

Witnesses of the Faith

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

A 26-WEEK INTERACTIVE STUDY
BY JASON HARDIN

(Part 2 of 2)

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A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts (Gareth L. Reese) – College Press
Acts Of The Apostles With Notes By Alexander Campbell – Old Paths Book Club
Jesus And The Victory Of God (N. T. Wright) – Fortress Press
New Commentary On Acts Of Apostles (J. W. McGarvey) – Gospel Light Publishing Company
The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today (Everett Ferguson) – Eerdmans Publishing
The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Craig S. Keener) – InterVarsity Press
The New Testament And The People Of God (N. T. Wright) – Fortress Press
The Pulpit Commentary: Acts & Romans (Edited by Spence and Exell) – Hendrickson Publishers
The Temple: Its Ministry and Services – Updated Edition (Alfred Edersheim)
Truth Commentaries: The Book of Acts (Johnny Stringer) – Guardian of Truth Foundation
Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Clinton E. Arnold, General Editor)

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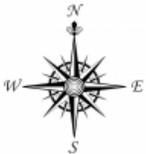
How To Use This Workbook

Welcome to *Witnesses of the Faith*, a 26-week study of *The Acts of the Apostles*. Before you go any further, let me say just a few words about the pages in front of you.

This workbook is designed to function as more than simply a collection of “Fill-In-The-Blank” and “True-False” questions. The intention is that this booklet would serve as a 6-month interactive companion as you walk with the Lord through the exciting and pivotal book of *Acts*. To encourage personal thought and application, you’ll find a number of features throughout this workbook.



Getting Into The Word: at the beginning of each lesson, this icon will indicate the portion of Scripture under consideration, a schedule for the daily reading of Scripture, and a brief summary of the lesson.



You Are Here: we study the Bible, not just to familiarize ourselves with facts, but to learn how to more fully conform ourselves into the image of God’s Son. Whenever you see this icon, you’ll find practical pointers or questions that will orient the Biblical text in a direction of personal application.



Markers Along The Way: this icon indicates that a little bit of time needs to be taken to explore some principle or passage of Scripture beyond the book of *Acts*. The goal is that reading and interpreting other key texts of the Bible will help us come to a deeper understanding of the message of *Acts*.



Dig A Little Deeper: at times, insight into the original meaning of a word or phrase can help us more fully understand the context of a passage. This icon indicates important information that directly relates to the Biblical text.

Finally, each lesson concludes with the **A-C-T-S** acronym. Use this opportunity to make your study even more personal. Read the Biblical text with the goal of discovering reasons for:

- A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...
- C - aution: this passage has reminded me to **take caution** in...
- T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...
- S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

To God be the glory,

Jason Hardin

Outline Of The Book Of Acts

Introduction (1:1-5)

- A. Mention of the recipient of the letter: Theophilus
- B. Summary of *"the first book"*
 - 1. An account of Jesus' actions and teachings that ends on the day of his ascension
 - 2. Specific commands given to the hand-picked apostles
 - 3. Jesus presents himself alive for forty days and speaks about the kingdom of God
 - 4. At his final appearance, Jesus orders his apostles not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for a baptism with the Holy Spirit

Part One: Witnesses In Jerusalem (1:6-8:4)

I. Preparations For The Proclamation Of The Gospel (1:6-2:13)

- A. The reassurances and ascension of Jesus (1:6-11)
- B. The return of the apostles to Jerusalem (1:12-14)
- C. Matthias chosen to replace Judas (1:15-26)
- D. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (2:1-13)

II. The "Good News" Spreads Throughout Jerusalem (2:14-8:4)

- A. Peter's witness to Jews *"from every nation under heaven"* on Pentecost (2:14-41)
- B. The lifestyle of the early disciples (2:42-47)
- C. First confrontation with the Jewish authorities (3:1-4:31)
 - 1. Peter heals a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple (3:1-11)
 - 2. Peter's witness connecting Jesus to the Old Testament prophets and the healing of the lame man (3:12-26)
 - 3. Peter and John arrested by the priests and the Sadducees (4:1-4)
 - 4. Peter's witness before the Jewish council (4:5-12)
 - 5. The command of the council to stop teaching in the name of Jesus (4:13-22)
 - 6. The believers' prayer for boldness (4:23-31)
- D. The sharing of resources by the disciples (4:32-5:11)
 - 1. Voluntary efforts (4:32-37)
 - 2. Deceitful efforts of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)
- E. Multitudes are added to the Lord as signs and wonders abound (5:12-16)
- F. Second confrontation with the Sadducees (5:17-42)
 - 1. The apostles arrested and put in public prison (5:17-18)
 - 2. The apostles released and commissioned by an angel of the Lord (5:19-21)
 - 3. The apostles called before the council after preaching in the Temple (5:22-33)
 - 4. Gamaliel's speech to the council (5:34-39)
 - 5. The apostles are beaten, but refuse to cease teaching and preaching (5:40-42)
- G. Seven men are appointed by the disciples to aid in the daily distribution of food (6:1-7)
- H. Stephen's confrontation with the Jewish council (6:8-7:60)
 - 1. Stephen seized and brought before the council (6:8-15)

2. Stephen's witness of Jesus standing in a long line of rejected prophets (7:1-53)
3. The stoning of Stephen (7:54-60)
- I. As great persecution arises against the church in Jerusalem, the disciples scatter (8:1-4)

Part Two: Witnesses In Judea And Samaria (8:5-12:25)

I. The Witness of Philip (8:5-40)

- A. Philip witnesses to the people of Samaria (8:5-25)
- B. Philip witnesses to an Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40)

II. The Conversion Of Saul Of Tarsus (9:1-31)

- A. Jesus speaks to Saul on the road to Damascus and Saul is blinded (9:1-9)
- B. Ananias tells Saul what he must do (9:10-19)
- C. Saul proclaims Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus (9:20-22)
- D. Saul is forced to escape from Damascus under the threat of death (9:23-25)
- E. Saul witnesses in Jerusalem (9:26-31)

III. The Witness Of Peter (9:32-11:18)

- A. Peter heals Aeneas and the residents of Lydda and Sharon turn to the Lord (9:32-35)
- B. Peter raises Dorcas from the dead in Joppa and many believe in the Lord (9:36-43)
- C. Peter's witness to Cornelius and his household in Caesarea (10:1-11:18)
 1. Cornelius is instructed by an angel to send for Peter (10:1-8)
 2. The Lord communicates with Peter through a vision of unclean animals (10:9-16)
 3. Peter responds to the vision and makes his way to Cornelius' house (10:17-33)
 4. Peter's message to the Gentiles (10:34-43)
 5. The Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles and they are baptized (10:44-48)
 6. Peter responds to Jewish criticism in Jerusalem (11:1-18)

IV. The Witness Of The Early Church (11:19-12:25)

- A. The gospel is preached in Antioch (11:19-26)
- B. Disciples in Antioch determine to send relief to brethren living in Judea (11:27-30)
- C. Persecution at the hands of Herod the king (12:1-25)
 1. James is killed and Peter is arrested (12:1-5)
 2. Peter is released by an angel of the Lord (12:6-19)
 3. Herod is killed by an angel of the Lord (12:20-25)

Part Three: Witnesses To The Ends Of The Earth (13:1-28:31)

I. The First Missionary Journey (13:1-14:28)

- A. Barnabas and Saul are sent by the Holy Spirit from Antioch (13:1-3)
- B. Barnabas, Saul (Paul) and John witness on Cyprus (13:4-12)
- C. Paul and Barnabas witness in Antioch of Pisidia (13:13-50)
- D. The work continues at Iconium (13:51-14:5)
- E. The gospel is preached in Lystra and Derbe (14:6-20)

- F. Paul and Barnabas witness on the return trip to Antioch (14:21-26)
- G. Report to the disciples in Antioch on the first missionary trip (14:27-28)

II. Gentiles And Their Obligation To The Law Debated In Jerusalem (15:1-35)

- A. Debate over Gentiles being circumcised and keeping the Law (15:1-5)
- B. Peter's witness of God's impartiality toward the Gentiles (15:6-11)
- C. The testimony of Paul and Barnabas (15:12)
- D. James' argument from the prophets (15:13-21)
- E. An explanatory letter sent to Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (15:22-29)
- F. Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas report back to the saints in Antioch (15:30-35)

III. The Second Missionary Journey (15:36-18:22)

- A. Paul and Barnabas disagree over taking along John Mark (15:36-41)
- B. Derbe and Lystra: Paul is joined by Timothy (16:1-5)
- C. Troas: Paul is urged in a vision to come to Macedonia (16:6-10)
- D. Philippi: personal stories (16:11-40)
 - 1. Lydia and her household obey the gospel (16:11-15)
 - 2. Paul and Silas thrown in prison (16:16-24)
 - 3. The conversion of a jailer and his family (16:25-34)
 - 4. Paul and Silas are released and depart the city (16:35-40)
- E. Thessalonica: a world turned upside down (17:1-9)
- F. Berea: many receive the word (17:10-15)
- G. Athens: the "unknown god" is preached (17:16-34)
- H. Corinth: one-and-a-half years of testifying (18:1-17)
- I. Return trip to Antioch (18:18-22)

IV. The Third Missionary Journey (18:23-21:14)

- A. Galatia and Phrygia: strengthening the disciples (18:23)
- B. Ephesus: three years of ministry (18:24-19:41)
 - 1. Apollos speaks boldly in Ephesus (18:24-28)
 - 2. Paul baptizes twelve men in the name of the Lord Jesus (19:1-7)
 - 3. Paul's work in the synagogue and the hall of Tyrannus (19:8-10)
 - 4. The seven sons of Sceva (19:11-20)
 - 5. A riot breaks out in Ephesus (19:21-41)
- C. Macedonia and Greece: three months of ministry (20:1-5)
- D. Troas: Eutychus falls from a third story window (20:6-12)
- E. Miletus: Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders (20:13-38)
- F. Tyre: Paul is urged not to go on to Jerusalem (21:1-6)
- G. Caesarea: Agabus' prophecy about coming trouble in Jerusalem (21:7-14)

V. The Journey To Rome (21:15-28:31)

- A. Paul witnesses in Jerusalem (21:15-23:33)

1. Paul visits with the elders of Jerusalem and goes to the Temple (21:15-26)
 2. Paul is falsely charged and arrested in the Temple (21:27-36)
 3. Paul recounts his personal story of conversion before a Jewish mob (21:37-22:21)
 4. The Roman tribune discovers that Paul is a Roman citizen (22:22-29)
 5. Paul witnesses before the chief priests and the Jewish council (22:30-23:11)
 6. A plot to kill Paul (23:12-33)
- B. Paul witnesses in Caesarea (23:34-26:32)
1. Paul reasons with Felix, governor of Judea, for two years (23:34-24:27)
 2. Paul argues his defense before Porcius Festus and appeals to Caesar (25:1-12)
 3. Paul makes his defense before King Agrippa (25:13-26:32)
- C. Paul witnesses in Rome (27:1-28:31)
1. Paul sails for Rome (27:1-12)
 2. A storm at sea (27:13-38)
 3. The shipwreck (27:39-44)
 4. Paul on the island of Malta for three months (28:1-10)
 5. Paul arrives in Rome (28:11-16)
 6. Paul witnesses to the local Jewish leaders (28:17-29)
 7. Paul proclaims the gospel to *"all who came to him"* for two whole years (28:30-31)

“Preaching Boldly In The Name Of The Lord”

The conversion of Saul would prove to be of monumental importance in the spreading of the gospel throughout the world. This vicious persecutor of Christians, first introduced to us in connection with the stoning of Stephen, was to become the great apostle Paul. This second half of our study of the *Acts of the Apostles* will slowly begin to shift focus, away from Peter and the work of the apostles in Jerusalem, to Paul and his intense labor to spread the “good news” to the ends of the earth.

Day One: *Acts 9:23-43*

Day Two: *Acts 9:23-25*

Day Three: *Acts 9:26-31*

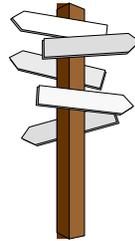
Day Four: *Acts 9:32-35*

Day Five: *Acts 9:36-43*

Day Six: *Acts 9:23-43*

Luke tells us that upon Paul’s return to Damascus, “*the Jews plotted to kill him.*” Why would these descendants of Abraham be intent on taking such drastic measures?

