyrdom in a very public way
 - So that Paul may be an example for the church in facing this suffering for the sake of Christ
- We should remember this lesson when we consider how to face the trials in our lives
 - God have the right to use our lives any way He wishes for His glory and His eternal purposes
 - And like Paul, God could decide that the best way to use our lives is to bring us through trials or tragedy as opportunity to demonstrate His power and grace through us
 - Are we prepared to become glory to God in that way?

[Acts 21:15](#) After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem.

[Acts 21:16](#) Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

[Acts 21:17](#) After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

[Acts 21:18](#) And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

[Acts 21:19](#) After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

[Acts 21:20](#) And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law;

[Acts 21:21](#) and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

- From Caesarea Paul moves to Jerusalem and finally arrives
 - Smartly, the brethren in Caesarea send with Paul to Jerusalem with a trusted brother who lived in the city
 - The plan was to have Paul and his entourage board with this man
 - His name is Mnason, and he may have been at Pentecost
 - He was a Hellenistic Jew and as such, he would have been less bothered by a mixed crowd of Jewish and Gentile believers boarding with him in Jerusalem
 - As Paul enters the city, he is warmly received by the church
 - He visits James and the other elders
 - And Paul gives a full report on how the church is spreading among Gentiles across the world
 - How encouraging this must have been for the church leaders in Jerusalem to hear
- Then the discussion turns to more serious matters concerning Paul's safety
 - The leaders remind Paul that in Jerusalem there are many thousands of believing Jews now
 - The word in Greek for thousands is myriads, which literally means 20,000 or more believing Jews in the city
 - On the one hand, this is a great testimony to the growth of the church in the city of Jerusalem
 - The believing Jews comprise a sizable minority in the city now
 - On the other hand, James tells Paul that the Christian Jews in Jerusalem were zealous to keep the Law
 - Since believers are not required to keep the Law in this way, these believers were either doing so as a matter of personal preference

- Or they were unaware of their liberty in this regard
- Or they were maintaining appearances to ensure good relations with the rest of the Jews in the city
- These believing Jews had been fed false rumors that Paul was teaching against Jewish Law and customs
 - We can be sure these rumors were the products of false teachers and dishonest men trying to stir up trouble for Paul
 - But the church leaders tell Paul that many believing Jews have accepted these rumors as true
 - So they decide upon a plan of action to help protect Paul

[Acts 21:22](#) "What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

[Acts 21:23](#) "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;

[Acts 21:24](#) take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.

[Acts 21:25](#) "But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

[Acts 21:26](#) Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

- The leaders know that eventually the whole of the church will discover that Paul is in town, and so they must have a way to show that Paul respects Judaism
 - There were four men in the church who were at the end of a period of a vow
 - At the end of a vow, these men were to purify themselves including shaving their heads
 - This process was somewhat costly, involving payments to the temple priests, for the sacrifices, etc.
 - So James recommends that Paul accompany them to the temple and pay for these expenses

- In this way, Paul would show his support for customs
- And he would demonstrate that he wasn't against the Law, allowing it to be practiced voluntarily
- Furthermore, the Gentiles in Paul's party would abide by the restrictions hammered out at the Council of Jerusalem
- We can see James working politically to get Paul to affirm support for voluntary adherence to the Law
 - Even while he agrees that Gentiles are not under the Law
- Paul agreed and accompanied the men to the temple
 - He himself was also purified
 - Paul would have had his own head shaved
 - Then he gave the notice that these men and himself had completed vows
 - This process involved reporting to the priest on behalf of each man, in turn, and setting the date that the sacrifices would be offered for the men
- In this case, the vows were complete in seven days, and so the sacrifices were conducted at the end of that time
 - The process seems to have had it's intended effect, because we never hear of believing Jews harassing Paul
 - Ironically, today believers may criticize Paul for sacrificing in the temple,
 - Some suggest that this was wrong for Paul since Jesus was the one sufficient sacrifice and no other is required
 - First, remember that this was not a sacrifice for atonement of sin but in thanks for completing the vow
 - Secondly, it was done to harmonize the Jewish and Gentile believers
 - Finally, keeping the Law is not wrong; only if we make it mandatory is it wrong

[Acts 21:27](#) ¶ When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, [Acts 21:28](#) crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

[Acts 21:29](#) For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

[Acts 21:30](#) Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.

[Acts 21:31](#) While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

[Acts 21:32](#) At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

[Acts 21:33](#) Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done.

[Acts 21:34](#) But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

[Acts 21:35](#) When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob;

[Acts 21:36](#) for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, "Away with him!"

- At the end of the vow period, Paul has been found out by the unbelieving Jews visiting from Asia
 - They were probably in town for the Passover or Pentecost as well
 - And they begin to stir up the city against Paul
 - They lie and distort Paul's teaching, making accusations calculated to gain a strong negative response from the Jews
 - The nail in the coffin was the charge that one of Paul's Gentile traveling companions, Trophimus, was brought into the holy place
 - That was about the worst thing a Jew could do, and it was guaranteed to start a riot
 - At the time the riot begins, Paul is in the Inner Court and into the Outer Court
 - And the doors to the Inner Court are closed, because a man's blood could not be spilled in the Inner Court

- And the Jewish mob are preparing to kill Paul
- Before they get very far, the commander of the Roman cohort hears of the rioting and rushes to put it down
 - He arrives to find Paul being beaten and puts a stop to it
 - They put Paul in chains and lead him away to interrogate him
- Thus begins five years of Roman imprisonment
- The noise and aggressiveness of the crowd requires that the interrogation move indoors, so the commander orders them to take Paul into the barracks
 - But the crowd follows in pursuit and continue to threaten the soldiers and Paul
 - So to get Paul inside, they must lift him up and carry him into the barracks

[Acts 21:37](#) ¶ As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek?"
[Acts 21:38](#) "Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"
[Acts 21:39](#) But Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people."

- Paul speaks up at this point and asks for a chance to address the crowd
 - Paul speaks in Greek, which surprises the commander and causes him to mistake Paul for a notorious revolutionary wanted for insurrection
 - Paul quickly identifies himself as a citizen of Tarsus and as a Jew
 - And he asks for permission to address the crowd
 - This was a brave request and it leads into chapter 22 next week, where Paul's speech and the crowd's response lead the story forward

Acts 22-23

- Paul is being held prisoner by the Roman authorities in Jerusalem
 - He is standing on the stairway between the Outer Court and the Antonia Fortress
 - He is under attack by a crowd of Jews at the Temple
 - And Paul asks permission to speak to the crowd
 - The Roman grants permission, hoping that Paul might say something to explain the situation
 - Paul begins to speak in Hebrew, which means the Romans will not be able to understand what he says
 - And at first the crowd listens

[Acts 22:1](#) ¶ “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you.”

[Acts 22:2](#) ¶ And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said,

[Acts 22:3](#) ¶ “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

[Acts 22:4](#) “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons,

[Acts 22:5](#) as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

- Paul begins his address with respectful words, spoken in Hebrew to get their attention and hide their conversation from Roman ears
 - Here we have Paul’s background story
 - He calls himself a Jew
 - Paul had come to know the Lord, but that didn’t mean Paul was not a Jew
 - He was born outside Judea but came to the city as a young boy and studied under a famous rabbi

- And his training was according to the strictest traditions, the Pharisaical traditions
- Paul is arguing that he was like them, as zealous for God as they were
 - This is a natural starting point for any testimony concerning faith in the Gospel
 - It may help people understand the message if we begin by explaining we were once them ourselves
 - This is Paul's technique here
- He goes a step further to remind them that he even persecuted the Way, which was Christianity's more common title
 - He persecuted to the death, and even went outside the city to find Christians
- Paul is seeking "street cred" here so that the crowd will appreciate the significance of what Paul will say next
 - The more they understand how much Paul hated the Christians, the more astonishing it will be when they hear that he became one
 - And the more glory God will receive for the work He did to convert Paul
- This is also an important feature in any Christian testimony
 - If we minimize the extent of our sinfulness prior to faith, we diminish God's glory
 - We seem to reduce our need for salvation and thereby decrease God's grace and mercy
 - Instead, we should make clear that grace was the our only hope
- Next Paul gives the testimony we know from earlier in the Book of Acts

[Acts 22:6](#) ¶ " But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, [Acts 22:7](#) and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' [Acts 22:8](#) "And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'

[Acts 22:9](#) "And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me.

[Acts 22:10](#) "And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.'

[Acts 22:11](#) "But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.

[Acts 22:12](#) ¶ "A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,

[Acts 22:13](#) came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him.

[Acts 22:14](#) "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth.

[Acts 22:15](#) 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.

[Acts 22:16](#) 'Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

- Paul's testimony of conversion begins with his encounter on the road
 - We know the outline from the earlier account and Paul only adds a few minor details
 - Interestingly, we will see yet another retelling of this story later in the book of Acts before Agrippa
 - Paul tells us that the timing was noon
 - Which means that the brightness of Christ exceeded the brightness of the noon day desert sun
 - In v.14 Paul indicates it was a privilege have been appointed to know God's will, see the Lord and hear Him speak
 - This statement gives us an appreciation for the significance of what it meant to be in the Lord's presence - then and now
 - Clearly, Paul was keen to tell his story of conversion because it was a story of God's mercy on a very sinful man
 - And if a sinful man bent on killing Christians could be arrested by God in such a dramatic way, then surely God can save anyone
 - Secondly, Paul's story validated his claims to have been entrusted with God's message of salvation
 - These were Paul's points as he delivered this testimony

- The final verse in that section has caused confusion for some, who wonder why Paul was told to wash away his sins through baptism
 - As is usually the case, the confusion lies in the translation from Greek to English
 - In this case, there are two pairings established in the text
 - First, “getting up” or rising up was paired with being baptized
 - Paul was commanded to be baptized as soon as he could get up off the ground
 - All believers are similarly commanded to move forward into baptism after faith
 - Secondly, washing away sins and calling on His name are paired
 - As Paul called on the name of the Lord, he was experiencing the washing away of his sins by faith
 - To properly reflect this sense from the Greek language, we need to restructure the sentence to emphasize these pairings
 - “Having arisen, be baptized, and wash away your sins having called on the name of the Lord.”

