

Acts and the Early Church

By Matt Dabbs

Mattdabbs.com

Wineskins.com

Introduction to Acts

I have attempted to note relevant sources where necessary. You can find the works I used in creating these lessons on the last page of this document. These will be referenced throughout the lessons.

Series Summary: This class is a study of the book of Acts that will engage historical and cultural background material in order to bring the book of Acts to life. We will study Judaism and the rise of the early church, the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the church, and we will look at the Greco-Roman world (its religion, culture, and political structures) as it has bearing on how we read and understand the book of Acts. All of this is an effort to increase our understanding of what happened in the first century and how that affects us as Christians today.

Gospel of Luke and book of Acts:

- Written by Luke
 - o Travel companion of Paul (starting on the 2nd missionary journey...notice in Acts the “we” passages. – 16:10-17, 20:5-16, 21:1-18, 27:1-28:16)
 - Luke traveled with Paul after Paul had already written most of his letters.
 - o Physician (Col 4:14, Philemon 24 & 2 Tim 4:11)
 - o Gentile – the only Gentile writer of a NT book
- Read intro to Luke and intro to Acts
- Matthew was an eyewitness of Jesus (disciple)
- Mark got his gospel from Peter
- Luke got his gospel from eyewitness testimony
- John was an eyewitness (disciple)

Luke is a remarkably accurate historian:

- Scholars 100 years ago questioned his accuracy.
- Over time, more and more inscriptions and finds corroborate Luke’s words and descriptions.
 - o Acts 17:6 – civic authorities of Thessalonica hadn’t been found anywhere else. Scholars thought Luke was unreliable. Now we have dozens of examples of this word (politarches) and most of them were found in Thessalonica!
 - o Same with town clerk (grammateus) and the religious authorities (asiarches – Acts 19:31)

- Luke calls two people proconsul who have been confirmed as such – Sergius Paulus (13:7) and Gallio (18:12)
 - 1930s Gallios marble lectern was discovered – Paul would have spoken from behind it (McCrackin)
- Quirinus as governor of Syria when Jesus was born – that was long thought to be historically incorrect. But newer findings show that he was in charge of Syria at that time (Finney, 5)
- Luke's knowledge of the shipping industry (grain) in Acts 27 is extensive and accurate – this is a “we” passage (knowledge of the winds in 27:4 is typical that time of year, etc)
- Keener (p.206-207) – Luke is accurate on his geography, local climate (Ephesus), accuracy of locals using a local language, local folklore (Zeus and Hermes in Acts 14 – more on that later)
- Luke is very accurate.

Acts in broader world history and time

Date of the events of Luke-Acts:

- Jesus was born under King Herod the Great
- Herod died in 4 BC (Josephus)
- That puts Jesus being born around that time.
- He started his ministry when he was 30 (Lk 3:23) = 26 AD
 - Luke 3:1 – John the Baptist began his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius. He started in AD 13 = AD 28 when John starts his ministry.
- The Gospels record three distinct Passovers = 3 years of ministry (could be slightly more) = 29 AD.
- It is safe to say Jesus is crucified around the age of 33-34 around the year 29-30 AD
 - Confirmation – John 2:19-20 the temple had been there 46 years. Josephus tells us the temple was started in the 18th year of Herod's reign (19 BC) and Jesus says this early in his ministry = 46 years after 19 BC is the year 27 (compared to the year 26 above). So we are within a year.

The last events in Acts take place around 62 AD

- Since Paul is executed around that time 62-64 one might think Luke would have mentioned it if he knew about it. Others argue that the Gospel of Luke was written first and they believe it was written after 70 (predictive prophecy of Jerusalem's fall in 70 they don't believe in – Lk 21:20-24) so they think Acts was written much, much later...80s and far beyond. But this doesn't work well with the “we” sections and the idea that predictive prophecy doesn't happen is also false, from a faith perspective.

The text/story of Acts

2 Volumes of one large story

- Blomberg's chiastic structure of Luke-Acts (Jesus and the Gospels, 143)
- Luke: 18,482 words
- Acts: 18,450 words

- This is the max a single scroll could contain – 1 scroll for Luke and 1 for Acts
- Books were not as common until the 2nd century
- In the first century it was the scroll
- Notice John 20:30 – they recognize that they can only write down so much in a manageable way.