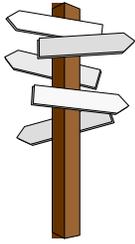
Manuscript evidence has led the translators of the ASV, NASB, NIV and ESV to render *Acts 9:25* as “*but his disciples took him by night...*” Using passages like *1 Corinthians 11:1*, in what way could these Damascus inhabitants be described as Saul’s disciples?



“When many days had passed...”

If we compare the *Acts* account with Paul’s own words in *Galatians 1:11-18*, we find that he left Damascus sometime after his conversion to journey to “*Arabia.*” Within the scope of the “*many days*” described by Luke, three years go by before Paul eventually goes up to Jerusalem. But the question has long intrigued Bible students—why did he go to Arabia? Can you think of some possible answers?

In *Acts 9:26*, Luke tells us, “*And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples.*” Think of the last recorded time Saul was in Jerusalem. Why had he left? What emotions must have stirred within Saul as he returned to the scene of his atrocities against these same disciples?

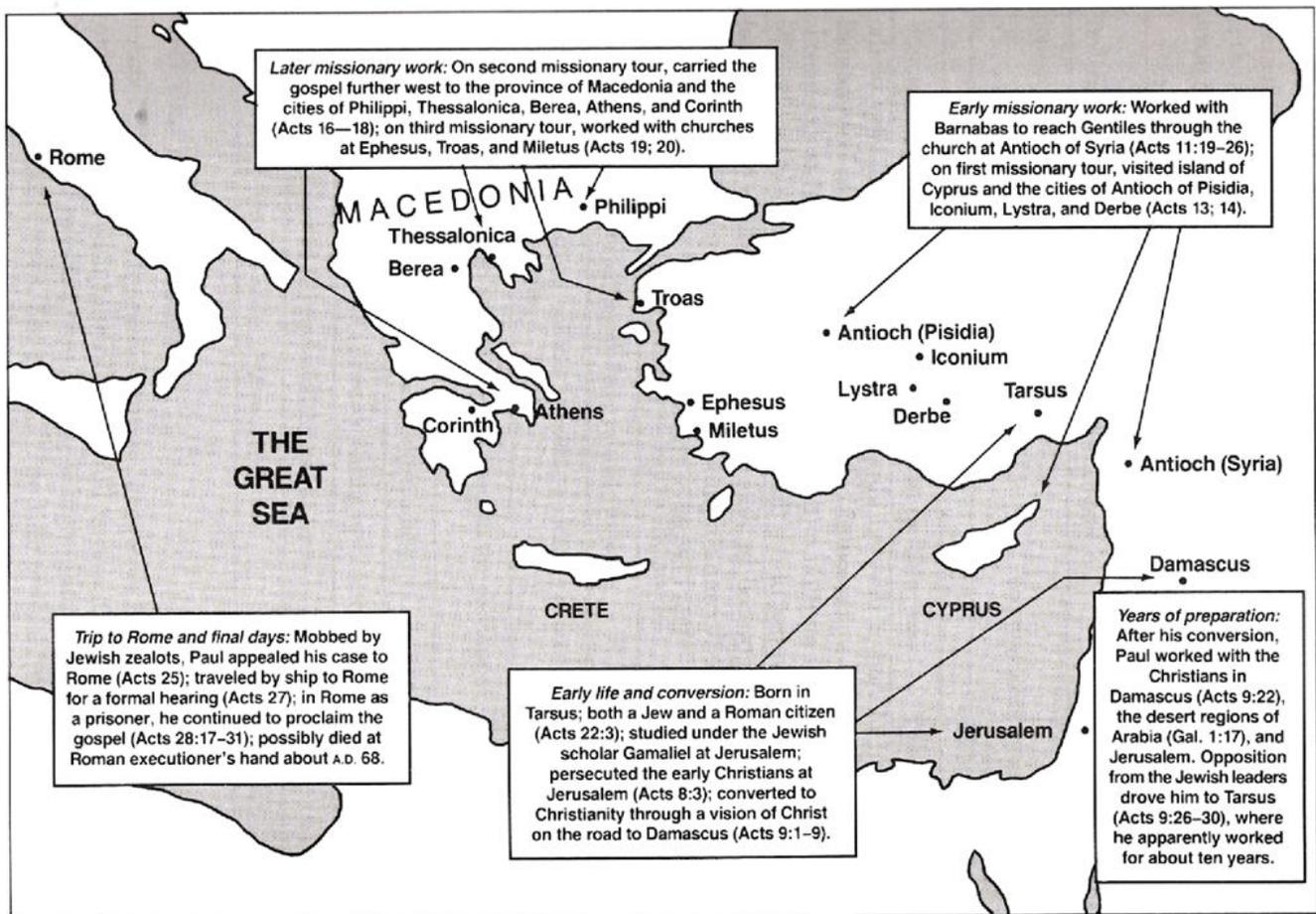


In *Galatians 1:18*, Paul recounts how he and Cephas (Peter) visited with each other for fifteen days. What kinds of things would Peter have told Paul, and vice versa?

“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles...” (9:27). When did we last cross paths with Barnabas? How does this action in *Acts 9* continue to reinforce the nickname given to him by the apostles?

From our study of *Acts 6* we learned that “*Hellenists*” were Greek-speaking Jews who had typically been raised outside of Israel. Think back to what ultimately led to Stephen’s death (*Acts 6:8ff*). What do passages like *Acts 9:28-29* tell us about Saul of Tarsus?

The Life of Paul



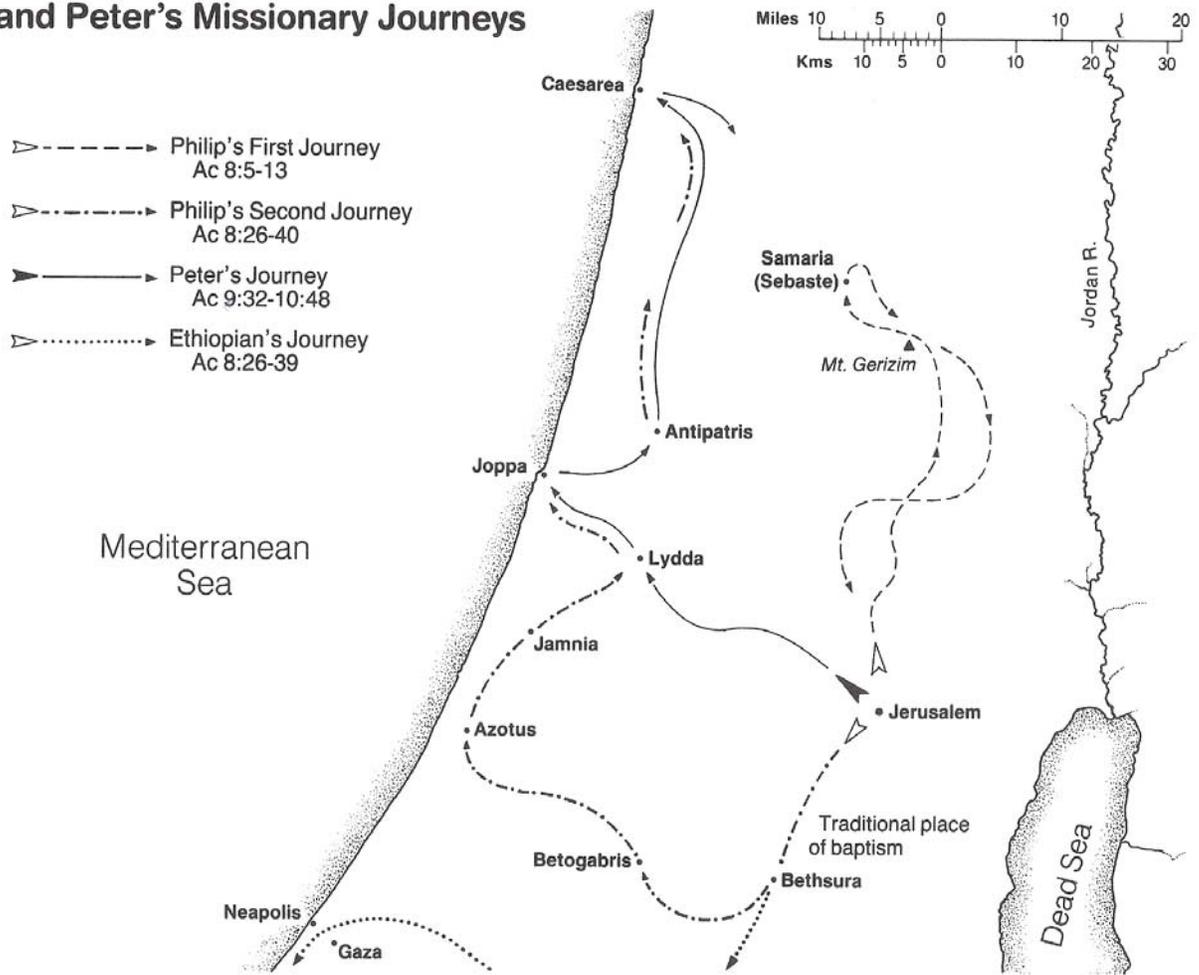


Acts 9:31 is another one of Luke’s summary statements of the time. Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were the three regions composing Israel. His point? The Lord’s church could not be defeated. Despite the threats, beatings, internal problems and the cruel persecution already suffered, the church continued to grow and thrive. Why? They were “walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.” Can I do the same in the 21st century? If so, how? What will it look like in everyday life?

- “Walking in the fear of the Lord”

- “Walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit”

Philip’s and Peter’s Missionary Journeys



In *Acts 9:32*, Luke shifts his focus away from Saul—who will spend the next several years in his home town of Tarsus and the surrounding region—back to Peter, partly in preparation to narrate the conversion of the Gentile household of Cornelius. Luke traces the travels of Peter from Jerusalem, to Lydda, to Joppa, and ultimately to Caesarea (see the map on the previous page). Reading the account of the healing of Aeneas (*Acts 9:32-35*), how was Peter different from a magician like Simon (*Acts 8:9ff*)?



In *Acts 9:32*, we run across the second use of the word “saints” in Luke’s narrative (see also *Acts 9:13*) and only the third time it is used in the entire New Testament (see *Matthew 27:52*). The word comes from the Greek *hagios* which signifies that which is “separated.” Much confusion obviously exists among much of the modern religious world as to what, exactly, a “saint” is. Based on Luke’s use of the word, what was a saint? To whom did the term rightfully apply, and why?

In Joppa, there was a disciple named “Tabitha” (Aramaic) or “Dorcas” (Greek) who was “full of good works and acts of charity” (*Acts 9:36*). Can 21st century women still serve in much the same way as Tabitha? Practically speaking...

- ...what will a modern-day Tabitha look like?
- ...what traits will she exhibit?

Take a moment to think of the people we have been introduced to throughout our study of *Acts* so far. A man like **Barnabas** couldn’t do everything that **Peter** could. **Philip** preached in Samaria, but it took someone like **John** to come to the region for the Holy Spirit to be miraculously imparted. **Dorcas**

didn’t serve her King in the same way that **Stephen** did, and yet they were both sorely missed after their deaths. What does this simple principle tell us about the wonder of the “*body of Christ*” (*1 Corinthians 12:12-31*) and the importance of each member contributing in every way they possibly can?



Building on that principle, what happens to the body of Christ if you have the “Peters” of the kingdom without the “Barnabas”?

What impact will be felt if the “Philips” of the kingdom aren’t complimented by the “Tabithas”?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 9:23-43*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Truly I Understand That God Shows No Partiality”



Peter, who had “*stayed in Joppa for many days*” (9:43) would now be sent by the Lord to the home of a man named Cornelius. Luke carefully documents how God uses Peter as the instrument through whom one of the most significant events in the history of Christianity was carried out. The gospel is for all people, but until this time, its proclamation had been essentially limited to the Jews. In the events surrounding the conversion of Cornelius, however, God dramatically demonstrates that salvation is available even to uncircumcised Gentiles and that He expects the news to be spread.

Day One: *Acts 10:1-8*

Day Two: *Acts 10:9-16*

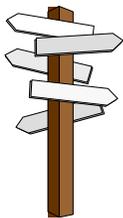
Day Three: *Acts 10:17-33*

Day Four: *Acts 10:34-43*

Day Five: *Acts 10:44-48*

Day Six: *Acts 11:1-18*

As you read Luke’s description of Cornelius in *Acts 10:1-2*, how would you describe him, in your own words?