[Acts 22:17](#) ¶ “It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance,
[Acts 22:18](#) and I saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’
[Acts 22:19](#) “And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You.
[Acts 22:20](#) ‘And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.’
[Acts 22:21](#) “And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

- Paul now tells of when he arrived in Jerusalem
 - We know from Acts 9 that Paul visited Jerusalem but Paul’s testimony here is new information concerning what happened while he was in the city
 - In Acts 9:29-30, we read that briefly that Paul was endangered by Jews and so Paul was ushered out of town for his safety

- Paul then relates how he reasoned with the Lord that these people would remember that Paul had been the one to punish the Christians
 - Paul's logic is interesting here
 - He is recounting how in his own mind he assumed that he could reason the Jews into belief
 - And he cited his own testimony and history as a powerful weapon in persuading the Jews to believe the Gospel
 - It's as if Paul is suggesting that the Lord is giving up on the Jews too easily
 - They will eventually come around to Paul's message
 - And Paul says his own personal testimony will be the clinched in making the argument
 - Also, Paul might have been suggesting that his reputation as a killer who hunted Christians might dissuade the Jews from trying to kill him
 - Then Paul gives the Lord's response to his logical argument
 - Paul says the Lord commanded that Paul leave Jerusalem and go to the Gentiles with the message of the Messiah
- Paul clearly spells out his commission to take the Gospel far and wide to the Gentiles
 - He mentioned it here probably to defend his ministry to the Jews and to explain the Jew's hatred for his message
- Paul also must have known the reaction his words would generate with the Jewish crowd

[Acts 22:22](#) They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!"

[Acts 22:23](#) And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air,

[Acts 22:24](#) the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.

[Acts 22:25](#) But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"

[Acts 22:26](#) When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman."

[Acts 22:27](#) The commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes."

[Acts 22:28](#) The commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "But I was actually born a citizen."

[Acts 22:29](#) Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.

[Acts 22:30](#) ¶ But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

- After Paul's statement that the Lord intended for him to reach Gentiles with the message, they had heard enough
 - It was blasphemy to their ears
 - Surely God would never make a way available for Gentiles
 - For these Jews, this statement was proof that Paul was a liar
 - So they call for Paul to be put to death, and the rioting resumes
 - This obviously angers the Roman soldiers, who feel as though Paul has abused their grace and used it against them
 - So they decide to whip Paul until he tells them what he said
- Clearly, Paul has been orchestrating this entire situation to suit his own purposes
 - He has hidden as much as he could from the Romans hoping to gain their protection so he could safely address the Jewish audience
 - Remember, to the Jew *first*, then the Gentile
 - Paul also knew that once he had pushed the Romans' patience too far, he could then reveal his Roman citizenship
 - Thus saving himself from their whips at least in the moment
 - Roman citizens enjoyed a degree of protection under law similar to U.S. citizens today
 - They could not receive punishment without due process

- In this case, it would have been illegal to punish before trial
- And it was also illegal to scourge a Roman citizen under any circumstances
- So Paul asks his carefully worded (and timed) question
 - Paul waits until he is literally stretched out and the whip was being raised to land the first blow
 - He seems to have timed his revelation for the last possible minute so that the centurion was already in violation of Roman law
 - Paul asks is it lawful for them to whip a Roman citizen?
 - The question is rhetorical because the answer is obvious to everyone
 - And the point of Paul's question was to simply state he was a Roman citizen
 - At this the centurion stops and goes immediately to the captain asking why they are whipping a Roman citizen
 - The captain goes to Paul to challenge his statement
 - In Paul's day, a person could acquire a coveted Roman citizenship in one of three ways
 - By Imperial decree for services rendered to the Empire
 - By birth under certain criteria
 - By purchasing it, which was very expensive
 - The captain says he gained his citizenship through the purchase method
 - Implying that Paul couldn't possibly have managed the same
 - He was also implying that if Paul was prepared to lie about purchasing citizenship, the captain was ready to fact check him from personal experience

- Instead, Paul says he was born a Roman citizen, which would have been rare for anyone, much less a Jew
 - Paul's citizenship couldn't have come simply because he was born in Tarsus, as Tarsus was a free city and not a Roman colony
 - He must have been born to parents who were themselves Roman citizens by some means
- The commander is now in a pickle
 - He feels vulnerable to Paul since he put Paul in chains and threatened to whip him
 - Paul could make life difficult for this captain if his mistake was reported
 - Still, he can't let go of Paul, and probably for reasons of pride, he is determined to know what Paul said in the temple
 - So he devises another plan
 - He will let the Jews try their own
 - So he assembles the Jewish council for a hearing on the matter of Paul
 - The captain is hoping that the council will help him get to the bottom of this issue
 - The council would have consisted of mostly Sadducees with a Pharisee minority
- As the council begins to meet, Paul gets off to a bad start with the high priest

[Acts 23:1](#) Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."

[Acts 23:2](#) The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.

[Acts 23:3](#) Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?"

[Acts 23:4](#) But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

[Acts 23:5](#) And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

- Paul's opening remark brings a swift and painful rebuke from the high priest

- Ananias commands one of the Jewish attendants standing near Paul to strike him in the mouth
 - They obviously disagree with Paul's statement
- But more than that, Ananias is a particular bad sort
 - Josephus wrote that this man was insolent, hot-tempered, profane and greedy
 - He stole the tithes that were to go to the priests
 - He conspired to instigate outbreaks of violence
 - He maintained his grip on power as high priest because of his strong pro-Rome stance
 - Eventually, he was hated by the people and killed by zealots in AD 66 after found hiding in an aqueduct
- After being struck, Paul responds in anger and indignation, calling the high priest a whitewashed wall, similar to the term Jesus used for Pharisees
 - He was declaring that the high priest was clean only on the outside
 - And Paul rightly points out that striking him was itself a violation of law, so that the one striking the supposed law breaker was the one breaking the law
- Paul cleverly points out that they violate the law when they strike him
 - And they point out that Paul had insulted the high priest?
 - This man was not truly God's high priest, since the Lord was now our high priest
 - Nevertheless, Paul gives a defense saying he was unaware that this man was the high priest and would show him respect
 - How would Paul have not known the high priest?
 - Several reasons come to mind, including Paul's long time absence from the city and the likelihood that the council was called quickly

- The high priest was probably not dressed in his garb
- Now we are treated to one of Paul's most clever manipulations of his enemies
 - He cleverly pits the Sadducees and the Pharisees against one another

[Acts 23:6](#) ¶ But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"

[Acts 23:7](#) As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

[Acts 23:8](#) For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

[Acts 23:9](#) And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

- Paul claims affiliation with the Pharisees and then proclaims that he has found himself in this position because he preaches the hope of resurrection
 - This is so clever on Paul's part because it's a true statement but one designed to turn Pharisee against Sadducee
 - As Luke explains, the Sadducees would not accept the reality of resurrection
 - The Pharisees did believe in resurrection
 - So the two groups were often at odds over the difference
 - Paul's statement pours salt in the wound between the two groups and causes the Pharisee to side with Jesus and against the other members of the council
 - Of course, what Paul said was accurate
 - He does preach the hope of resurrection of the dead through Christ
 - What the Pharisees heard instead was that the Sadducees had a hand in arresting Paul because they disagreed with this political views
 - This was the reaction Paul was counting on
 - When the Pharisees heard Paul reference resurrection, they ran to his side and declared Paul had done nothing wrong

- The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees didn't
- So when Paul claimed to be persecuted for that belief, he immediately gained the Pharisees as allies and drove a wedge in the council
- The Pharisees even offer a defense on Paul's behalf, that his unbelievable claims might have been delivered to him by an angel
 - Since Sadducees didn't believe in angels either, the Pharisees were taking full advantage of the situation to embarrass the Sadducees
 - This claim fans the flames and the crowd erupts again
- Things are just about to get out of control when the Romans step in again

[Acts 23:10](#) And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

[Acts 23:11](#) ¶ But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

[Acts 23:12](#) ¶ When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.

[Acts 23:13](#) There were more than forty who formed this plot.

[Acts 23:14](#) They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.

[Acts 23:15](#) "Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place."

- The Romans rescue Paul from certain death and lead him away for a night in prison
 - They probably wonder what to do with him, since he causes an uproar in the city every time he is released
 - As Paul spends the night in the prison, the Lord comforts him and assures him that this is part of a plan to move him to Rome
 - The Lord's words reaffirm that Paul was right to head into Jerusalem, despite the warnings

- And now Jesus says his next mission target will be Rome
 - God has arranged it for that the Romans provide free, guarded transport for Paul to reach Rome
 - And we can see already why it was necessary for Paul to be guarded on the way, for the Jews were determined to kill him
- A group of about 40 Jews conspire to kill Paul the next day
 - They are bound by an oath, or the literal meaning of the Greek is curse
 - They say they will be subject to a curse if they do not perform the act they are planning
 - The curse is that they will not have food or drink until Paul is dead, indicating that the act must happen quickly
 - Since we know this conspiracy failed, as do all the Jewish conspiracies against Paul, what happened to these men?
 - Typically, these men would have been released from their vow by the Sanhedrin on the basis of "constraint" or the impossibility of fulfilling the vow
 - Like the rest of their dealings with the Law and tradition, the Jewish leadership would bend and ignore the rules of vows when it suited them

[Acts 23:16](#) ¶ But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul.