This had to be condensed/shortened

- The speeches in Acts were probably much longer
- Luke gives us the highlights
- The speeches as recorded are only 1-2 minutes long.
- So Luke has to edit things down – this doesn't change the truthfulness of the words, just that he had to be concise to fit things on a scroll.
- Typical written work in the 1st century was the length of Philemon. These Gospels and Acts are massive works.

Start with the end – Acts 28:30-31

- *Why would Acts end this way?*
- *How might you expect Acts to end?*
- You might expect it to end with what happened to Paul
 - o He has been warned death awaits him
 - o Why doesn't Luke tell us?
 - Because Acts isn't about Paul
 - It isn't a bio on Paul

So what is Acts about?

- Acts gives us an outline of its contents that Luke follows very specifically through the words of Jesus in **Acts 1:8**
 - o Acts is concerned with the movement of the Gospel in fulfillment of the words of Christ Jesus. The story has no concern for what happens to Paul. The story is concerned with the Gospel going from Jerusalem through various locals all the way to Rome.
 - o That is exactly the path Acts follows.
- The inception and growth of the church as a Jesus-initiated, Holy Spirit empowered outpost of the kingdom of God on earth
- The church is the direct result of the good news about Jesus death, burial, resurrection and ascension as the divine Son of God.
- The church does not stand in contrast to Judaism, true Judaism. Judaism was supposed to result in Christianity – which is the fulfillment of all Judaism was about.
- It also deals with the issue of how Gentiles got into God's family apart from Torah observance.

Acts may also be a legal defense of Christianity:

- Through various trials the Christians are found not guilty by the Roman authorities.
- Could be a case for Christianity to get some legal protection.

Acts is not just a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Acts is the continuation of the OT story:

Acts' use of the OT:

- Quotes the OT 35 times
- 16 times Luke uses the word for fulfillment
- Jesus is the fulfillment of God's divine revelation (Lk 1:20, 4:21, 24:44, Acts 1:16, 3:18, and 13:27)

Acts 1

Two volume works in the ancient world often summed up the first volume at the beginning of the second. That is what Luke does in **Acts 1:1-3**

Who is Theophilus?

- Probably Luke's patron – the one who paid for the commission of the Gospel and Acts to be written.
- Name means "one who loves God" so it might be a generic name – that these are written for all of those who love God or it could be a real individual.

The Kingdom restoration:

- Acts 1:3 – Jesus is resurrected and he continues to preach the kingdom
- So what does this mean for his followers?
 - o They didn't know the Messiah would die and be raised.
 - o They understood that after the fact (John 2:19-22 – ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken."
- Acts 1:4 – "gathered" or "eating" together – literally "took salt together" = table fellowship.
- Acts 1:5 – you will be immersed in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2)
- Acts 1:6 – now we get the natural sense of their question in Acts 1:6 – are you going to, at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel?
 - o This is a practically question politically - This is what the Messianic expectation had turned into under Roman occupation. N.T. Wright talks about their time under Roman occupation as basically a new exile period – they were home but not restored...not in charge. The king in the line of David wasn't on the throne – 2 Sam 7:11-14 (which fits with John 2, by the way).
 - o This was a practical question religiously – Jesus not only preaches the kingdom but also preaches the coming of the Spirit. The pouring out of the Spirit was associated with the restoration of Israel (Isa 32:15 & 44:3, Ezek 37:14 & Joel 2:28-31)
- 1:8 – you will be my witnesses (martus – where we get martyr)

Their role as Gospel/kingdom proclaimers relied on the power of the Spirit to help them with their mission – you will receive power from the Holy Spirit and be my witnesses (someone who testifies about what they have seen).

Ascension of Jesus

Replacing Judas (Acts 1:12-26)

Notice where they had met Jesus – Mount of Olives

- Zech 14:1-6 – this ties in directly with Acts 1:6 – this is where they thought the Messiah would come when he came to Jerusalem.
- Sabbath's day walk – 2000 cubits. It isn't Sabbath...just a familiar way of measuring something = roughly half a mile

Prayer - They go to Jerusalem as Jesus said to do and they wait – but they don't wait passively. They wait in prayer. They prayed **constantly**.

New apostle – must have been there from the beginning (Jesus' baptism) and was a witness of the resurrection.