Do you remember the promises of Jesus in *Matthew 16:13-20*? In our study of *Acts* we have read of disciples like John, Barnabas, Stephen and Philip. In fact, there is evidence that Philip had actually settled in Caesarea (8:40; 21:8). Why, then, was Cornelius specifically instructed to seek out “*Simon who is called Peter*”? (*Acts 10:3-8*)



“A **centurion**” was a commander of a “century” in the Roman army—that is, he was over 100 men. A “cohort” was a tenth part of a “legion.” A Roman legion consisted of 6,000 men. This particular cohort was made up of soldiers from Italy.

This isn’t the first time we come across a centurion and the subject of his faith in the New Testament. Go back and carefully read *Matthew 8:5-13*. What does Jesus seem to be saying in that passage?



According to Cornelius' account of this incident, the angel of God told him that Peter would declare to him "a message" by which he would be saved (11:13-14). It's noteworthy that the **angel** did not tell Cornelius what to do to be saved. An angel was involved in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, but specifically directed **Philip** to proclaim the message (8:26-40). Even when Jesus himself appeared to Saul, **he** did not tell Saul what to do to be saved. Rather, he brought Saul into contact with **Ananias** (9:6,10-17; 22:16). Is there a practical lesson we should learn from these accounts?

Read Luke's description of Peter's vision in *Acts 10:9-16*. It's easy to understand how Peter would have been "*inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean*" (10:17). What was God's point and how did this vision even tie into what God was asking Peter to do?

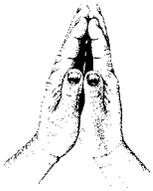
The Holy Spirit tells Peter to "*rise and go down and accompany [Cornelius' messengers] **without hesitation***" (10:20). That same phrase is translated "*waver*" (*Romans 4:20*), "*doubts*" (*Romans 14:23*) and "*doubting*" (*James 1:6*) in other contexts. Why would Peter "hesitate" to follow the Lord's instructions?

In *Acts 10:26*, when Cornelius had fallen at Peter's feet and begun worshiping him, "*Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I too am a man.'*" How have some men with far less authority than Peter forgotten that principle of reverence?

As you read *Acts 10:34-43*, how would you summarize Peter's message?

What we read in *Acts 10:44-46* is of supreme importance.

- ▶ In your own words, what happened?
- ▶ Just as important, *why* did it happen?
- ▶ How was this outpouring of the Holy Spirit different from anything Peter had ever seen?
- ▶ Finally, very practically speaking, what does *Acts 10:47-48* teach us—even 2,000 years later—about salvation?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 10:1-11:18*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“The Hand Of The Lord Was With Them”



The monumental conversion of Cornelius opened the way for the spread of the gospel to Gentiles abroad. This work began to occur in Antioch of Syria. This prominent city became a type of center for evangelism to the Gentiles, serving as the launch pad from which Paul would embark on three evangelistic journeys into the Gentile world. In this section of his record, Luke also relates a remarkable incident involving King Herod’s wicked assault on Christianity. In the end, he would learn—just as all have—that God and his purposes cannot be defeated.

Day One: *Acts 11:19-26*

Day Two: *Acts 11:27-30*

Day Three: *Acts 12:1-5*

Day Four: *Acts 12:6-11*

Day Five: *Acts 12:12-19*

Day Six: *Acts 12:20-25*

“When [Barnabas] came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with **steadfast purpose**...” (*Acts 11:23*). Throughout the New Testament we find encouragement for disciples to remain faithful in their devotion to God. Both bolded words above are important elements in the equation of faithfulness. In your own words...

☞ ...what does it mean to be “**steadfast**”? (see *1 Corinthians 15:58; Colossians 1:21-23; James 1:12*)

☞ ...why is a clear sense of “**purpose**” vital to our walk of discipleship? (see *Romans 8:28; Eph. 1:3-14; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:8-9; James 5:11*)



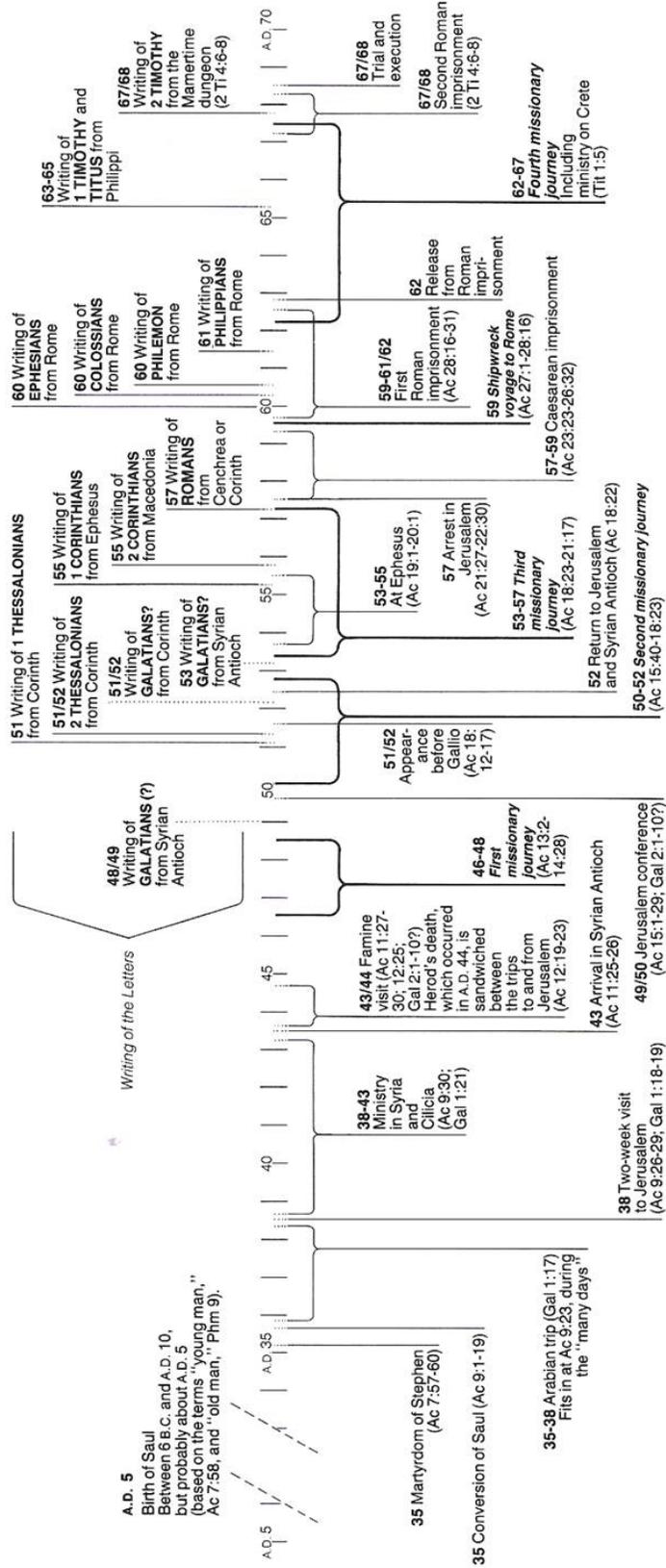
Reacquainting ourselves with Saul

In *Acts 11*, we meet up with Saul of Tarsus once again. Several years have passed since his conversion. Let’s take a moment to reacquaint ourselves with his story so far:

- Jesus appears to Saul on the road to Damascus (*9:1-8*)
- Saul spends three days and nights without sight waiting for Ananias (*9:9*)
- Upon his conversion, Saul immediately preaches Jesus in Damascus (*9:10-22*)
- He goes away into Arabia (*Galatians 1:17*)
- He returns to Damascus (*Gal. 1:17*)
- After three years, faced with murder from the Jews, Saul goes to Jerusalem where he preaches boldly (*9:26-29*)
- In a vision, Jesus tells him to get out of Jerusalem quickly (*22:17-21*)
- He is brought by the brethren to Caesarea and sent off to Tarsus, his home town (*9:30*)
- To this point, he has been preaching in the regions of Syria and Cilicia (*Gal. 1:21*)

Time Line of Paul's Life

Lines, brackets and dotted lines help show sequence of events, but are not meant to point to precise months or days within a given year, since exact dating is difficult.





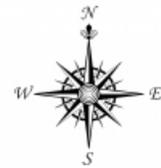
famines in Israel during the years A.D. 45-46.

According to *Acts 11:28*, the prophecy of Agabus came to pass during the reign of **Claudius Caesar**, emperor of the Roman Empire from A.D. 41-54. Several ancient writers (Tacitus, Josephus, Suetonius) document great

*“Now in these days **prophets** came down from Jerusalem to Antioch” (11:27).* When the Bible refers to someone as a “prophet,” what are we generally to assume about them?

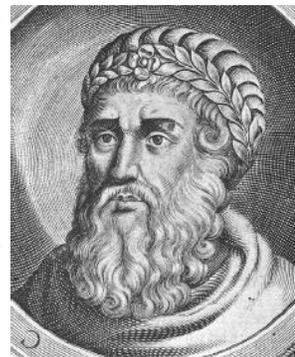
Taking what we have learned thus far about Barnabas and Saul, what elements would each uniquely bring to Antioch that the Lord could use for the continued growth of the kingdom?

Throughout the New Testament, we find saints engaged in “benevolent” work. *Acts 11:27-30* is just one of those examples. If our goal is to pattern ourselves after the 1st century church that was functioning under the guidance of the apostles (who were themselves being directly instructed by the Holy Spirit), any patterns of work and worship we can pick up on are invaluable. What details from this account are important for us to take to heart as modern disciples of Christ?



In the New Testament, one family of rulers particularly stands out in opposition to Christ and his cause: the Herods. The patriarch of the family was known in all modesty as **Herod the Great** (*pictured to the right*). He ruled Judea from 47-37 B.C. Then, having been dubbed “King of the Jews” by Rome, he ruled all of Palestine from 37 B.C. until his death shortly after Christ’s birth (*Matthew 2:15*). Herod the Great was a particularly bloodthirsty ruler. He executed one of his wives, Mariamne, her mother, and three of his sons (the last one five days before his own death)...

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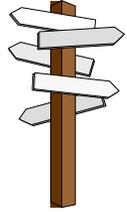
Shortly before his death, he lured prominent Jewish leaders to Jericho where he imprisoned them. Knowing the people would not mourn his death, Herod the Great ordered that these leaders be executed after he died. That way, he reasoned, there would at least be mourning going on at the time of his death. Fortunately, his mad scheme was not carried out. Most barbaric of all was Herod's slaughter of all the innocent young male children near Bethlehem (*Matthew 2:16*). He sought vainly by this cruel act to kill the true King of the Jews, who was safely in Egypt with his parents.

The "*Herod the king*" of *Acts 12* was **Herod Agrippa I**, who reigned from A.D. 37-44. He was the grandson of Herod the Great, who had murdered his father, Aristobulus. The apostle Paul would one day stand trial before his son, Herod Agrippa II (*Acts 25:13-26:32*). Despite being raised and educated in Rome, Agrippa I was always on shaky ground with the Romans. He ran up numerous debts in Rome, then fled to Palestine, leaving angry creditors behind him. Unwise comments he made got back to the Roman emperor Tiberius, who promptly imprisoned him. Released from prison following Tiberius' death, he was made ruler of northern Palestine (*Luke 3:1*), to which Judea and Samaria were eventually added in A.D. 41. He ruled the largest territory of Palestine since Herod the Great nearly fifty years earlier. Because of his tenuous relationship with Rome, it was imperative that he maintain the loyalty of his Jewish subjects.

One way to win favor with the resident Jewish authorities was to persecute the hated sect of the Christians, especially the apostles.



In *Acts 12:1-2*, Luke tells us of the death of the first apostle (other than Judas) – James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John. Take the time to go back and read *Matthew 4:18-22* and *20:20-23*. What was this "cup" James shared with Christ?

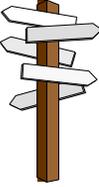


Combining *Acts 12:2* with *Deuteronomy 13:12-15*, what most likely was the charge against James?

Reading *Acts 12:4*, it's evident that Peter was in the "maximum security wing" of Agrippa's prison. A "squad" consisted of four soldiers each. Why so many soldiers? Perhaps rereading *Acts 5:17-20* will help your answer.