[Acts 23:17](#) Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him."

[Acts 23:18](#) So he took him and led him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you."

[Acts 23:19](#) The commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, "What is it that you have to report to me?"

[Acts 23:20](#) And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him.

[Acts 23:21](#) "So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you."

[Acts 23:22](#) So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, "Tell no one that you have notified me of these things."

[Acts 23:23](#) And he called to him two of the centurions and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen."

[Acts 23:24](#) They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.

- Paul evidently had a sister living in Jerusalem, and she may have been Paul's host at times when he stayed in the city
 - Her son had become aware of this plot
 - Based on v.19, it seems he was a young boy rather than an adult
 - So it's likely that he was nearby when the plot was hatched and his presence was ignored because of his age
 - But the boy understood the seriousness of the situation and went to the jail to tell Paul
 - As a relative of Paul's the boy would have been granted access to Paul
 - We can clearly see God's hand in this circumstance
 - He is working to thwart Paul's enemies and using children to accomplish His work
 - I find moments like this in Scripture to be very very encouraging
 - They remind me that the Lord can work through everything and everyone to bring about His good purposes in our lives
 - He sends friends with a word, neighbors, even strangers
 - He places information in our path in a variety of ways
 - He reveals His will and shows us our sin from the mouth of babes
 - But we must be attentive to that work and recognize that these incidents of everyday life are, in fact, God at work
 - In this case, the need to act was obvious, but yet Paul might have easily dismissed the boy's story or assumed that God would save Paul without the need for Paul to take measures
 - But this boy's report WAS the way the Lord intended to save Paul

- So Paul act upon what he heard
- Paul sends the boy to the captain, who listens to the story and recognizes the danger
 - Sensing that the episode was quickly growing out of control, he wisely decides to get Paul out of town while he could
 - And he assembles a large contingent of 470 soldiers and leaves in the third hour of the night, or 9-10 PM
 - Felix was the governor, who resided in the provincial seat at Caesarea
 - During the time of Jesus, Pontus Pilate was governor
 - Now it's Felix, and later before Paul dies it becomes Festus
 - Ultimately, Paul is in Roman custody for nine years before he is killed

[Acts 23:25](#) And he wrote a letter having this form:

[Acts 23:26](#) "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.

[Acts 23:27](#) "When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

[Acts 23:28](#) "And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council;

[Acts 23:29](#) and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.

[Acts 23:30](#) "When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you."

- To explain Paul's arrival, Claudius writes a letter to Felix
 - Felix's family has an interesting history
 - He and his brother were both famous members of Roman society
 - Having been slaves originally, they both became freemen under Claudius the Emperor
 - Felix was the emperor's childhood friend
 - In just seven years, Felix had moved from slave to procurator of Judea

- His quick rise left him ill-prepared for the responsibilities of his office
 - Historians of the time said he exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave
- He was a man of lust, having three wives at the time, and marrying another later
- He married into a family of despots
 - One father-in-law was the man who killed the Apostle James and imprisoned Peter
- Felix himself assassinated a high priest during his reign
- The letter defends Paul and explains his transfer as a protective act on Paul's behalf
 - Since Paul was a citizen, the Roman state was obligated to protect him from the Jews
 - We notice that his greeting of Felix matches Luke's greeting of Theophilus, suggesting that Theophilus was also a Roman official
 - The Roman captain also paints his actions in the best possible light, saying he came to Paul's rescue because he knew Paul was a citizen
 - This wasn't true, but it was close enough
 - The captain also says that Paul's accusers would travel to Caesarea to make their case against Paul
 - So Felix would have the responsibility of conducting a Roman trial

[Acts 23:31](#) ¶ So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.

[Acts 23:32](#) But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks.

[Acts 23:33](#) When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

[Acts 23:34](#) When he had read it, he asked from what province he was, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia,

[Acts 23:35](#) he said, "I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also," giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

- Paul is marched 35 miles to Antipatris, and he probably arrived sometime the next day
 - At this point, the bulk of the guard return leaving only the horsemen to escort Paul
 - At this point, they were away from the mountainous terrain and into the valleys, where it would be easier to protect Paul
 - When they arrived, Paul was delivered to the procurator
 - Felix first asks if Paul was from a region under his authority
 - Felix had authority over an area that included parts of Syria and Judea
 - Paul states he was from Cilicia, the region where Tarsus was located
 - This region did fall under Felix's jurisdiction, so he agrees to hear the case
 - He orders Paul held until the accusers arrive
- Next chapter begins the trial, with the high priest himself acting as Paul's accuser
 - And after this trial, a two-year period of imprisonment in Caesarea begins, which includes a change in procurator

Acts 24

- As we near the end of the book of Acts, today we move into the second of three sections describing Paul's years in captivity
 - Last week we studied the first section with Paul in Jerusalem under the control of the Roman commander for the cohort in Jerusalem
 - Paul was examined by the Romans unsuccessfully and later sent before his accusers, the Jewish council or Sanhedrin
 - Neither review resulted in a decision concerning Paul's guilt or innocence
 - And when a plot to kill Paul was uncovered, he was sent to Caesarea to stand trial by the Roman procurator, Felix
 - In fact, in looking back over the events in chapters 22-23, it's easy to see God at work in keeping Paul in custody
 - Paul was never accused of anything specific and no witness has come forward to make a credible accusation
 - The Romans were simply curious for why the Jews had rioted and attempted to kill Paul
 - The more sensible response would have been to consider Paul a victim rather than the suspect
 - So it seems clear that Paul is destined by God's hand to remain in Roman custody and to be escorted under their control to Rome
 - Paul could have made his way to Rome without the Roman escort,
 - But he wouldn't have had the same opportunity to reach the upper echelons of Roman authority
- As chapter 23 ended last week, Paul had arrived in Caesarea, before Felix the procurator for Judea
 - After Felix received Paul, he placed Paul in the Praetorium, a palace built by Herod the Great
 - Just as Paul had been housed in the Antonia Fortress palace in Jerusalem, here we see him housed in the palace for Caesarea

- Paul spoke of his time in this place briefly in the letter to the Philippians

[Phil. 1:12](#) ¶ Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,
[Phil. 1:13](#) so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,
[Phil. 1:14](#) and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

- Paul himself voices the two primary reasons that God has permitted his imprisonment
 - To encourage the brethren to greater courage to speak the word of God
 - And so that Paul's time spent in prison would open doors for Paul to preach to a part of Roman society that would otherwise never know the truth
- So the trial before Felix begins

[Acts 24:1](#) After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.

[Acts 24:2](#) After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, "Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation,

[Acts 24:3](#) we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.

[Acts 24:4](#) "But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.

[Acts 24:5](#) "For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

[Acts 24:6](#) "And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law.

[Acts 24:7](#) "But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands,

[Acts 24:8](#) ordering his accusers to come before you.] By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him."

[Acts 24:9](#) The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.

- It required five days for the Jewish leaders to make their way to Caesarea on foot

- Paul had traveled on horse, so he made the trip in much less time
 - Ananias and some elders came with an attorney bearing a Greek name, meaning he was probably a Gentile
 - These proceedings would have been conducted according to Roman Law, and the Jewish leaders probably didn't understand Roman trial proceedings
 - So they hired a Gentile attorney to prosecute their case
- As Paul appears before Felix, the prosecutor lays out his case
 - In typical fashion, the attorney begins by ingratiating himself to the judge, Felix
 - The attorney acknowledges Felix's benevolent rule over Judea
 - In one sense this statement is false and intended to flatter Felix
 - Because Judea had experienced revolts and uprisings due to Jewish unwillingness to be ruled by Rome
 - There were also reports of Felix permitting bands of thieves to prey on road travelers and then demand a share of their proceeds
 - On the other hand, there was a general truth to the attorney's description of life under Felix
 - This time was part of the Pax Romana, a period of over 200 years of relative peace and prosperity throughout the empire
 - Judea was probably the least peaceful, though, second only to Britannia
- After the long-winded introduction, the attorney moves to the specific accusations against Paul
 - First, Paul was a pest
 - The Greek word for pest means plague or pestilence
 - Calling Paul a pest in that day was meant somewhat less metaphorically and more literally than it is today

- We say someone is a pest because they bother us
- The attorney meant Paul was a plague, a blight on the city and the nation of Israel
- His calls Paul a plague because he is causing dissension among all the Jews throughout the world
 - Dissension is the Greek word stasis, which literally means insurrection
 - So this accusation is carefully worded to catch the procurator's attention
 - Paul is now accused of inciting insurrection among Jews
 - This charge would have been particularly damaging if true, because Jews were so easily stirred to rebellion against Rome
 - And so the Romans were particularly reactive to such accusations
 - Besides the fact that the accusation was a lie, nevertheless it is quite a testimony to Paul's effectiveness as a minister of the Gospel
 - Paul has the reputation of reaching all the Jews and confronting them with the Gospel
- Notice also that the lawyer identifies Paul as the ringleader of a sect called the Nazarenes
 - The word sect suggests that Jews viewed Christians as a subgroup within Judaism
 - As such, they were hated for their unwillingness to be held accountable to Jewish authorities
- Finally, the prosecutor charges Paul with desecrating the Temple, though he never specifies how Paul did so
 - This charge was important because it explained the actions of the Jews in the Temple
 - Since Jews were permitted to kill anyone who desecrated the Temple, this charge became their excuse for rioting to kill Paul

- The attorney states that the Jews had lawfully arrested Paul, but this wasn't true
 - They were inciting violence against Paul without benefit of a trial
- Finally, the attorney levies a charge against the Roman commander
 - Tertullus intimates that the Roman commander had violated law when he intervened to stop the action of the Jews
 - Since Romans allowed the Jews to take action against offenders within the Temple, the attorney suggests that the commander had no jurisdiction to intervene
- Notice at this point that no proof has been offered for these accusations, and none will be offered since none exists
 - Instead, the attorney assures Felix that the proof will be found in an examination of Paul himself
 - And as Tertullus ended his presentation, the rest of the Jews who traveled from Jerusalem begin to chime in and agree with Tertullus
- Next it was Paul's turn to speak

[Acts 24:10](#) ¶ When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: ¶ "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense,

[Acts 24:11](#) since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

[Acts 24:12](#) "Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.