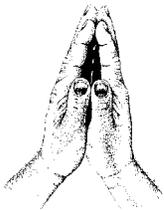
In *Acts 12:5* we find the church engaged in "earnest prayer" for Peter. Our English word *earnest* relates to an ancient Greek medical term (*ektenes*), describing the stretching of a muscle to its limits. The same word is used to describe Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (*Luke 22:44*). In your own words, what is "earnest" prayer?

Upon his escape, Peter went “to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name (in Greek) was Mark” (Acts 12:12). This is the first of many times we will cross paths with John Mark (Acts 12:25; 13:5,13; 15:36-39; 2 Timothy 4:11; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 1 Peter 5:13). More than likely, he is the author of the *Gospel According to Mark*.



In Acts 12:20-23, Luke documents the striking death of Herod Agrippa I. Josephus, the Jewish historian, also describes the occasion: “He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of wonderful contexture, and early in the morning came into the theater place of the shows and games, at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the first reflection of the sun’s rays upon it, shone after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those

that looked intently on him...he did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery...A severe pain arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. And when he was quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, in the 54th year of his age, and the 7th year of his reign” (*Antiquities* XIX, viii, 2). What should we learn from this account?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 11:19-12:25*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Set Apart For Me Barnabas And Saul”



With *Acts 13* we come to the beginning of the third and final major section of the *Acts of the Apostles* (see the outline, pg. 5-8). The main focus throughout the rest of Luke’s account will be the labors of Saul of Tarsus. Just as he had foretold (*Acts 9:15-16*), God’s plan for Saul was that he carry the good news to the Gentiles. In *Acts 13* we find God sending Saul (Paul) on the first of three great journeys from Antioch into the Gentile world. On this first journey he is accompanied by Barnabas and, in the beginning, John Mark.

Day One: *Acts 13:1-3*

Day Two: *Acts 13:4-12*

Day Three: *Acts 13:13-25*

Day Four: *Acts 13:26-39*

Day Five: *Acts 13:40-47*

Day Six: *Acts 13:48-52*

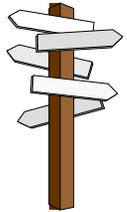


In many ways, the **church at Antioch** is a “model church”—the kind of example we should strive to emulate. We noted in *Acts 11:27-30* their generosity toward the brethren in Judea. As we continue reading, we discover:

- ▶ a number of gifted leaders who are zealously and selflessly serving the Lord.
- ▶ a multi-ethnic makeup (two of the five mentioned in *Acts 13:1* appear to have been from northern Africa, one is from Cyprus and the other is from Cilicia; only one is from Palestine and not one is from Antioch or Syria), reflecting the fact that the gospel is not for just one particular group of people.
- ▶ people who worship the Lord with sincere hearts, seeking the direction of the Spirit, and striving for obedience to the Lord’s directives.

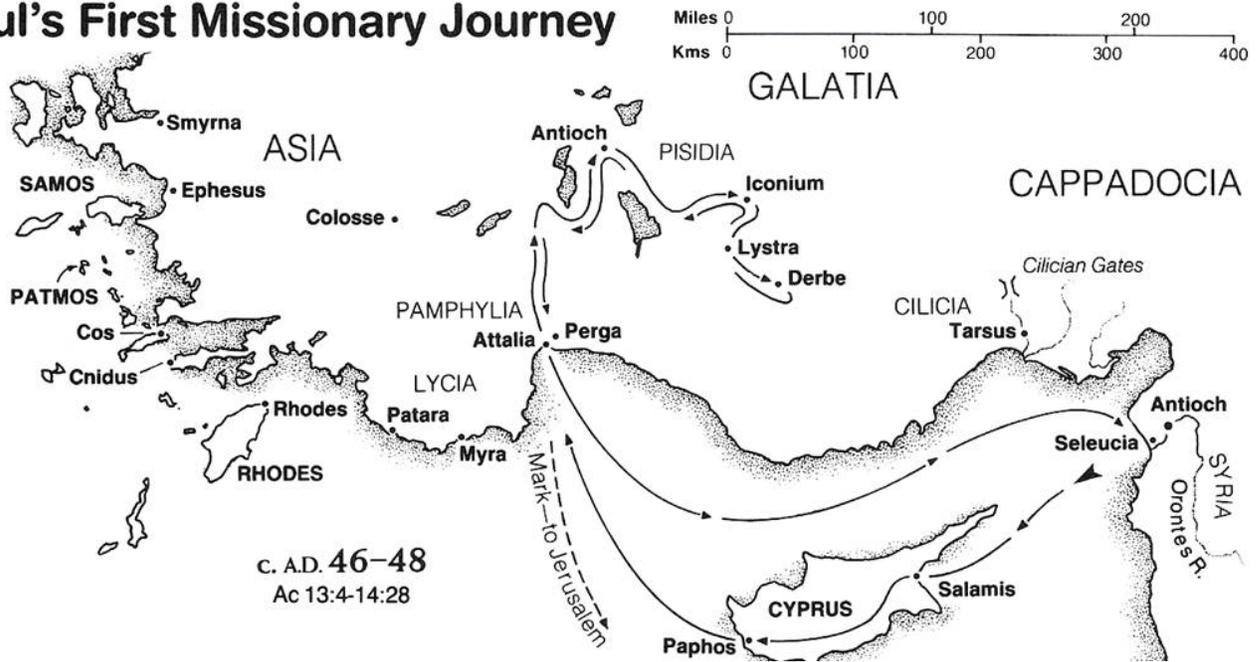
Comparing ourselves with those disciples, where should we be inspired to make some improvements?

Two different times in *Acts 13:1-3* Luke tells us of the disciples in Antioch fasting. What is fasting?



Using the concordance in the back of your Bible or some other resource, take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with fasting as it is described and prescribed in the Scriptures. How should we view fasting as modern disciples?

Paul's First Missionary Journey



Having read *Acts 13:1-3* and thinking about what we have already studied from *Acts*, what patterns of conduct have you noticed on the part of individuals and 1st century congregations when it came to the work of evangelism? How was the work being done? Who was “in charge”? Have you already noticed some differences in the way 1st century churches went about their work when compared with many 21st century churches?



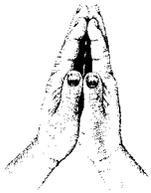
“But Saul, who was also called Paul...” (*13:9*) This is the last time in *Acts* that Luke calls the apostle by the name of “Saul.” While we do not know much about the reasons or the date of the change of name, we can speculate. Can you think of any reasons why Saul (*Hebrew*) would have come to be known as Paul (*Latin*)?

After reading *Acts 13:4-12*, why do you think Paul responded the way he did to this Jewish false prophet?

Take the time to carefully read Paul's message in the Jewish synagogue (*Acts 13:13-41*). How would you outline the major points of his discourse?

Why was it "*necessary that the word of God be spoken first*" to the Jews (*13:46*)?

What should we make of the description of those who "*were appointed to eternal life*" in *13:48*? What does that phrase mean?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 13:1-52*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Speaking Boldly For The Lord”



Acts 14 documents the rest of Paul’s first missionary journey. To this point in the journey, the gospel has been preached on the island of Cyprus and in Pisidian Antioch. After their mixed reception at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas travel nearly a hundred miles to Iconium where they receive a similar response to their preaching. Before making their way back to Antioch in Syria, the two will proclaim Christ in Lystra and Derbe and take the time to revisit and strengthen these new Galatian churches. As you study *Acts 14*, the map on page 23 will be helpful.

Day One: *Acts 14:1-28*

Day Two: *Acts 14:1-7*

Day Three: *Acts 14:8-18*

Day Four: *Acts 14:19-23*

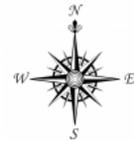
Day Five: *Acts 14:24-28*

Day Six: *Acts 14:1-28*

“Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed” (14:1). Do you remember what Paul wrote in *Romans 10:17*? Many hold to the unscriptural notion that faith is produced through a miraculous, direct operation of the Spirit on the sinner’s heart. How is the truth demonstrated perfectly here in *Acts 14*?

In *Acts 14:4* Paul and Barnabas are referred to as “apostles.” What does that word mean and how was it apparently used in two different contexts throughout the New Testament?

Acts 14:2 tells us that “the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and **poisoned their minds** against the brothers.” How might these minds have been “poisoned” and how does such continue to occur today?





The strange and surprising turn of events in *Acts 14:8-18* probably had its roots in local folklore. There was a tradition in Lystra recorded by the Roman poet Ovid (43 B.C. - A.D. 17) that the gods **Zeus** (the most powerful of the gods, popularly worshiped as the god of weather and the provider of vegetation) and **Hermes** (the god of eloquence, the spokesman of the gods) once came to earth in human form. As they asked for food and lodging they were refused at a thousand homes. Finally, at the last house in Lystra, a tumbledown shack at the edge of the city dump, an old peasant named Philemon and his wife, Baucis, took them in, fed them well, and prepared for them a place to rest. Not knowing that they were entertaining gods “in the guise of human beings,” the old couple eventually learned the identity of their heavenly visitors. The gods led them late at night to the top of a hill and mercifully spared them from a devastating flood sent in vengeful judgment on the inhospitable inhabitants of the region. Following the destruction, Philemon and Baucis saw their humble cottage miraculously transformed into a magnificent marble temple where they served as priest and priestess for the rest of their lives. After their deaths, according to the legend, they were turned into two stately trees.

As you read Paul’s brief recorded statements in *Acts 14:14-17*, do any other New Testament passages come to mind?

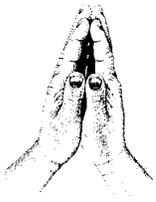
In *Acts 14:15*, Paul references “*vain things*” that these Gentiles needed to turn away from. “*Vain*” could also be translated “futile, useless, worthless, empty.” Why would Paul refer to the people’s belief in Zeus and Hermes in this way and how could he be unashamed to do so?

What should we make of Luke’s summary of Paul’s message as he sought to strengthen the souls of these new disciples, “*saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*” (14:22)? Doesn’t the immersion of a penitent believer translate him or her into the kingdom of God? Didn’t Paul write to 1st century believers who had

been transferred out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (*Colossians 1:13*)? If such is the case, why would Paul speak of entering the kingdom as if it were still something to be awaited and prepared for in the future (see also *2 Peter 1:10-11*)?

The details of *Acts 14:23* are of supreme importance. What does this relatively simple and straightforward statement by Luke teach us about early Christianity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

It's significant to note that the disciples of *Acts 14* will eventually be Paul's audience in his letter "to the churches of Galatia" (*Galatians 1:2*). Take the time to skim *Galatians*. What points of emphasis do you notice in that letter that fit the context of *Acts 13-14* perfectly?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 14:1-28*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“After There Had Been Much Debate”



For many years, the Jewish people welcomed Gentiles into their covenant community provided that they turned from their idols to the one true God and adhered to the Jewish law—most notably by being circumcised. Now that the Messiah of Israel has come and an ingathering of Gentiles into the newly constituted people of God is happening, a number of law-observant Jews are wondering why Paul and the church at Antioch are not insisting that the Gentile converts keep the law. This issue becomes divisive and threatens to split the movement. The wisest course of action is to convene a meeting with the leaders of the Jerusalem church and reach a mutual understanding that will govern the movement as more and more Gentiles put their faith in Jesus.

Day One: *Acts 15:1-5*

Day Two: *Acts 15:6-11*

Day Three: *Acts 15:12-21*

Day Four: *Acts 15:22-29*

Day Five: *Acts 15:30-35*

Day Six: *Acts 15:1-35*

“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers...” (15:1). A faction within the Jerusalem church, particularly of the party of the Pharisees (15:5), are disturbed about the way Gentiles are being admitted into the church. They are upset that Gentile believers are not being circumcised as commanded by the law. To make sure that the Antioch church is not lax in its fidelity to God’s law, a group of them make the 300-mile journey to Syria to press this issue. *Acts 15:24* makes it clear that their teaching is not authorized by the leaders of the Jerusalem church, even though they may have claimed to be representing the views of the church in Jerusalem. Why, then, did Paul and Barnabas engage in *“no small dissension and debate with them”*?

Why not simply amiably “agree to disagree”? Why were *“Paul and Barnabas and some of the others appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question”*? (*Acts 15:2*)



As “an apostle to the Gentiles” (*Romans 11:13*), Paul naturally wrote a great deal about circumcision and its tie to man’s redeemed relationship with God. Take the time to read *Romans 2:25-29*; *1 Corinthians 7:17-24*; *Galatians 5:1-6*; *6:14-15*; *Ephesians 2:11-22*; *Philippians 3:2-3*; *Colossians 2:8-15*. How would you summarize the Spirit’s communication through Paul to these Gentile Christians?

The similarities between this meeting and the one described in *Galatians 2:1-10* have led many commentators to conclude that *Acts 15* and *Galatians 2* are discussing the same meeting. Even if such is not the case, they at least touch on the same basic point of contention. What additional insight into this practical question do we gain from Paul’s personal account?



How would you summarize Peter’s message to the assembly in *Acts 15:7-11*?

We know that James, the son of Zebedee, had been executed by Herod Agrippa (*Acts 12:1-2*). There were two other prominent men named James:

- (1) an apostle, James the son of Alphaeus (*Matthew 10:3*)
- (2) James, the Lord’s brother (*Matthew 13:55*; *Acts 1:14*).

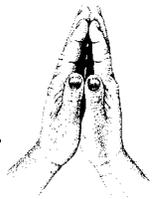
The most common opinion is that the James of *Acts 15* is the Lord’s brother. References in *Acts (12:17; 21:17-26)* and *Galatians (1:18-19; 2:9,12)* indicate that there was a James who was particularly prominent in Jerusalem. Reading *Acts 15:12-21*, how would you summarize his message?

If this is indeed the Lord’s brother, what sort of things had happened that would have helped him grow from his opinion in *John 7:1-5* to becoming an influential believer in the church of Jerusalem?

Why would James seek to reinforce the prohibition of the four things mentioned in *Acts 15:20* for Gentile Christians?

Why was there wisdom behind sending representatives from Jerusalem “to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas” (*Acts 15:22*)?

Had this sharp disagreement not been settled, what potentially could have happened to seriously hinder the growth of God’s kingdom among men? What can we learn, practically speaking, from this real-life account of conflict resolution?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 15:1-35*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Let Us Return And Visit The Brothers In Every City”



“After some days,” Paul determines that the time has come for a second missionary journey. His proposal is to visit the Christians in the cities where he and Barnabas had preached on their first journey. Recognizing that these converts face temptations and opposition, Paul is understandably concerned about their spiritual welfare. This second journey, however, will turn out to be even more extensive, as Paul will travel beyond Asia Minor where he and Barnabas had preached on their first journey, and carry the gospel into Europe.

Day One: *Acts 15:36-41*

Day Two: *Acts 16:1-5*

Day Three: *Acts 16:6-10*

Day Four: *Acts 16:11-15*

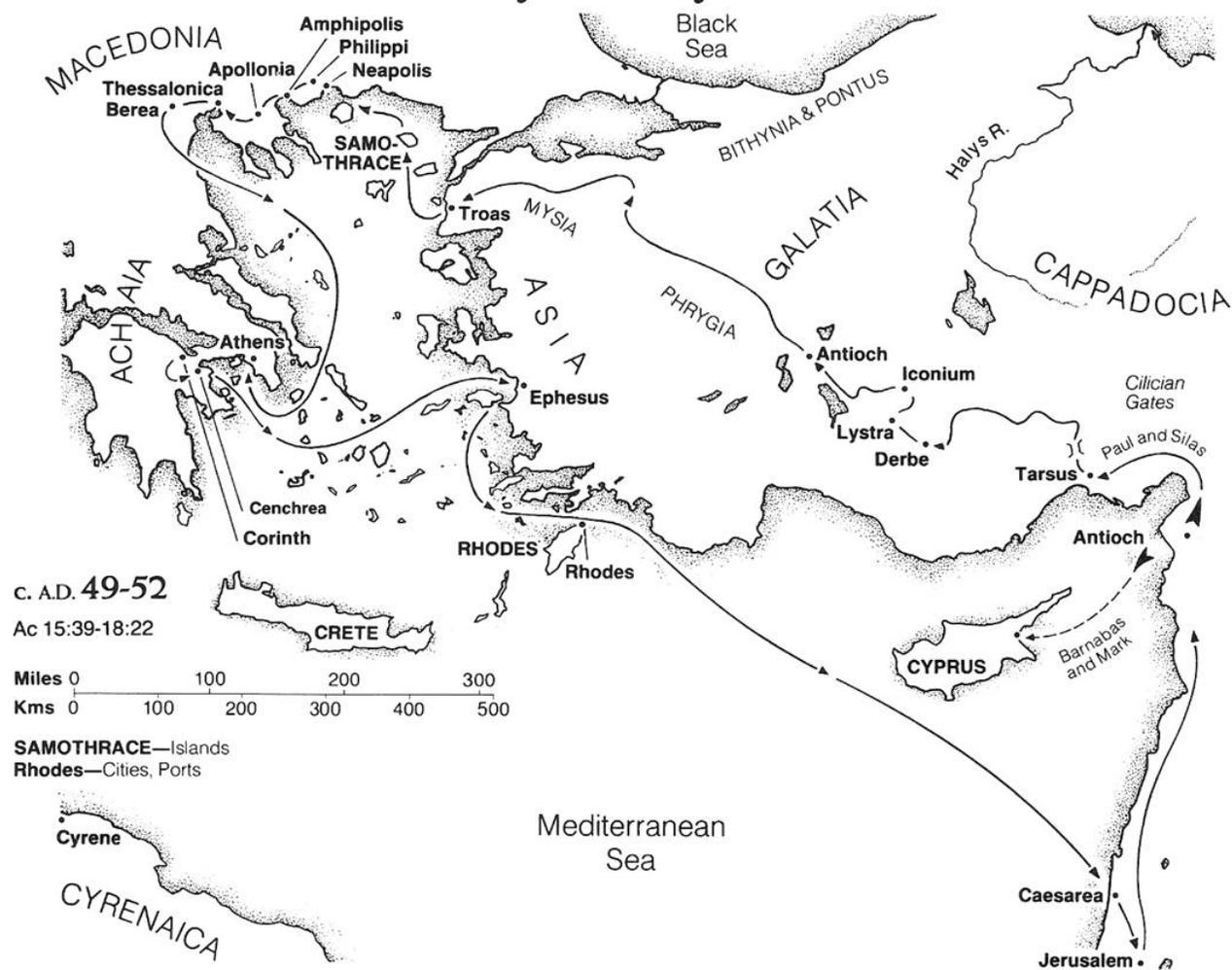
Day Five: *Acts 16:16-24*

Day Six: *Acts 16:25-40*

“Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought it best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work” (*Acts 15:37-38*). Remember that Barnabas was a cousin to Mark (*Colossians 4:10*). For whatever reason, Mark had left Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey (*Acts 13:13*). As the plans for their second journey continue to develop, “*there arose a sharp disagreement*” between Paul and Barnabas, “*so that they separated from each other*” (*Acts 15:39*). What can we learn, practically speaking, from this account about the nature of disagreements among brethren and how to handle them when they arise?

Later in life, Paul mentions both Barnabas and Mark in different epistles (*1 Corinthians 9:6; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24*). Is there a lesson we can learn, even from these brief references?

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



There are three generations of disciples in Lystra—a grandmother (Lois), a mother (Eunice), and a son (Timothy). In *2 Timothy 1:5*, Paul mentions them by name. What are the implications made by Luke in noting that Timothy's father "was a Greek"? Can we learn anything from the faith of these two women and the impact they had, not only on Timothy, but on generations to come?

"Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:3). Is Paul being grossly inconsistent in this action? After what we studied of the great debate over the place of circumcision and its relationship to Christianity in *Acts 15*, why would Paul do such a thing? Perhaps *1 Corinthians 7:19; 9:19-23* will be helpful.



Timothy will become one of Paul's most valuable coworkers over the span of the next fifteen years. He works alongside Paul in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea (*Acts 17:14-15*), Corinth (*18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19*), and Ephesus (*Acts 19:22*). Later, Timothy serves as Paul's personal messenger to the Corinthian church for handling some of the problems that surface there (*1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10*). In a similar way, he serves the Philippian church (*Phil. 2:19*) and the Thessalonian church (*1 Thess. 3:2,6*). He is also named as a cowriter of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (*2 Cor. 1:1*) as well as his letters to the Philippians (*Phil. 1:1*), Thessalonians (*1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1*), the Colossians (*Col. 1:1*), and to Philemon (*Philem 1*). Shortly before the end of his life, Paul writes Timothy two personal letters. The first gives a variety of instructions for establishing leadership and a good example in the church at Ephesus. The other offers significant advice and encouragement to young Timothy as Paul awaits death in a Roman prison. Paul's affection for Timothy is summed up in a remark he makes to the Philippian church: "as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel" (*Phil. 2:22*).

Further detail is given by the author of *Hebrews* who references Timothy and his recent release from prison (*13:23*).

Acts 16:11-15 documents the conversion of Lydia and her household. Note especially *16:14*. How does the Lord "open the hearts" of people even today?

After reading *Acts 16:16-18*, why would Paul have become "greatly annoyed" (the word can include the different ideas of *grief, pain* and *anger*) at the actions of this slave girl?

"But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers" (*16:19*). What could possibly keep these men from being moved to believe in Paul's teaching and submit to Christ in whose name this demon had been expelled?

In a Roman court, criminals were usually stripped entirely naked. Beatings were done by the *rhabdychoi* or "lictors." Whereas Jews used a leather whip to administer beatings and were limited to 40 stripes, the Romans used rods and were subject to no such limitations. Cicero gives an account of a man named Gaius Servilius who suffered an official beating. He was beaten "till finally the senior lictor Sextius...took the butt end of his stick, and began to strike the poor man violently across the eyes, so that he fell helpless to the ground, his face and eyes streaming with blood. Even then his assailants continued to rain blows on his prostrate body...And having been carried off for dead at the time, very soon afterwards he died."

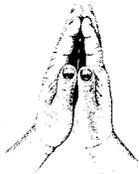
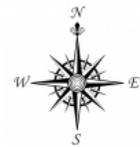


This beating was one of at least three that Paul suffered (*2 Cor. 11:25*). He wrote later of being "shamefully treated" at Philippi (*1 Thess. 2:2*) because the magistrates ordered the beating even though there had been no trial. Such treatment of Roman citizens was illegal (*16:37-38*).

How is what we read in *Acts 16:25* a living commentary on Paul's later words in *Philippians 4:11-13*?
How can mere mortals possibly learn to enjoy such peace and contentment?

Having read *Acts 16:25-34*, what can we learn from this simple example of New Testament conversion?

If you were the Philippian jailer, or Lydia, or a member of their households, what kinds of things would have been going through your mind as Paul and Silas "encouraged" you after everything that had occurred in Philippi, and then "departed"?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 15:36-16:40*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“The Times Of Ignorance God Overlooked”



This week leads us through the rest of Paul’s second missionary journey. After leaving Philippi, Paul and his companions travel about 90 miles to Thessalonica. He then proceeds to Berea and Athens, where he proclaims the God who is “unknown” to so many of the inhabitants. From Athens, Paul goes to the Grecian city of Corinth where he meets Aquila and Priscilla and stays for eighteen months. Silas and Timothy rejoin Paul in Corinth, likely bringing support that enables him to devote himself more fully to preaching. From Corinth, Paul will make his way back to Antioch of Syria, where this preaching trip had begun. The map on page 32 will be helpful for this week’s study.

Day One: *Acts 17:1-9*

Day Two: *Acts 17:10-15*

Day Three: *Acts 17:16-21*

Day Four: *Acts 17:22-34*

Day Five: *Acts 18:1-17*

Day Six: *Acts 18:18-22*



Paul apparently decides not to spend significant time in Amphipolis and Apollonia (*Acts 17:1*). Instead, he goes to the capital of the province of Macedonia–Thessalonica. From there, the entire region can hear the gospel, as in fact happened (*1 Thess. 1:8*). Taking the time to read *1 Thess. 1-2* will provide good contextual insight for *Acts 17*.

Roman Caesars of the past had issued decrees warning anyone about predicting a change of ruler over the empire. Caesar Augustus issued an edict in A.D. 11 explicitly forbidding the use of astrology to predict his or anyone else’s death. The emperor Tiberius reaffirmed this decree by putting to death foreigners who ignored it.