[Acts 24:13](#) "Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me.

[Acts 24:14](#) "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets;

[Acts 24:15](#) having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

[Acts 24:16](#) "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.

[Acts 24:17](#) "Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;

[Acts 24:18](#) in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were some Jews from Asia —

[Acts 24:19](#) who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me.

[Acts 24:20](#) "Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council,
[Acts 24:21](#) other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'"

- Paul begins by declaring that he was happy to present his defense before someone who has been judging Israel for many years and understands their law
 - Paul begins his defense by pointing out he had only been in the city for twelve days
 - Hardly enough time to lead an effective revolt
 - And Paul points out they offered no proof in any case
 - Paul gives his true purpose in arriving in the city which was to worship
 - Paul does acknowledge one statement of the attorney, that Paul was a member of the Way, or Christianity
 - Paul could admit this simply because it was not (yet) a crime in Rome to be a Nazarene or Christian
 - But rather than being a sect or breakoff from Judaism, Paul testifies that Christianity was the fulfillment of all that Jews cherished and worshipped
 - Finally, Paul gets to the root of the real issue
 - He preached concerning the resurrection of Christ from the dead
 - Paul is saying that he is here simply because they didn't like to hear him preach concerning the truth of the Gospel
 - And Paul adds that the reality of resurrection was his main motivation to keep a clear conscience
 - Knowing that judgment was coming and wishing to have a good outcome at the judgment, Paul was always careful to obey God and law
 - Paul says the incident in the Temple was merely the result of their hatred of his message

- So when Paul came to worship, he brought no crowd meaning no Gentiles as he was accused
- Rather it was Jews from Asia instigated the riot
 - Yet they are not present to make their accusations
 - Under Roman law there were severe penalties for accusers who made charges and failed to appear at court
- So without the real accusers present, Paul challenges Ananias and the Elders to provide proof from their own inquisition in Jerusalem
 - Paul reminds them that he only spoke one phrase and nothing more was decided
- Felix chooses not to make a decision concerning Paul

[Acts 24:22](#) ¶ But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case."

[Acts 24:23](#) Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.

[Acts 24:24](#) ¶ But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

[Acts 24:25](#) But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."

[Acts 24:26](#) At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him.

[Acts 24:27](#) But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

- Felix apparently had some understanding or experience with Christianity
 - The Greek phrase "a more exact knowledge" means an accurate or thoroughly understanding of Christianity
 - We don't know what he knew specifically, but Luke probably means that Felix knew enough to understand that the accusations weren't sound
 - Also, it seems to explain what happens next to Paul
 - Felix says that he waits for the commander to come and explain the situation

- But Felix never summons the commander, which suggests he was lying at this point
- Furthermore, Felix already had the letter from the commander that reported that Paul was not found to violate any Roman law
- Felix was merely making excuses for not rendering a decision
 - This allowed him time to listen to Paul and learn more about the faith Paul preached
 - And he hoped to make some money from Paul
- We can see this is true looking at Felix's actions over the next months and years
 - Felix doesn't seem to have ill will against Paul because Paul is granted considerable privileges in the meantime
 - And his wife, who was a Jewess, together with Felix began to hold court and listen to Paul's preaching
 - Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa who put James to death and imprisoned Peter
 - Felix had wooed her from a previous marriage, a scandalous thing even among Romans
 - Interestingly, the only son she bore to Felix was killed in the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79
 - It's been said that during these discussions enslaved royalty was addressing royal slaves
 - There was probably a curiosity factor and perhaps a sincere interest in the message
 - Paul preached concerning righteousness, self-control and judgment
 - These were the three elements that Jesus said would be preached in His absence under the influence of the Holy Spirit

[John 16:8](#) "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;

[John 16:9](#) concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;

[John 16:10](#) and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;

[John 16:11](#) and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

- Notice the response this preaching gained in Felix
 - He was clearly convicted and even frightened at the prospect of judgment
 - A man who had schemed, robbed, cheated, lusted, adulterated and any number of other sins must have understood his jeopardy
 - And yet he ran away from the truth and not toward it
 - Felix proves Paul's own words when he wrote in Romans

[Rom. 3:9](#) ¶ What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

[Rom. 3:10](#) as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

[Rom. 3:11](#) THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

[Rom. 3:12](#) ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

- Both Jew and Greek are under the charge of sin before God and that charge drives them away from His presence
 - It doesn't bring them into the light for the darkness of men's hearts cannot receive God by it's own power

[John 1:4](#) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

[John 1:5](#) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

- Felix has been exposed to the Light, but he cannot comprehend it, and the conviction drives him away in fear
 - Paul says it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance in Rom 2:4, and that kindness refers to God's grace to break through our dark hearts
 - Paul describes the moment when this happens for each of us in 2Cor

[2Cor. 4:6](#) For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

- Following this frightening incident, Felix continues to hold Paul hostage for two years hoping to extort money from Paul in exchange for his freedom
 - Along the way he continues to conduct conversations with Paul
 - We note that Paul never makes any such offer of money
 - Instead, Paul seems content to remain where God has placed him knowing he has this opportunity to preach to Felix and receive visitors
 - How might we react to this situation today?
 - Would we pay a bribe to leave a prison in a foreign land so we could get home and continue our lives?
 - Or would we see our circumstances as Paul did in this case?
 - Would we patiently allow our time in prison to become a witness opportunity
 - Understanding that God was in control and our time in such a place had been ordained for His glory?
 - That doesn't mean we wouldn't take every opportunity to leave, but only under the right conditions
 - And a bribe wasn't the right condition for Paul
- Finally, Luke says the two years ended when Felix was succeeded by Festus
 - Festus becomes Paul's antagonist in chapter 25
 - Felix was deposed by Nero around AD 60 after a fight broke out among Jews and Greeks in Caesarea
 - Felix's response was too harsh, and his soldiers killed many Jews in the process
 - The Jews complained formally to Nero, who responded by recalling Felix and installing Festus
 - What little we know of Festus is he ruled only a short time and died in office in AD 62

- Finally, Luke says that the reason Felix left Paul imprisoned when he was recalled to Rome was to win the Jewish favor
 - Apparently, Felix thought that leaving Paul in prison would gain the Jews approval
 - Since he was traveling to Nero, Felix thought perhaps this would cause the Jews to soften their complaint
 - Or at least he wouldn't be antagonizing them further

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Acts 25-26

- The trials of Paul continue, both literally and figuratively
 - Last week in chapter 24 we watched Paul on trial before Felix
 - Followed by two years spent in prison until Felix was relieved and a new procurator appeared
 - This week that new procurator, Festus, becomes our focus
 - Followed by a third character, King Agrippa

[Acts 25:1](#) Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.

[Acts 25:2](#) And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him,

[Acts 25:3](#) requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way).

[Acts 25:4](#) Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly.

[Acts 25:5](#) "Therefore," he said, "let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him."

[Acts 25:6](#) After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea, and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.

[Acts 25:7](#) After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove,

[Acts 25:8](#) while Paul said in his own defense, "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

[Acts 25:9](#) But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?"

[Acts 25:10](#) But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.

[Acts 25:11](#) "If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar."

- Festus' first meeting with Paul takes a circuitous route
 - Initially, Festus arrives in Caesarea to take command, but within three days he decides he needs to travel to Jerusalem to meet with Jewish leaders

- You see the extent to which the Roman leadership felt the need to appease Jewish authorities for the sake of good order
- Remember, Festus' predecessor Felix was disposed because he treated Jews harshly
 - Festus wisely makes mending fences with the Jewish leaders his priority
- One of the first things the Jewish leaders tell Festus is they want Paul returned to Jerusalem to stand trial
 - But as Luke writes, the real purpose for the request was to get Paul into a vulnerable stretch of road leading into Jerusalem and ambush him
 - Even after two years, the only thing they care about is killing Paul
 - That's quite a testimony to how much the enemy wanted to put an end to Paul's ministry of spreading the Gospel
 - Festus immediately recognizes that this request is a test of his resolve and willingness to wield power against the Jews
 - Festus answers that Paul is already under the custody of a higher authority
 - It would be like a lower court asking a higher court to return a case
 - Once the appeal has been made, the case remains in the higher court
 - Instead, he offers to let them come back to Caesarea with him to try Paul again
 - In less than 2 weeks, Festus is back in Caesarea and the trial begins
 - The leaders cast numerous charges against Paul but still without proof
 - Paul simply maintained his innocence
 - And Paul was 100% innocent
 - He has done nothing to violate any Roman or Jewish law
 - Without proof, the proceedings go nowhere