That being said, it’s evident from the Thessalonian epistles that the kingdom of Christ—and especially Jesus’ second coming as King—was very prominent in Paul’s preaching while in Thessalonica. Forty-six times in his two letters Paul refers to Jesus as “Lord.” Take the time to

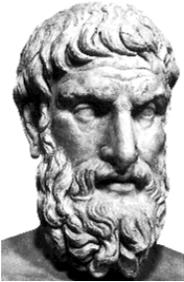
read *1 Thess. 2:11-12; 5:23; 2 Thess. 1:5-8; 2:1-12*. Putting these words together with *Acts 17:1-9*, in what way were Paul and his companions saying that “*there is another king, Jesus*” (*17:7*)?



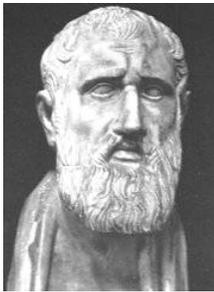
In what way do we need to be just like those more noble inhabitants of Berea (*17:10-15*)?

“The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers...” (17:18). These were two of the schools of Greek thought seeking to explain the great questions of life.

Men who embraced the teachings of the philosopher **Epicurus** (340-270 B.C.) were called Epicureans. Some of their major tenets were: (1) Pleasure is the highest end of living. By pleasure, Epicurus meant “good” pleasure (being generous, kind, and patriotic). But his followers formed their own standards of pleasure and often lived lives indulging the flesh. (2) Matter is eternal, therefore the world was not created by a deity. (3) The soul is not immortal. (4) There will be no future judgment after death for deeds done in this life. (5) The gods do not exercise providential control over human affairs.



Stoic philosophers were advocates of the theories originally taught by **Zeno** of Cyprus (340-265 B.C.) Because he regularly held his classes on one of the porches in the marketplace, his followers were called “Stoics” (from the Greek word *stoa* which means “porch”). The Stoic philosophy was well known in Tarsus, Paul’s hometown; at least six famous Stoic philosophers came from that city. The Stoics believed: (1) The world was created by Zeus. (2) All things are governed by the “Fates,” to whom Zeus himself is subject. (3) Natural events are the expressions of the “Fates,” therefore whatever happens should be accepted without complaint. Passions and affections are to be suppressed and restrained. Man must master pleasure, pain, desires, and lusts so that reason may rule above all. (4) The soul is not eternal.



Athens was one of the cultural, philosophical, and intellectual capitals of the world. Evidences of this would have been all around. But as Paul made his way through the city, what he really saw were people in need of Christ. In your own words, how would you summarize the main points of his famous message in this city (*Acts 17:16-34*)?

Using the information to the left, how did Paul’s message directly contradict much of the philosophical theories of the Athenians?

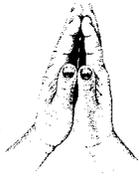
How was this particular sermon different from Peter’s sermon on Pentecost (*Acts 2:14-41*) or even Paul’s own message in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia (*Acts 13:16-41*)?

Why wouldn’t these men just preach the same things in the same ways wherever they went?

From Athens, Paul goes to another strategic city—**Corinth**, the largest city in Greece at the time and the capital of the province of Achaia. Corinth was a prosperous, bustling center of trade and commerce, but also notorious for its immorality. “To live as a Corinthian” meant to live an indulgent, immoral life. Among the most prominent structures at Corinth was the Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility. More than 1,000 priestesses acted as religious prostitutes for the city. Paul faces an enormous challenge when he brings the gospel to Corinth, and it’s wonder that he begins his work there “*in weakness and in fear and much trembling*” (1 Corinthians 2:3). He recognizes his own personal weaknesses in view of the challenge he faces, and his anxiety is only natural.

As long as Paul is in Corinth, he receives no financial support from the Corinthians. Yet, when he later writes to the church in Corinth, he vigorously defends the right of the gospel preacher to be supported for his labors (1 Cor. 9). For whatever reason, the circumstances in Corinth lead him to think that receiving support from these people will be a hindrance to the success of the gospel. It’s likely that when Timothy and Silas come to Paul from Macedonia (18:5), they bring him the support of which he later wrote (2 Cor. 11:8-9).

It’s during this eighteen month stay in Corinth that Paul writes his first letter to the brethren in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1; 3:1-6), and probably the second letter as well.



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 17:1-18:22*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Paul Came To Ephesus”



With *Acts 18:23*, in approximately 54 A.D., we begin Paul’s final missionary journey from the city of Antioch. A study of the letters he wrote during this journey reveals that he was collecting aid from churches to be taken to the needy saints in Jerusalem. Luke does not mention this fact, perhaps because he desired to keep the emphasis on Paul’s evangelistic labors. This third journey will eventually end with Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem, which finally leads to his being taken to Rome as a prisoner.

Day One: *Acts 18:23-28*

Day Two: *Acts 19:1-7*

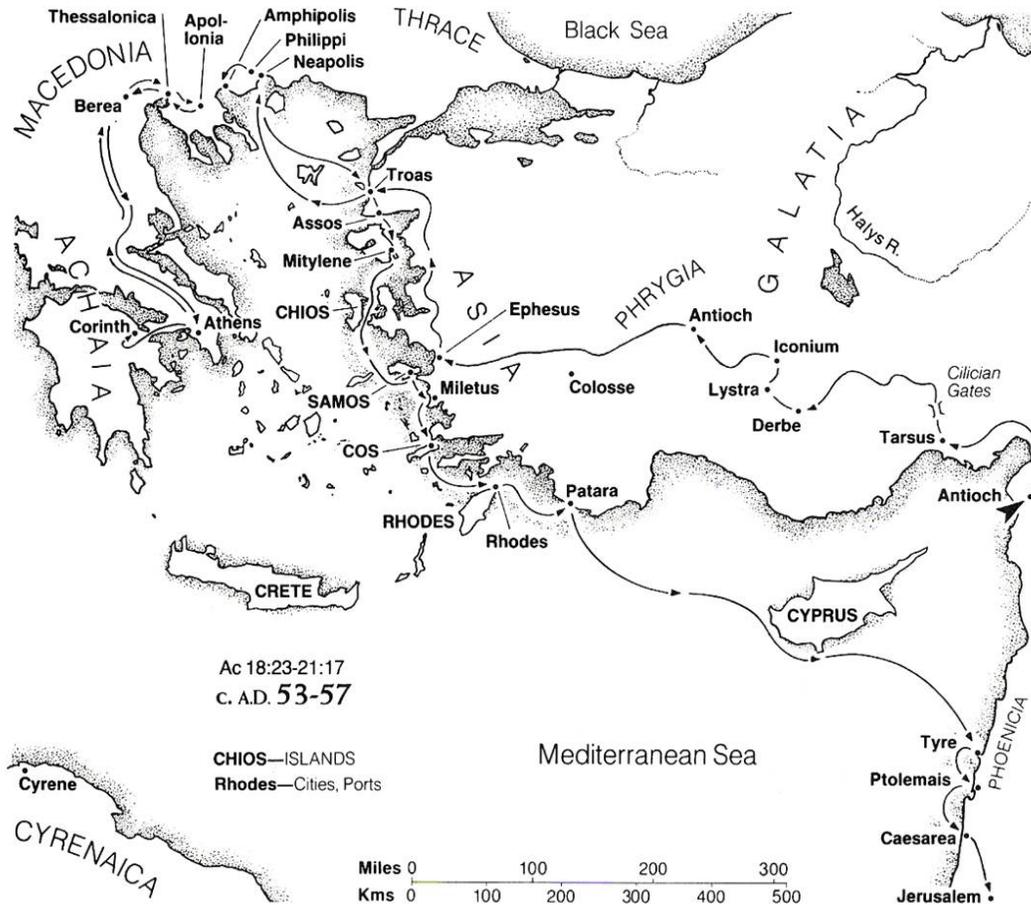
Day Three: *Acts 19:8-10*

Day Four: *Acts 19:11-20*

Day Five: *Acts 19:21-27*

Day Six: *Acts 19:28-41*

Paul’s Third Missionary Journey



This week's lesson centers in on the spread of the gospel in the city of Ephesus. Paul had left Aquila and Priscilla in that city with the promise to return if the Lord willed (*Acts 18:19-21*). Paul does indeed eventually return to Ephesus, but before he does, a Jew named Apollos came to the city. After reading *Acts 18:24-26*, how would you describe in your own words Apollos' level of understanding at this point in his spiritual journey?

Priscilla and Aquila take Apollos aside and explain to him the way of God more accurately? Why? Why not simply allow him to continue on proclaiming what he believes to be the truth?



Numerous ancient inscriptions refer to **Ephesus** as “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia.”

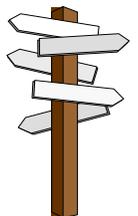
This was not an empty boast. Ephesus was clearly the leading city of the most prosperous region of the Roman empire. With a population of a quarter million, Ephesus ranked only behind Rome, Alexandria (Egypt), and Antioch (Syria) in size.

Because of the city's strategic importance to the spread of the gospel in Asia Minor, Paul earnestly desires to minister for an extended period of time in Ephesus. As it turns out, he stays in Ephesus for about three years, twice as long as he spent in any other place in his apostolic travels.



Reading the rest of the story (*Acts 18:27*) and recognizing that Apollos seems to reform his understanding and preaching of the gospel based on this new information, what insight does this give us into Apollos and his character? What can we learn, practically speaking, from his example?

Luke tells us that Apollos went on to powerfully refute the Jews in public, “*showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus*” (*Acts 18:28*). Understanding that “*the Scriptures*” refers to the Old Testament, what Old Testament passages can you think of that would have been helpful in proving that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah?



What did Paul mean by asking those disciples he found in Ephesus, “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed*” (Acts 19:2)?

Why would their response lead Paul to naturally ask, “*Into what then were you baptized*” (Acts 19:3)?

Again, it seems to be evident that these people were sincere in their efforts to do what they believed to be right and had exhibited a willingness to act upon their beliefs. Why then does Paul encourage them to be “*baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 19:5)?

In your own words, what happened to the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:11-16)? And what can we learn from the evil spirit’s answer to them in verse 15?



Carefully read Acts 19:18-20. “*Fifty thousand pieces of silver*” is roughly the equivalent of fifty thousand days’ wages. Another way of looking at this is that it would require over 150 people working a full year to equal the financial value of these scrolls. What does this teach us about the nature of repentance? Why not just sell the scrolls for personal gain or even to provide ample funds for needy saints?



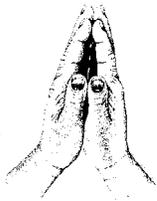
Artemis was the principal deity of the huge metropolis of Ephesus and popular throughout the Mediterranean world. In fact, the Greek writer Pausanias notes that she was worshiped more widely than any other deity. The ancients believed that Artemis possessed fertility and reproductive power that caused the earth to blossom with life of all kinds. She was the goddess of childbirth and a nourishing mother to all. Her grand temple in Ephesus was lauded as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The worshipers of Artemis honored her as “first among thrones,” “savior,” “Lord,” “Queen of the World,” “the heavenly goddess,” and “an unrivaled deity” who could not only help them in their daily affairs of life but could also provide them with protection from evil powers and break the bonds of fate.

After reading *Acts 19:21-41*, one of the obvious questions is, how can people be so blinded to the truth? Reading what we do in passages like *Acts 19:11-12*, how could these inhabitants of Ephesus possibly turn away from the gospel to remain in their paganism and idolatry?



Are there any modern-day parallels we can make to that sad ancient situation?

Reading *Ephesians 4:17-24* and building on what we have studied from *Acts 19*, what does Paul expect the saints in Ephesus (and all of us for all time) to do?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 18:23-19:41*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Declaring To You The Whole Counsel Of God”



After spending three years in Ephesus (20:31), Paul departs into Macedonia as he continues his third missionary journey. He had told the Corinthians that he planned to stay in Ephesus through Pentecost (1 Corinthians 16:8), which in the year 55 A.D. fell on May 25th. Now, Paul pours his efforts into visiting and writing to many of the churches he has helped to establish. He is also working during this time to gather a collection for the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem, where this third journey will eventually end on a dark prophetic note.

Day One: Acts 20:1-6

Day Two: Acts 20:7-12

Day Three: Acts 20:13-16

Day Four: Acts 20:17-38

Day Five: Acts 21:1-6

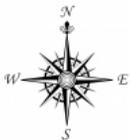
Day Six: Acts 21:7-14



While in Ephesus, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and possibly Galatians. Acts 20:1-6 is a highly abbreviated summary of nearly two years of activity. After leaving Ephesus, Paul travels first to Troas, a fact that we learn from 2 Corinthians, which he writes a short time later while in Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12-13). While in Greece (20:2-3, probably Corinth), he writes Romans. In it, he expresses his plans to visit them shortly as he anticipates a journey to Spain (Rom. 15:22-29).

As Paul carried funds to Jerusalem, he wanted to avoid all appearances of impropriety. Therefore, he was accompanied by brethren approved by the churches sending the funds. The men listed in Acts 20:4 were probably those the various churches had approved to help deliver the funds to Jerusalem. **Sopater** may be an abbreviated form of *Sosipater*, who sent greetings to the Romans (Rom. 16:21). **Aristarchus** had been seized in Ephesus (Acts 19:29); he would later accompany Paul on his voyage to Rome (27:1-2) and be with him when he wrote *Colossians* from Rome (Col. 4:10). We know nothing of **Secundus** except

that he was from Thessalonica. **Gaius** was from Derbe, a city of Galatia. **Timothy** was also from the province of Galatia. **Tychicus**, from the province of Asia, is probably the same Tychicus mentioned in several letters (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 3:12). **Trophimus**, also of Asia, was a Gentile from Ephesus (21:28-29). He is mentioned again in 2 Timothy 4:20.



We sometimes use the phrase “approved apostolic example.” What is that, and how does Acts 20:7 fall into that category? What do we, as modern disciples, learn from this passage?

Jesus had taught his apostles what Christians were to do in order to remember his body and blood (*Matthew 26:26-29*), but the scriptural account of that event does not tell us *when* this memorial was to be observed. *Acts 20:7*, as well as *1 Corinthians 16:1-2*, indicate that the early Christians assembled on the first day of the week to worship (Sunday), rather than on the traditional Sabbath day (Saturday). Based on the larger context of the New Testament, why would this have been the case?

The term “*breaking of bread*” can be used to mean different things in varying contexts, as we found to be the case in *Acts 2:42-47*. Twice we run across that phrase in *Acts 20*. Is there any way to figure out what is meant by:

- ▶ “*to break bread*” in verse 7?

- ▶ “*broken bread and eaten*” in verse 11?

After reading *Acts 20:18-35*, how would you summarize Paul’s message to the elders of the church in Ephesus?

What did Paul mean by saying, “*I am innocent of the blood of all of you*” (*20:26*)? How is this similar to God’s image and expectation of a watchman of Israel in *Ezekiel 33:1-6*?

What do we specifically learn about the work of elders (shepherds, overseers) from Paul’s parting words?

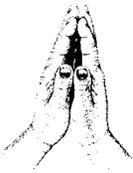
In *Acts 21:8*, we once again read of Philip. When was the last time we ran across him?

What has Philip been doing in Caesarea, based on Luke's description of him as "*the evangelist*"?
What is an evangelist?

What does Luke intend for us to understand by his reference to the fact that Philip "*was one of the seven*"?

We have also already read of an Agabus in *Acts*. Assuming this is the same man, what else had he prophesied?

What insight does *Acts 21:13-14* give us into Paul's frame of mind?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 20:1-21:14*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“We Got Ready And Went Up To Jerusalem”



After the days spent in Caesarea, Paul and his fellow-travelers complete this third great missionary journey in Jerusalem, about 65 miles southeast of Caesarea. As best we can tell, they arrive in time for the Pentecost celebration of A.D. 57. While in Jerusalem, Paul is arrested and imprisoned, and he will remain a prisoner throughout the rest of the book of *Acts*. Following his arrest and imprisonment in Jerusalem, he will be sent as a prisoner to Caesarea (23:31-33), then to Rome (27:1), where he remains a prisoner as the book closes.

Day One: *Acts 21:15-26*

Day Two: *Acts 21:27-36*

Day Three: *Acts 21:37-22:29*

Day Four: *Acts 22:30-23:11*

Day Five: *Acts 23:12-22*

Day Six: *Acts 23:23-35*

In *Acts 21:20-25*, the Jerusalem elders explain a problem Paul will have to overcome if many of the Jewish Christians are to accept him. In your own words, what is the obstacle that many of these first-century disciples are still struggling to overcome?

In what way were the rumors that had been circulating about Paul false?



“When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly” (21:17). Paul must have been apprehensive as he entered Jerusalem. First, he was uncertain that the Jewish Christians there would accept the aid he was bringing from churches that were predominantly Gentile. His concern about this matter is seen in the fact that he asked the Roman Christians to pray that the saints in Jerusalem would accept that which he brought (*Romans 15:31*). Second, the Spirit had repeatedly warned him of the affliction that awaited him in that city. Surely, then, he needed the comfort he derived from the joyful reception the brethren extended to him. In this verse, we have another depiction of the love and unity of first-century Christians.

What do the elders offer as a way to prove the rumors about Paul to be false?



Based on the elders' explanation and recommendation in connection with these men and their vow, many have concluded that this would have been a Nazarite vow, discussed in *Numbers 6*. Using that Old Testament passage, what was a Nazarite vow and what was the one who made it expected to do?

Based on what we know of Paul's preaching and writing, why would he go along with the recommendation of these elders?

Acts 21:30 tells us that "they seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut." Appreciate the irony of this occurrence. God's messenger to bring light to the Gentiles (*Acts 22:21; Romans 11:13; 15:16*) has been shut out of the most holy place of Judaism—the place where God mediated His grace to His people for centuries. In your own words, what was Paul's view (as well as Luke's) of the temple at this point in history?

Historically speaking, this great building was demolished by the Romans just thirteen years later during the destruction of Jerusalem. How do you think 1st century Christians would have viewed its destruction?



"Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place" (*21:28*). There was a stone wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts of the temple (such as the holy area, the women's court, the court of the Israelites, and the court of the priests). Warning signs were posted along this wall prohibiting the Gentiles from entering. The Jewish historian Josephus describes the stone wall and these notices:

"Anyone passing through this towards the second court found it enclosed within a stone balustrade 4½ feet high, a perfect specimen of craftsmanship. In this at equal intervals stood slabs announcing the law of purification, some in Greek and some in Roman characters. No foreigner was to enter the holy area—this was the name given to the second court."



“Are you not the Egyptian...?” (21:38). The exploits of this Egyptian revolutionary are described in detail by Josephus:

A greater blow than this was inflicted on the Jews by the Egyptian false prophet. Arriving in the country this man, a fraud who posed as a seer, collected about 30,000 dupes, led them round from the desert to the Mount of Olives, and from there was ready to force an entry into Jerusalem, overwhelm the Roman garrison, and seize supreme power with his fellow-raiders as bodyguard. But Felix anticipated his attempt by meeting him with the Roman heavy infantry, the whole population rallying to the defense, so that when the clash occurred, the Egyptian fled with a handful of men and most of his followers were killed or captured; the rest of the mob scattered and stole away to their respective homes.

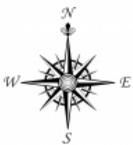
There is a discrepancy in the two stories over the numbers involved. Most scholars think that Luke’s figure of 4,000 is more reliable given Josephus’s tendency to exaggerate numbers. This occurred when Felix was procurator of Judea (52-59 A.D).

Having read Paul’s firsthand account of his conversion to Christ (Acts 22:1-21), at what point in the story do the unbelieving Jews choose to stop listening? Why?

As Paul stands before the Jewish Sanhedrin, he states, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day” (Acts 23:1). What does he mean by that statement?

What did Paul mean by referring to Ananias the high priest as a “whitewashed wall”? (Acts 23:3 – Interestingly, Josephus records that at the outbreak of the Jewish war with Rome [66 A.D.], Ananias went into hiding in Jerusalem near an aqueduct. The Jewish revolutionaries found him and his brother, Hezekiah, and killed them both).

Who else had referred to many of the leading Jewish authorities in a similar way?



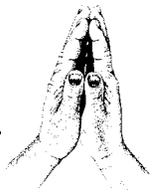
Should modern Christians be concerned with being nothing more than “whitewashed walls” or “tombs”? If so, in what ways?

Jesus may have ascended into heaven and taken His place at the right hand of God, but He did not cease to be actively involved with His people (*Acts 23:11*). Can you find other New Testament passages that speak to the work of Jesus following His resurrection and ascension?

If you were a first-century Christian who witnessed Paul's trials and conduct firsthand, what would you have taken away from the experience?



In comparison to what we undergo at this point in history because of our faith, what should we glean from this real-life account of suffering for the cause of Christ (*Acts 9:15-16*)?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 21:15-23:35*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

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“When They Had Come To Caesarea”



After Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem, certain Jews had plotted to take his life during his imprisonment. Consequently, Paul had been sent away from the city under guard for his own protection. Five days after his arrival in Caesarea, a trial is convened. The Roman governor Felix serves as judge and hears the case of both the plaintiffs and the defendant. For two years Paul remains a prisoner in Caesarea until another governor, Festus, steps onto the scene. Seeking the favor of the Jewish leadership, Festus asks Paul if he is willing to go back to Jerusalem for further hearings. In view of Festus’ willingness to appease the Jews, Paul knows that he has no hope of receiving justice under Festus. Therefore, he exercises his legal right to appeal to Caesar, which will eventually lead to an opportunity for Paul to spread the “good news” in Rome.

Day One: *Acts 24:1-21*

Day Two: *Acts 24:22-27*

Day Three: *Acts 25:1-12*

Day Four: *Acts 25:13-27*

Day Five: *Acts 26:1-11*

Day Six: *Acts 26:12-32*

Having read *Acts 24:1-9*, how would you summarize the accusations of Tertullus, the *rhetor* (“spokesman” or “attorney”) against Paul?

What was meant by the description “*the sect of the Nazarenes*” (24:5)?

How would you describe Paul’s present view of the Law and the Prophets (24:14)?

“*Twelve days since*” (24:11). Having been in Caesarea for five days (24:1), it has only been seventeen days since Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem. An extraordinary amount has happened in that brief span of time:

- **Day 1:** Paul arrives in Jerusalem (21:18).
 - **Day 2:** Paul meets with the leaders of the Jerusalem church (21:18).
 - **Days 3-9:** Paul observes a seven-day purification ritual (21:27).
 - **Day 9:** Paul is arrested (21:33).
 - **Day 10:** Paul appears before the Sanhedrin (22:30).
 - **Day 11:** The plot against Paul’s life is uncovered (23:12).
 - **Day 12:** Paul is taken to Caesarea (23:31-32).
 - **Days 13-17:** Paul awaits trial in Caesarea (24:1).
- Paul gives only the number of days from his arrival in Jerusalem until he had been brought into Felix’s custody. Felix already knew how long Paul had been in his custody.



Felix was the Roman governor of Judea for roughly eight years (A.D. 52-59) and had ruled for five years when Paul was taken into custody. He did not come from a background of wealth and status, but was actually a freed slave. Both he and his brother Pallas had been the slaves of Antonia, the mother of Claudius Caesar. This was the first time that a Roman governorship had ever been held by a former slave.

Felix's reign did much to stimulate unrest among the Jews, which eventually led to the war against Rome. The Roman historian Tacitus summed up Felix's leadership: "Practicing every kind of cruelty and lust, he wielded royal power with the instincts of a slave...he stimulated outbreaks by injudicious disciplinary measures." According to Josephus, Felix had his soldiers regularly track down and catch Jewish zealots, immediately executing them by crucifixion. One of his most heinous crimes was conspiring to put to death the Jewish high priest Jonathan.

Felix was ousted from his office by the emperor Nero in 59 A.D. after his inept handling of an uprising in the city of Caesarea. A dispute had arisen between the Jewish population of the city and the Syrian inhabitants. The conflict led to rioting and street fighting. "One day the Jews were victorious, and Felix came into the marketplace and ordered them with threats to retire. When they refused, he sent his soldiers against them and killed a large number, whose property was promptly plundered" (Josephus). This happened while Paul was in Roman custody in Caesarea.

Felix was married to **Drusilla**, who was one of the three daughters of Herod Agrippa I—the king of Palestine who died suddenly in Caesarea after being praised by the people as a god (*Acts 12:19-23*). Drusilla was six years old when her father died in 44 A.D., which means that she was only fourteen years old when she married Felix and nineteen years old in *Acts 24* (Josephus).