- Finally, Festus must have recognized that there wasn't going to be a way to give the Jews what they wanted concerning Paul
 - He saw that their hatred for Paul was intense, so letting Paul go would have angered the Jewish leaders at the start of Festus' reign
 - But there was no way to convict Paul without ignoring Roman law, which could have brought Festus trouble with the Roman government
- So to appease the Jews, Festus floats the idea of letting them take Paul back to Jerusalem
 - In a sense, Festus is offering to wash his hands of the whole thing and let the Jews take the matter into their own hands
 - As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to refuse this idea, since Jewish law could not overrule Roman law
 - Which is why Festus asks Paul first
- At this point Paul senses the danger, and refuses to accept this idea
 - Paul says he is standing where he ought to be, meaning he is where Roman citizens should be: in a Roman tribunal
 - Paul adds that he has done no wrong, as you well know
 - This last statement is a jab at Festus
 - Paul is calling out Festus for not having the courage to make the judgment he knows he should
 - He should decide Paul was innocent and put an end to the proceedings
 - Instead, he is giving in to the Jewish leaders
 - Paul adds that he is willing to respect the decision of the court
 - If Festus found him guilty, he would face the executioner without protest
 - Obviously, Paul doesn't expect to be found guilty, since he knows the evidence was nonexistent
 - But don't think Paul didn't mean what he said

- He was willing to go to death at the judgment of the court, but Paul knew that whatever the court did it was according to God's providence
- Just as Paul himself wrote in Romans:

[Rom. 13:1](#) Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

[Rom. 13:2](#) Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

[Rom. 13:3](#) For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;

[Rom. 13:4](#) for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

- At some point in the moment as Paul spoke his answer to Festus, Paul sensed that Festus was not inclined to do the right thing
 - So as Paul ends his statement with the words, "I appeal to Caesar."
 - Paul's appeal to Caesar was a legal maneuver
 - He was availing himself of a right granted to every Roman citizen in the year 509 BC
 - In that year, the original Roman kingdom ruled by monarchs was replaced by a republic with a senate and constitution
 - This was the starting point for what would become the Roman Empire and would last in various forms for nearly two thousand years
 - One of the rights given Roman citizens in that constitution was the right to appeal to Caesar for judgment in any trial
 - Paul's invoking of this special appeal immediately ended Festus' authority over Paul and forced his hand
 - Festus now had no choice or decision to make
 - He must send Paul to Rome to see Caesar
 - You might ask why wouldn't every prisoner appeal to Caesar especially if facing conviction of a crime

- The answer is many did, but only as a last resort
 - Going to Rome to see Caesar meant spending a long time in chains, since there was no guarantee when Caesar might see you
 - Plus, Caesar wasn't exactly a softy, so the decision probably wasn't going to be in your favor
- Still, it was better than death, so Paul makes the appeal
 - In Paul's case, we might also wonder why Paul didn't make this appeal sooner
- The only answer that makes sense is that Paul wanted to remain in Caesarea as long as it appeared he might be set free to influence Felix and now Festus with the Gospel
 - Now it must be clear, that his time in Caesarea has run its course and he needs to move to Rome
- After Paul's appeal, Festus confers with his staff, and then he acknowledges the only thing he could say: it's off to Rome for Paul
 - Before Paul is sent to Rome, an important visitor comes calling for Festus

[Acts 25:12](#) Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

[Acts 25:13](#) ¶ Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus.

[Acts 25:14](#) While they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix;

[Acts 25:15](#) and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.

[Acts 25:16](#) "I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges.

[Acts 25:17](#) "So after they had assembled here, I did not delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought before me.

[Acts 25:18](#) "When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting,

[Acts 25:19](#) but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.

[Acts 25:20](#) "Being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters.

[Acts 25:21](#) "But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar."

- This King Agrippa is Agrippa II, son of King Agrippa I
 - Remember that Festus's predecessor Felix was married to the daughter of Agrippa I, Drucilla
 - Agrippa II was the last descendent of Herod to rule over Judea
 - The Herods were not Jewish but descendants of Esau
 - Agrippa was the last in a line of men who opposed the work of God
 - Herod the Great tried to kill the infant Jesus
 - Herod's son Antipas killed John the Baptist
 - And Agrippa's father, Agrippa I, killed the apostle James and imprisoned Peter
 - This family had been installed by the Romans as the Jewish kings to appease the Jews and create a puppet authority over the land
 - They thought themselves Jewish kings, though they had no credible claim to that title
 - Agrippa II was raised and educated in Rome and was essentially a Roman, though he assumed his father's role of King at a young age
 - As the declared King of the Jews, Agrippa II angered the Jewish authorities by his frequent meddling with the priesthood and building his palace overlooking the temple
 - After the city and temple were destroyed in AD 70, he went back to Rome and died 30 years after childless, thus putting an end to the line of Herods
- Knowing this background, we can read between the lines for what is happening in this scene
 - Agrippa is paying Festus a visit on the occasion of his arrival as the new procurator for Judea
 - Festus must have seen this visit as an opportunity to help himself out of the jam with Paul

- Festus' problem was Paul's appeal to Caesar
 - Festus was now obligated to send Paul to Caesar for the emperor to review the charges and findings against Paul
- But the problem for Festus was there were no findings against Paul
 - What charges was Festus going to send to Caesar to review?
 - There were no credible charge and certainly no proof of guilt
- If Festus couldn't trump up credible charges, then he would be forced to release Paul rather than sending him to Caesar
 - And if he released Paul, his standing with the Jewish authorities would be on rocky ground from the beginning
- So Festus deliberately engages Agrippa in a conversation concerning the case of an insignificant Jewish teacher who has languished in prison for the past two years
 - Festus is hoping Agrippa might give him something to use in charging Paul before sending him to Rome
 - Festus quickly recount for Agrippa how Paul came to his attention and the case against Paul, what little there was
 - He includes details on how the Jews wanted Paul in Jerusalem but Roman citizens are to stand trial by Roman courts
 - When the trial took place, Festus learned that the charges did not concern Roman law but disputes of Jewish religion
 - And in particular, Festus detected that the real issue was their disagreement over a man Jesus
 - Who the Jewish leaders claim was dead but who Paul said was alive
 - Even to a casual observer like Festus it was nevertheless clear that the real issue at the center of everything was Jesus

- Festus finishes by stating that he is at a loss to investigate such matters, so he suggested that Paul be tried in Jerusalem
 - But when Paul appealed to Caesar, Festus' hands were tied
 - At this point Festus stops and waits to see if Agrippa decides to get involved
 - And right on cue, Agrippa takes the bait

[Acts 25:22](#) Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

[Acts 25:23](#) ¶ So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.

[Acts 25:24](#) Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you see this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer.

[Acts 25:25](#) "But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.

[Acts 25:26](#) "Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write.

[Acts 25:27](#) "For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

- Paul's time before Agrippa begins with pomp and circumstances befitting a king holding court
 - Paul is brought in before not only the king but an audience of commanders of the military guard at Caesarea
 - Also present were the prominent men of the city
 - Festus begins the presentation with an overview of his predicament
 - How he heard the charges, found nothing to charge Paul with
 - Yet because Paul appealed to Caesar, he must comply and send Paul forward, yet without charges
 - This seemed absurd to Festus, so here we are
 - In Festus' own statement, he condemns himself to a degree

- He makes clear that Paul is innocent yet he continues to the justice process rather than letting Paul free
- He says it's absurd to send a man to Caesar without charges, yet he invokes this audience before Agrippa precisely to find an accusation against Paul
- In response to Festus' own words, the only logical thing to do would be to release Paul
 - Once again, we're confronted with the reality that Paul is here because God wants him here
 - And Paul will move to Rome for the same reason
- So then the moment arrives for Paul's defense before the procurator, a king and many prominent Roman citizens

[Acts 26:1](#) ¶ Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense:

[Acts 26:2](#) ¶ "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today;

[Acts 26:3](#) especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

[Acts 26:4](#) ¶ "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem;

[Acts 26:5](#) since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

[Acts 26:6](#) "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;

[Acts 26:7](#) the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.

[Acts 26:8](#) "Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

- It should be noted that Paul is the first one called to speak at this trial
 - So even before anyone brings a credible charge, Agrippa asks Paul to defend himself
 - As unfair as that was, Paul gladly complies because this is the audience he has been waiting for so his message will have its greatest impact
 - And Paul's response is to simply give his testimony

- Paul isn't defending himself in this moment...he's declaring Christ and he relishes the opportunity
- Paul's opening is a sincere statement concerning his excitement for the chance to speak to Agrippa
 - Imagine the opportunity to preach the Gospel concerning the King of the Jews to the self-appointed king of the Jews.
 - Paul must have been beside himself in anticipation for the opportunity
 - And Paul himself knew full well what was at stake
 - If God was prepared to take the Church's chief prosecutor in Saul and turn him into the chief evangelist, then what might happen for Agrippa?
 - The Herods had long been the chief antagonists for both the Gospel and for Jews in general
 - If God could turn Saul, He could certainly turn Agrippa if he chose
 - And if that happened, what might it mean for the nation of Israel and the church?
 - Paul must have wondered if such a conversion was possible on this day
- Paul adds that his excitement was also the result of Agrippa's knowledge of Jewish Scripture and custom and teaching
 - Though Agrippa was Roman educated, he was also part Jewish and was devoted to the Jewish people and Jewish culture
 - Paul knew that his message of the Messiah would hold meaning for Agrippa even though it would be lost on most of the Gentile audience
- Paul then moves to his testimony prior to faith
 - He is well-known as a Pharisee and a well-known one at that
 - But he is standing trial because he believes in the fulfillment of the promises made to the father's of Israel

- Paul says in v.6 that he ironically began tried for a hope that all Jews are supposed to have, yet Paul's being persecuted for having it
 - Specifically, Paul is referring to the promises for a coming Messiah
- In v.8, Paul turns from Agrippa and speaks to the watching crowd, probably Jews in the audience who were opposed to Paul
 - His aside asks the rhetorical question why he would be hated for claiming that a man was resurrected from the dead
 - When orthodox Judaism held to resurrection without debate
 - But Paul's willingness to declare that Jesus was resurrected is considered grounds for death
 - Paul points out the ridiculousness of their hatred, yet Paul himself knew the source for it
 - The enemy works hardest against threats that are real and true
 - Christianity's declaration of a risen Lord is the greatest threat to Satan's domination of unbelievers
- So this is the focal point for Satan's attacks

[Acts 26:9](#) ¶ "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

[Acts 26:10](#) "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.