Drusilla was Felix's third wife. One of his previous wives was the granddaughter of Anthony and Cleopatra—a marriage that made Felix a relative of the emperor Claudius. The circumstances of Drusilla's marriage to Felix reveal elements of his character. Drusilla had recently been married to Azizus, king of Emesa (a small territory in Syria). When Felix met Drusilla, he was overcome with desire for her. Josephus says that "she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty." Longing to make this woman his own wife, Felix secured the services of a magician from Cyprus and made every effort to take her away from Azizus. Enticed by the many promises of Felix to make her a happy woman, she was persuaded to leave her husband and become Felix's wife.

Acts 24:23 tells us that Felix "gave orders to the centurion that [Paul] should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs." Thinking about the disciples we have come across in Caesarea throughout the book of *Acts*, who might some of these "friends" have been?

How would you summarize the main points of Paul's message to Felix and Drusilla (24:25)?

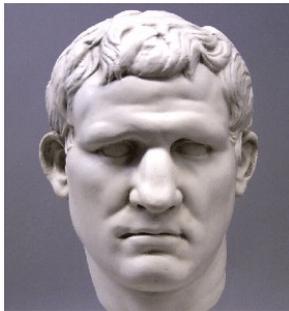
- ★ Righteousness –
- ★ Self-control –
- ★ The coming judgment –



“I appeal to Caesar” (25:11). Paul is making his appeal to appear before Nero, who has been emperor for five years by 59 A.D. To this point in Nero’s rule, he had shown a fair amount of stability as he was still under the influence of his tutor, Seneca (the Stoic philosopher) and Sextus Africanus Burrus. The horrible atrocities against Christians will take place five years later after the burning of Rome (64 A.D.)

King Agrippa I. Felix. Nero. Agrippa II. With these men and others like them as the role models of the first century, what made the disciples of Christ we have become acquainted with so different?

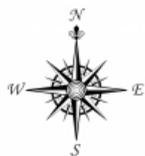
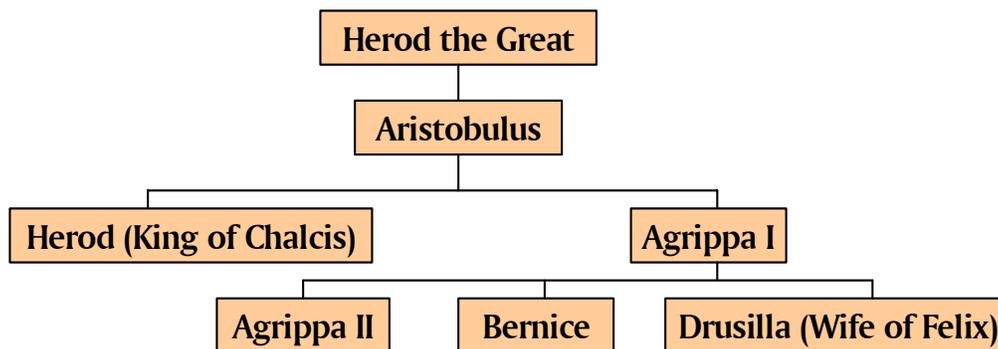
How would you summarize the main points of Paul’s defense before Agrippa the king (26:1-29)?



Marcus Julius Agrippa (Herod Agrippa II) was the oldest of four children and only son born to Agrippa I. He was in Rome at the time of his father’s death. Six years later (50 A.D.), Emperor Claudius bestowed on Agrippa the kingdom of Chalcis (part of present-day Lebanon). Over the next few years, Claudius extended Agrippa’s domain to include other territories in the north, as well as giving him the powerful right to appoint the Jewish high priests.

As the grandson of Herod the Great, a valued friend of Rome, knowledgeable about the affairs of the Jews, curator of the Temple, and someone in charge of appointing high priests in Jerusalem, if anyone could legally lay claim to the title “king of the Jews,” it was Agrippa II.

Bernice was the younger sister—not the wife—of Agrippa. Yet Josephus records that suspicions abounded over whether there was an inappropriate relationship between the two. At the time of this hearing with Paul, she and her brother would have been thirty-one and thirty-two years of age.



We studied two reactions to the gospel this week—one from Felix and the other from Agrippa. As modern hearers of the “good news,” how can we make sure to avoid having the attitude:

- ▶ “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you”?
- ▶ “You almost persuade me to become a Christian” (NKJV)?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 24:1-26:32*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“It Was Decided That We Should Sail For Italy”



Our journey through the *Acts of the Apostles* concludes with a journey to Rome. Paul has appealed to Caesar. He is sent by Festus, along with some other prisoners, by ship. The apostle’s prayers will be answered and God’s promise will be fulfilled—the gospel will be preached in Rome (*Acts 23:11*). As we draw our study to a close, take a moment to reflect on the progress that was made in the spread of the gospel over a span of thirty years. Appreciate how much growth on the part of fallible human beings has been exhibited. Ordinary people who were inspired and aided by the Holy Spirit of God have served as witnesses of the risen King through an extraordinary message—from Jerusalem, throughout all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, exactly as the Father had planned.

Day One: *Acts 27:1-12*

Day Two: *Acts 27:13-32*

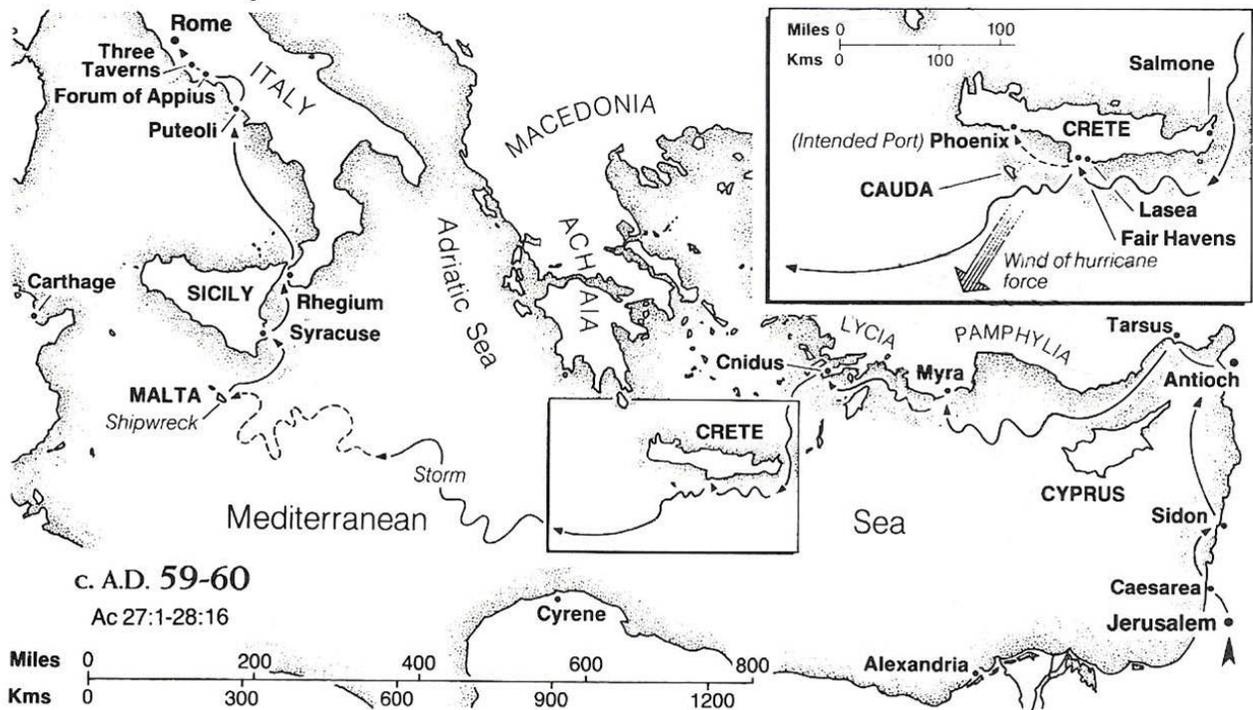
Day Three: *Acts 27:33-44*

Day Four: *Acts 28:1-10*

Day Five: *Acts 28:11-16*

Day Six: *Acts 28:17-31*

Paul’s Journey to Rome





In writing of Paul's voyage to Rome, commentators have long relied on James Smith's classic work, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*. Smith was an accomplished yachtsman who studied Luke's account in the light of his detailed knowledge of the Mediterranean Sea, sailing, and the ships of the ancients. Here is his conclusion:

No sailor would have written in a style so little like that of a sailor; no man not a sailor could have written a narrative of sea voyage so consistent in all its parts, unless from actual observation. This peculiarity of style is to me, in itself, a demonstration that the narrative of the voyage is an account of real events written by an eyewitness. A similar remark may be made on the geographical details. They must have been taken from actual observation, for the geographical knowledge of the age was not such as to enable a writer to be so minutely accurate in any other way (wlvii).

Luke devotes a great deal of space to the description of this voyage. Perhaps the Lord's purpose for so detailed an account was to emphasize dramatically the fact that nothing could prevent God from accomplishing his desire for Paul to reach Rome. Because of the divine promise that Paul will stand before Caesar, the question is not *if* Paul will make it, but *how* he will do so given the overwhelming odds against him. How will the divine plan be fulfilled when it seems that everything is working against it?

Having read Luke's harrowing account, are there any other chronicles that took place on the sea that you can think of from the Bible?

Remarkably, what was the ultimate point behind each of those accounts, just as in Luke's account of *Acts 27*?



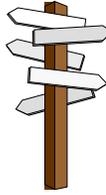
"Even the Fast was already over" (*Acts 27:9*) – this is another way of referring to the Jewish Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). The date of this festival was on Tishri 10 on the Jewish lunar calendar. In 59 A.D., the observance would have fallen on October 5.



"A ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead" (*Acts 28:11*) – the "twin gods" were sons of Zeus and brothers of Helen according to ancient mythology. Their names were Castor and Polydeuces. This vessel may have been dedicated to the "appropriate" deities (the twins were revered as gods who rescued sailors in their distress), but there can be no doubt as to which deity was ultimately watching over this vessel.



Acts 28:15 tells us that upon Paul's arrival in Rome, he "thanked God and took courage." We all know what it's like to ask God for help when we are in distress. But why is it that we so frequently forget to thank God when deliverance has come?



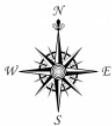
"He lived there two whole years" (*Acts 28:30*). One of the activities Paul engages in during this time is letter writing. From his Roman apartment, he writes *Philippians*, *Colossians*, *Philemon*, and *Ephesians*.

Luke records in *Acts 28:24* that "some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved." Isn't this a perfect summary of the entire book of *Acts*? Paul had been experiencing this kind of reception for years, and yet he continued to simply do what he could in spreading the "good news." What does that tell us about our own responsibility as 21st century disciples?

One of Paul's last recorded statements is his quoting of *Isaiah 6:9-10*:

*Go to this people, and say,
"You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive."
For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed;
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.*

Again, what a perfect summary of the responses we have studied throughout *Acts*. Even today, as people hear, what can hinder them from ever understanding?



As people see, why do they sometimes not perceive?

What is this healing that God has offered for literally thousands of years?

The book of *Acts* ends somewhat anticlimactically, with no verdict from the Roman court or emperor. Yet, for Luke, the important part of his story has been told. Paul has reached Rome and is there proclaiming the kingdom of God. To the saints in Philippi, he wrote:

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear (1:12-14).

By the time he wrote that epistle, there were saints in Caesar's household (4:22), possibly as a result of the teaching he did while in custody.

No matter what, Paul maintained his spiritual focus:

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord...Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice (3:1; 4:4).

He was not shy in affirming his contentment and trust in Jesus:

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (4:11-13).

Philippians indicates that Paul's trial was approaching. With that in mind, he wrote:

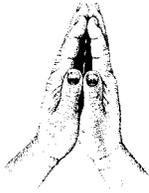
It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death (1:20).

Because of his belief that it would be more beneficial to the brethren if his life was spared, he was confident that such would indeed be the case (1:24-26).

Historical indications are that Paul's trial resulted in his release. His letters to Timothy and Titus mention events and journeys that cannot be fit into the period covered in *Acts*. Following his release and a period of freedom, Paul was eventually imprisoned a second time in Rome. This second imprisonment, during which he wrote *2 Timothy*, culminated in his execution.

The full story continues to unfold. The gospel continues to be proclaimed. God's children continue to await the return of the Christ. "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11).

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (*Revelation 22:20*).



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my study of the *Acts of the Apostles*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...