[Acts 26:11](#) "And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

[Acts 26:12](#) ¶ "While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,

[Acts 26:13](#) at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.

[Acts 26:14](#) "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

[Acts 26:15](#) "And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'

[Acts 26:16](#) 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;

[Acts 26:17](#) rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,

[Acts 26:18](#) to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

- Paul moves now to reminding the audience of his conversion
 - This is the third time we see an account of Paul's conversion
 - In this account we have a more specific description of how Paul participated in the killing of Christians
 - When early Jewish Christians were tried by the Jewish council, Paul was a voting member of the council
 - He was one who voted against these persecuted Christians and ushered them into death for their faith
 - Literally, the Greek phrase is "I cast down my stone"
 - Votes were cast by holding or dropping small stones
 - From there Paul went out to synagogues and in the Temple to find those Jews who worshipped Jesus so they might be removed
 - He tried to force them to blaspheme
 - Paul was either trying to cause them to commit an offense worthy of the death penalty so they could be killed under Jewish law
 - Or Paul means he was working to get believers to speak against Jesus, which Paul nows recognizes would have been blasphemy
 - Either way, the Christians didn't cooperate and that enraged Paul, causing him to pursue them in foreign cities
 - Paul's testimony is always an opportunity for him to remind the crowd from whence he's come
 - Once a hater of Christians, now the leader
 - That's a testimony that's hard to dismiss or ignore

- In describing his conversion, Paul tells essentially the same story, but adds a few details
 - We are reminded that the light of God was even brighter than the light of a noonday sun in the desert
 - And we learn that Jesus spoke to Paul in Hebrew
 - And we hear that Jesus spoke an idiom to Paul
 - Is it hard to kick against the goads?
 - Goads are spikes on the front of plows designed to deter oxen from kicking backward against the plow
 - The spikes or goads are painful for the ox, and if the ox continues to kick against the spokes, it only succeeds in injuring itself
 - And it accomplishes nothing in terms of removing the weight and burden of the plow
 - Jesus compares Paul's burdens in persecuting the growth of the Church as kicking against the goads
 - It's hurting Paul and it's not stopping God in establishing His church
 - So why keep persecuting Jesus?
- Finally, Paul says he was appointed to be a minister and to be a witness of the resurrected Jesus, not only on the road but additional times as well
 - So we know Paul received personal instruction from the resurrected Lord, much as the other apostles received their instruction from the Lord before His death
 - And Paul in v.17 is called to the Gentiles specifically
 - Leaving the dominion of Satan and becoming a fellow heir in an inheritance appointed for us
 - This too is our claim on the basis of faith

[Acts 26:19](#) ¶ "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, [Acts 26:20](#) but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

[Acts 26:21](#) "For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.

[Acts 26:22](#) "So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place;

[Acts 26:23](#) that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

[Acts 26:24](#) ¶ While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad."

[Acts 26:25](#) But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.

[Acts 26:26](#) "For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.

[Acts 26:27](#) "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."

[Acts 26:28](#) Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."

[Acts 26:29](#) And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

[Acts 26:30](#) ¶ The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,

[Acts 26:31](#) and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment."

[Acts 26:32](#) And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

- Finally, Paul testifies that his trial is merely the result of his obedience to Christ in testifying that the Messiah has come and risen
 - And in particular, on this day Paul says his testimony was the result of having obtained help from God
 - Without God's help, Paul would have already died at the hands of his enemies, but instead he stands here to testify
 - Notice that relationship: Paul is alive because God has sustained his life
 - And his life has been sustained so that he can testify in this moment and later moments
 - Paul understood that his life was not his own, just as our lives are not our own

- We live each day because there is something more we must testify concerning
 - Else the Lord would have already called us home
 - At a point, Festus has heard enough and declares that Paul is mad with his great learning
 - From Festus' unbelieving perspective, nothing Paul said made sense
 - It seemed insanity to believe such things
 - This is the universal perspective of unbelievers
 - The Gospel is nonsense unless and until the Lord's Spirit brings an understanding
 - Paul's response is to rebuke Festus and declare he spoke sober or sound-minded truth
- Since Festus had spoken up and cast his vote against Paul's testimony, Paul sensed the opportunity to press Agrippa for a point of view
 - He turns to the king and makes a direct appeal
 - Paul says do you believe in the prophets? I know you do
 - Paul is taking some advantage here of the king
 - As the king of the Jews, Agrippa would have to publicly agree with Paul
 - He couldn't deny his belief in the writings of Jewish prophets
 - So Paul was hoping that Agrippa's willingness to agree with the prophets would cause him to go the next step and agree with Paul's message
 - Agrippa responds with a very politically astute but noncommittal response
 - He couldn't agree with Paul or else risk countering Festus' public statement and ruining his new relationship with the procurator
 - My version translates the phrase Agrippa speaks in a light-hearted and dismissive way

- In reality, there are four possible ways to translate the meaning of that phrase
 - First, a matter-of-fact “You are working quickly to persuade me to be a Christian”
 - Secondly, a question “Are you trying to persuade me to be a Christian in such short time?”
 - Third, “In summary, you are trying to persuade me to become a Christian.”
 - Fourth, another question, “Do you think you can persuade me to be a Christian in such a short time.”
 - Some Bible choose a fifth rendering of “I am almost persuaded to become a Christian” but this translation is not proper given the Greek construction
 - And there is no such thing as an “almost Christian” in any case, so the sentence would have no meaning in that sense
- Paul responds by saying he doesn’t care which way it happens (i.e., fast or slow), but only that Agrippa and everyone else in the room come to faith
 - This is the heart of an evangelist
 - Paul understood and taught Biblical truths of election and God’s sovereignty in salvation
 - He recognized that human power is not a function of salvation
 - Yet he also knew that God purposed to work through men and the proclamation of the Gospel
 - So Paul worked for every soul and didn’t care what techniques or methods worked so long as faith arrived
 - We should work equally hard and with equal willingness to move as the Spirit leads
- At the conclusion of the trial, the verdict is the same as before
 - Paul is clearly innocent of any charge, and his powerful testimony is enough to put an end to the proceedings

- Luke's account reaches a climax with the recording of Agrippa's final words concerning Paul
 - He was innocent and would have been set free had he not appealed to Caesar
 - This is Luke's footnote to prove what is so clearly evident in the events depicted: Paul was innocent
 - And therefore, his incarceration and his continuing movement to Rome were orchestrated by God and not by men

Acts 27-28

- Yet another VBVM study comes to an end
 - Similarly, Paul's journey to Rome will complete tonight
 - His trial before Festus eventually led to Paul's request for an appeal to Caesar, as was every Roman citizen's right
 - Even so, Festus had no clear basis for his charge against Paul
 - So he enlisted the support of the reigning king of Israel, Agrippa
 - But Agrippa found nothing to accuse Paul
 - So Paul returns to wait in the palace until it was time to go to Rome
 - In our last chapters, Paul begins his trip Italy
 - Along the way, Paul will encounter a storms and shipwreck
 - He will experience snakebite, perform healings, and comfort many brethren in numerous places
 - And in the end, Paul will repeat his old pattern, preaching to the Jews of Rome first, and then reaching out to the Gentiles
- Luke accompanies Paul in his travels, and his record of all the happens is one of the highlights of the entire book
 - His entire account reads with a similarity to the story of Jonah
 - And this is probably intentional on Luke's part, since the theme of both accounts is the same
 - God moving His prophet to preach repentance and salvation to Gentiles instead of Israel
 - Of course, there are differences too, since Paul makes the trip willingly while Jonah didn't

[Acts 27:1](#) ¶ When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius.

[Acts 27:2](#) And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica.

[Acts 27:3](#) The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care.

[Acts 27:4](#) From there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary.

[Acts 27:5](#) When we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.

[Acts 27:6](#) There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it.

[Acts 27:7](#) When we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone;

[Acts 27:8](#) and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

- As Paul sets sail for Italy, we begin Paul's fourth missionary journey begins
 - We might not be thinking this is a missionary trip, since Paul makes the journey under guard
 - But that just reminds us that God uses all circumstances to meet His purposes
 - But ministry happens while we're busy planning our next mission trip
 - When the time comes to set sail for Italy, Paul is combined with other prisoners begin taken to Rome
 - These other prisoners might have included other men appealing to Caesar
 - Or more likely, they were men destined to fight and die in the colosseum for sport and amusement
 - They would be guarded during the trip by one of the cohorts or squads of soldiers stationed in Caesarea
- Looking at our map of the fourth missionary journey, we can follow the description that Luke provides
 - They board a ship named for the region near Troas,
 - The ships home port would have been Myra in that region

- This ship was scheduled to sail along the coast of Asia, which tells us it was a small ship used to run in safe waters near the coast
 - This ship is merely the first one for the trip
 - They obviously intend to find a larger ship later to cross the Med to Italy
- First, they go up the Phoenician coast to Sidon
 - While there, the centurion of the cohort, Julius, treats Paul with grace allowing him to visit the church in that town
 - This was probably a reflection of Paul being a citizen while the other prisoners weren't
 - The fact that Luke was allowed to travel with Paul was probably another concession for Paul's sake
- After Sidon, they sail around the eastern side of Cyprus using the large island as a barrier to shield them from contrary winds
 - This was a longer way to travel but it appears they had little choice, since the winds were coming against them
- Eventually they reach Myra, which was the home port for this small vessel
 - So this is the end of the line for this ship
 - And the group must disembark to find a new ship
- They find a grain ship headed to Italy and join it for the trip to Rome
 - This vessel was Alexandrian, meaning it's home port was Egypt
 - Egypt was a major supplier of grain for Rome
 - Ancient records show that there was a large fleet of these grain ships operating around the Med
 - They were 180 feet long, 50 feet wide and 44 feet deep in the hold
 - These ships were more than twice the size of the ones Columbus used to sail the Atlantic

- A direct route would have taken them straight across the Med south of Greece, but winds are blowing against them again
 - Here's where the story starts to sound like Jonah's account
 - In the story of Jonah, the ship was caught in a storm because Jonah was disobedient
 - When the men tried to return to the land, the wind blew harder to stop them
 - Clearly God was preventing the men from returning Jonah to the land for God intended that Jonah spend some quality time in the fish
 - But the men on the ship weren't immediately aware of God's working in these circumstances
 - Only later did the sailors with Jonah understand that the storm was a direct result of God's hand
 - And His intended audience was Jonah
 - Likewise, Luke's account seems to draw our attention to God's silent work in detouring the ship
 - Rather allowing a direct course to Italy, God seems to have another destination in mind
 - But at first the ship 200+ passengers are unaware of God's work
 - Nor do they understand that Paul is the focus of God's attention
- So the captain of the ship does the only thing he can at this point
 - He sails in another direction hoping to move around the weather
 - His route takes him southwest toward Crete, hoping to use the island as a shelter
 - As an aside, we see how sophisticated sailing was in this day
 - Hardly ancient, these mariners are navigating in wide open seas and can steer the vessel to known points of land with great skill

- Eventually, they land in Fair Havens on the southern side of the island
 - The ship docked here to wait out the weather

[Acts 27:9](#) ¶ When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them,

[Acts 27:10](#) and said to them, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.”

[Acts 27:11](#) But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul.

[Acts 27:12](#) Because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

[Acts 27:13](#) ¶ When a moderate south wind came up, supposing that they had attained their purpose, they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, close inshore.

- Unfortunately, the captain made the mistake of waiting too long to set sail
 - In v.9 we’re told that the voyage has now become dangerous because the fast was already over
 - Because of autumn and winter storms over the Med sea, sailing on the open waters was generally considered risky after mid September
 - And after mid November, ships would never dare venture out into open waters
 - Such a journey was assured to end badly, since the trip couldn’t be made reliably before a storm would come upon the vessel and sink it
 - The reference to “the fast” is to the Jewish observance of Yom Kippor, the Day of Atonement
 - This day is traditionally called “the fast” by Jews
 - The day occurs in the autumn, and in this year it happened on October 5
 - This means that the date is mid October or later, a very risky time to set sail in the Med
 - If the ship doesn’t sail, it will be forced to spend the entire winter in this port

- The captain of the ship won't get paid until the cargo reaches Rome, and he had not intended to spend winter away from Rome
 - So he pushes to leave
- Paul warns the centurion not to allow the ship to leave port, since Paul knows the ship will encounter serious problems should it leave
 - Specifically, Paul warns that the trip will result in loss of cargo and lives
 - Paul specifically warns that cargo would be lost, people would be injured and even lives would be lost
 - In reality all these things occurred except there will be no loss of life
 - This difference is important because it tells us that Paul was not speaking on the basis of divine revelation
 - Instead, he seems to be speaking simply as an experienced traveler doing his best to reverse a dumb decision
 - Based on Paul's earlier writing in his second letter to Corinth, we know Paul has already been shipwrecked three times before this trip
 - So he speaks with experience
 - Because the centurion took the word of the pilot and captain rather than Paul, Paul will now have to endure his fourth shipwreck
 - The majority vote to move to a better harbor for wintering
 - No one is foolish enough to set sail across the sea at this point in the year
 - But they figure they can at least make it along the Crete coast to Phoenix, which is a much better port for a long term stay
 - The trip should be relatively safe since they were going a short distance and would stay near the shore as they traveled
 - Keep in mind that Paul is going to reach Rome...and knows that he will
 - He was assured by the Spirit that he was headed to Rome

- And he has cooperated with the Romans this entire time because he knows where he is going and why
- Luke is working to build the tension as we wonder not if Paul will get to Rome, but how
 - And why is the Lord making the trip so difficult at this point?

[Acts 27:14](#) But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo;

[Acts 27:15](#) and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along.

[Acts 27:16](#) Running under the shelter of a small island called Claudia, we were scarcely able to get the ship's boat under control.

[Acts 27:17](#) After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along.

[Acts 27:18](#) The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo;

[Acts 27:19](#) and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.

[Acts 27:20](#) Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.

- Luke gives a lot of valuable details of the ship's movements and the sailor's reactions
 - His account is probably the most detailed and most authoritative account in classical literature of how ancient ships were sailed under these circumstances
 - For tonight, I will only highlight a couple of pertinent details
 - First, the wind that they encountered was called a Euraquilo, or today we would say a nor'easter
 - A strong northeasterly wind rushing down from the land of Crete
 - The wind was violent, Luke says, and the Greek word for violent is a word from which we get the word typhoon
 - It was a hurricane-like gale
 - The violent, swirling nature of the wind prevented the pilot from keeping control of the ship

- So it couldn't navigate to Phoenix or even steer at all
 - Luke references the ship's lifeboat, which was typically dragged behind the main ship
 - It was brought up into the ship for safekeeping, but only barely
- Fearing they would run aground in the shallow water near North Africa (Syrtis on our map), they lower the anchor and hope to slow their progress
 - Still they are driven by the wind
- Over the next two days they throw cargo overboard and even the tackle, which is the ship's furniture
 - Hoping to lighten the boat to avoid being swamped by waves
 - This is also reminiscent of Jonah, when the sailors did the same thing in the storm
 - I'm sure all sailors resort to this response when desperate, but simply the fact that the trip has come to this is important in drawing a connection to Jonah
 - The men on board have reached the limits of what they can do on their own in facing their circumstances
- But many days pass, we're told, without sun and stars shining
 - Not only does this tell us that the storm clouds have persisted for an extended time
 - But it also means the ship could be navigated
 - So hope begins to fade
 - It seems only a matter of time before they die in the storm

[Acts 27:21](#) ¶ When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss.

[Acts 27:22](#) "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

[Acts 27:23](#) "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me,

[Acts 27:24](#) saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'

[Acts 27:25](#) "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.

[Acts 27:26](#) "But we must run aground on a certain island."

[Acts 27:27](#) ¶ But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land.

[Acts 27:28](#) They took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms.

[Acts 27:29](#) Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak.

- The storm's intensity was so great that no one had been able to eat in days
 - Paul then steps forward to accomplish two things
 - First, Paul wants to teach the men to trust him and his word
 - So he reminds them that Paul had anticipated these circumstances
 - Secondly, Paul has encouraging news to share with the men
 - So he witnesses to the angel's statement, that Paul must reach Caesar and Rome and these men who accompany him will survive too
 - Notice that God has granted this saving of all lives provided they all sail with Paul
 - One writer noted that Paul is the only man with courage remaining in this moment, because it came from a knowledge of and a trust in the God who controlled the seas
 - And by his courage, Paul the prisoner has become the captain
 - This monologue is also similar to Jonah, when Jonah gives his explanation to a mystified crew for the storm and connects his circumstances to God
 - Luke seems to be crafting the narrative to follow the Jonah pattern
 - Finally Paul also predicts the ship will run aground, as this is God's plan

- A full two weeks into this storm, on the fourteenth night the sailors sense that land is near, probably by smell
 - They took depth readings and discovered that they were quickly approaching an underwater shelf and feared running aground
 - Since they can't see at night, they need to stop their movement and wait
 - So they lowered anchors and prepared to wait for daybreak

[Acts 27:30](#) But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow,

[Acts 27:31](#) Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved."

[Acts 27:32](#) Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it fall away.

[Acts 27:33](#) ¶ Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing.

[Acts 27:34](#) "Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish."

[Acts 27:35](#) Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat.

[Acts 27:36](#) All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food.

[Acts 27:37](#) All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons.

[Acts 27:38](#) When they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.

- In the midst of lower the anchor, some on the ship begin to lower the small boat brought on board earlier
 - They are pretending that this is part of lower an anchor, but Paul the experienced sailing passenger knows better
 - He warns the centurion that his only hope to see God hold to his grant to save everyone is if everyone remains with Paul
 - Paul is simply echoing what he heard the angel say: God's offer was to save all those who set sail with Paul
 - If that group is no longer together, God's grant of their lives to Paul would be void
 - The centurion and soldiers immediately respond by cutting the lifeboat free

- Why does Paul work to save these men's lives at this point?
 - He could have let them go, but then he knew that God intended to save all of them, as the angel said
 - He could have assumed God would keep that promise somehow and not intervened
 - Instead, Paul seemed to understand that we are called to be God's means for accomplishing His work
 - So Paul acts to instruct the men in how to obey the Lord's direction so that His word will stand
 - Could it have been any other way? No, but we don't try to figure out the "what ifs?"
 - We obey without worrying about how God works it out
- There is still another parallel here to the story of Jonah
 - When Jonah reaches Nineveh, his declaration of God's message results in the entire city being saved by faith
 - Like the ship's passengers, it was an all or nothing commission from God
 - Until Jonah preached, none were saved
 - But God intended to save the entire city through Jonah's preaching, so it must happen
- Then Paul works to bring encouragement to these sailors and by prompting them to eat for the first time in 2 weeks
 - That's a very long time to be without food, and it will have left them very weak
 - Paul's concern is for their weakness so he breaks bread
 - And he reassures them they will all make it through the storm
 - The encouragement took hold and they ate were strengthened
 - So much so that they felt they could throw the wheat out
 - The reason is simple: the wheat was the heaviest thing left in the ship and it was making the ship vulnerable to running aground

- They want to lighten the ship so it will raise up in the water and get closer to shore

[Acts 27:39](#) ¶ When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could.

[Acts 27:40](#) And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach.

[Acts 27:41](#) But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves.

[Acts 27:42](#) The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape;

[Acts 27:43](#) but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land,

[Acts 27:44](#) and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

[Acts 28:1](#) When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta.

- The daylight showed them the bay of an island they didn't recognize
 - The bay is in the island of Malta south of Italy and today the bay is called St. Paul's Bay
 - Ocean currents from east and west meet along the island of Malta, and deposit silt and mud in the bay
 - But the sailors resolve to reach the beach
 - They drop the anchors and free the rudders to steer the ship and now they sail head long toward land
 - They hit a reef, which in the Greek indicates a sand bar and they are stuck out from the beach
 - And as the waves strike the ship, they are in danger of breaking up in the waves
 - The soldiers then decide they should kill the prisoners to keep them from escaping, since soldiers usually paid with their lives when a prisoner escaped
 - The centurion relieved the soldiers from this responsibility and saved the prisoners' lives for Paul's sake

- This man's actions indicate he has taken an inordinate interest in Paul and may have come to faith himself, though we don't know
- So instead, the centurion says swim if you can and the rest float to shore
 - This was brave on his part, for if a prisoner escaped he would lose his life
 - And these prisoners had every reason to escape, since they were likely to die in Rome
 - And as God promised, all made it to shore and none died
 - They land on Malta and now regroup

[Acts 28:2](#) The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.

[Acts 28:3](#) But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand.

[Acts 28:4](#) When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live."

[Acts 28:5](#) However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.

[Acts 28:6](#) But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

- The men are received well by natives who make a fire to dry them out
 - The text indicates they didn't speak Greek, since the word native indicates non-Greek speaking
 - Therefore, they probably had trouble communicating in details
 - We see Paul's experience collecting wood and the snake biting his hand
 - Paul probably picked up the snake as it was hiding among sticks, and it was sleeping or sluggish in the cold
 - The heat woke it up
 - The natives witness this and begin to make a common assumption among unbelievers and even some believers: bad things happen to bad people
 - While there is truth that bad behavior leads to bad outcomes, the natives have incorrectly assumed the reverse: bad outcomes are unique to bad people

- The natives see the outcome as proof that Paul is bad
 - But in reality, bad things happen to everyone, but God promises to turn them to good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose
 - In this case, Paul's bite becomes God's opportunity to glorify His name among these people through Paul
- For his part, Paul doesn't seem fazed by the event
 - And sure enough, he shows no reaction to the bite
 - This outcome is in keeping with Jesus' promise to the apostles in Mark 16:18, when He promised that deadly snakes will not hurt them
 - This promise wasn't universal to all believers but given as an example of how the Lord's work in the Body of Christ will manifest for some believers
 - In Paul's case, he saw this specific promise fulfilled
- The natives are astounded by Paul's resilience and call him a god
 - A similar response to the earlier episode with Barnabas
 - What these natives prove by their response is how these signs were God's way to demonstrate His power through the Apostles
- This moment of healing for Paul himself becomes the opening for God to reach the entire island through Paul

[Acts 28:7](#) ¶ Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days.

[Acts 28:8](#) And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.

[Acts 28:9](#) After this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.

[Acts 28:10](#) They also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed.

[Acts 28:11](#) ¶ At the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead.

- Paul is a bit of a celebrity and now encounters Publius, the leading man of the island
 - The Greek phrase for “leading man of the island” means the political leader or chief officer
 - He was a Roman governor who ran the island
 - And his father was dying of Maltese Fever, a water-borne bacterial disease common to the island of Malta
 - Paul ministers to this man, heals him and then finds himself at the center of a crowd of islanders seeking similar healing
 - Here is Paul preaching the Gospel and reaching Gentiles for Christ on a far away island practically unknown to sailors
 - While he is a prisoner of the greatest human empire known, yet he is furthering the expansion of the eternal kingdom of the true God
 - Though the Roman empire purposed to deliver Paul to Caesar, God purposed to deliver Paul to the Maltese people
 - Just as Jonah was forcibly sent outside Israel to preach to Israel enemy, Paul was taken as a prisoner away from Jerusalem to preach to Israel’s enemies
 - And when the time came for Paul to represent the truth, he influences an entire island, just as Jonah saved an entire city
- After three months wintering on Malta, time came to leave the island, the natives graciously replaced the lost goods and sent them on their way
 - They sail on a sister ship of the one lost in the storm, which had also wintered on the island
 - It was decorated with the twin brothers, who were sons of Zeus and Leda, and were the patron gods of sailors
 - The remainder of the trip to Rome was uneventful

[Acts 28:12](#) After we put in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.

[Acts 28:13](#) From there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium, and a day later a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli.

[Acts 28:14](#) There we found some brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome.

[Acts 28:15](#) And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

[Acts 28:16](#) ¶ When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

- Paul was able to find and greet believers in at least one church along the way
 - Until finally Paul reaches Rome
 - Paul is now in the capital of the greatest empire the world has ever seen
 - The empire was 3,000 miles east to west and two thousands miles north to south
 - Its population was 4.5 million, and half were slaves
 - Paul has traveled 2,250 miles from Caesarea to get here
 - As Paul walks to the city from the port, he is met by the brethren in two places
 - They probably learned of Paul's approach from the brothers in Puteoli who had seen Paul a little earlier
 - The Roman church sends two parties out to greet Paul and encourage him, one meeting him at the Market and another at the Three Taverns
 - These spots are 33 miles south of Rome
 - Imagine someone walking 33 miles to greet you?
 - This was a great encouragement to Paul and quite an honor for him
 - Paul's accommodations in the city were good, all things considered
 - He was allowed to live by himself, perhaps in the home of the captain of the guard who watched over him
 - Now that Paul is settled in the city and since he will have a long wait to see the Caesar, Paul begins again to minister in the way he always did
 - Only this time, instead of visiting the synagogue, Paul has the synagogue visit him

[Acts 28:17](#) ¶ After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he began saying to them, “Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

[Acts 28:18](#) “And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death.

[Acts 28:19](#) “But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation against my nation.

- Paul says he was forced into becoming a prisoner of Rome at the hands of Jewish authorities
 - Yet Paul is careful to point out that his appeal to Caesar was not an indication he was choosing Roman affiliation over his Jewish people, but merely out of necessity

[Acts 28:20](#) “For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.”

[Acts 28:21](#) They said to him, “We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you.

[Acts 28:22](#) “But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere.”

- The Jewish leaders assure Paul that he will have a fair hearing with them, though they have heard many negative reports concerning the sect called the Way
 - We see again that the Christian faith is understood to be a division of Judaism and not something different

[Acts 28:23](#) ¶ When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

[Acts 28:24](#) Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.

- Here is the fulfillment of Luke’s storyline
 - Paul and the Gospel itself has moved outward from Jerusalem to the corners of the world’s empire
 - And Paul now sits in Rome teaching the Jewish leaders of the city about the Messiah
 - Specifically, Paul taught on the Kingdom of God and concerning Jesus

- One is a teaching concerning God's plan for Israel and the arrival of the promised Messianic kingdom
- The other is to the Person of the Messiah
 - Eventually Paul stood before Caesar with a similar message
 - As always, some believed while others did not

[Acts 28:25](#) And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

[Acts 28:26](#) saying,

"GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY,
" YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND;
AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;

[Acts 28:27](#) FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL,
AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR,
AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES;
OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES,
AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS,
AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN,
AND I WOULD HEAL THEM."

[Acts 28:28](#) "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."

[Acts 28:29](#) [When he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.]

- Paul responds to the leaders' unbelief in quoting Isaiah's own commission from God
 - Isaiah was told that though he was called to be a messenger to God's people, God would withhold understanding from them
 - And by withholding that understanding, God ensured they would be ensnared by their own sin
 - Paul quotes that passage to remind these leaders that God had in the past sent the truth to Israel only to have it rejected
 - And now these men were repeating that pattern
 - Paul's point is clear: he had done his duty to preach to the Gentile first, but by their rejection they prove God's word
 - And Paul is no free to preach to the Gentiles in Rome

- And so Luke's story comes to an end

[Acts 28:30](#) And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him,

[Acts 28:31](#) preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

- The length of time mentioned here is significant
 - Two years was the Roman statute of limitations for witnesses to appear against the accused
 - Since Paul spent two years in house arrest, the implication would be that Paul was then released, since there were no charges that could be brought against him
 - In fact, there is strong evidence from some of Paul's epistles and from writings of early church fathers that Paul was released in Rome in AD 63
 - From there, Paul likely undertook a fifth missionary journey, since there are places and events mentioned in 1 & 2 Tim and Titus that did not occur in the journeys mentioned in Acts
 - The church fathers also wrote that Paul was released from Rome, visited more churches and eventually returned to Rome
 - In Paul's second visit to the city, he was arrested again and executed under Nero by beheading in AD 68