- Matthias
- Joseph Barsabbas (son of the Sabbath – probably born on a Sabbath)
- Cast lots – God is in charge and control and will determine the outcome. Prov 16:33 (the lots are cast but God decides)

Acts 2: Pentecost, Spirit and Church

Acts 1:5 – you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:8 – you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you

Coming of the Spirit - This wasn't any surprise:

- Jesus already told them this before the crucifixion in the Gospel of John – **John 14:16-17**
- The Old Testament already pointed them to the coming of the Spirit in the messianic age
 - **Isa 32:15** - “till the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.
 - Back up to Isa 32:1 – a king will come in righteousness
 - **Ezek 39:29** – “Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. ²⁹I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.”
 - Very appropriate at Pentecost when God’s people are gathered in Jerusalem for the festival
 - **Joel 2:28-29** (which Peter quotes in Acts 2) – “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.
 - **Joel 2:30** goes on to talk about the day of the Lord

Ends of the earth - Their commission to the ends of the earth is also echoed in the prophets

- **Isa 49:6** “a light for the Gentiles so that you may be for salvation to the end of the earth.” Luke knows this verse as it is quoted in Acts 13:47 as something Paul said to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch
- **This wasn't a surprise either. The vocation of Israel had always been to be a light to the Gentiles. Part of the restoration of Israel (1:6) was for them to fulfill their original intention.**

Acts 2 – Pentecost

2:1 – they were all together in one place

- This would take a very large room
- Rooms this large have been excavated and they are always near the temple.
- Some people speculate that “house” in 2:2 is the temple – no evidence of that. Luke uses a different word for the temple (hieron)

Pentecost is the Feast of Weeks (7 weeks = 49 days)

- Pentecost is the Greek name for the festival (what Greek speaking Jews would have called the Feast of Weeks. Remember Luke is a Gentile and Greek-speaker.
- It is 50 days after Passover (Lev 23:16)
- It took the Hebrews roughly fifty days to get from the Red sea to Sinai
- Pentecost is a celebration of the wheat harvest.
- It is also a celebration of receiving the Law on Sinai
 - o Some debate over this point – some scholars believe this came to be after the first century but there are early Jewish writings showing this was happening in the first century (Jubilees & Manual of Discipline in the DSS – Fitzmyer)
- Even more important – Pentecost came to represent **covenant renewal**. There was no more appropriate time to initiate the new, messianic covenant, than at Pentecost.

Pentecost synagogue readings:

- Theophanies: Exo 19-20, Ezek 1-2 and Hab 3
- Gentiles and the wheat harvest – Ruth
- The connection to the Gentiles with the covenant renewal was already present

Pentecost and David:

- Pentecost was supposedly the time David died
- Notice Peter connecting David to his Pentecost sermon

2 loaves of bread:

- In celebration of the wheat harvest – these were the first fruits
- Jesus as the bread of life brings this new meaning
- Some believe the 2 loaves represent the Jews and Gentiles in Christ, post Pentecost

Violent wind & tongues of fire:

- Sinai imagery (Exo 19:18)
- Numbers 11:25-26 – At Sinai God put his Spirit on the 70 elders

Filled with the Spirit – 2:4

- Luke's phrase for being empowered by the Spirit
- Luke 1:15, 41, 67; Acts 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9

Speaking in tongues:

- These are intelligible languages
- The crowd understood them in their own language
- 2:7 – are these men not Galileans?
 - o Expected to be less educated – part of the amazement of the crowd
- 1 Cor 13 – seems to indicate that there are also angelic tongues/languages that someone could possibly speak.

Peter's sermon

- How does one establish the authority of the message when sharing this brand new good news?
 - o Appeal to the Bible (Old Testament)
 - Joel 2
 - Psalm 16
 - It is entirely possible the women are speaking in tongues as well (they were there in chapter 1 and chapter says they were all back together. You also have more regions of people than you have apostles). Daughters of Philip
 - o Appeal to the miraculous
 - Speaking in tongues
 - 2:22 – Jesus was accredited to them by miracles
 - o Connecting the two
 - 2:33 – Jesus has been exalted to God’s right hand and he is the one who is responsible for this outpouring of the Spirit the crowd was witnessing.
- 2:29 – David’s tomb is here to this day
 - o There is evidence they knew the location of David’s tomb in the first century
 - o It was probably destroyed in the Bar Kokhba revolt of 135AD
- 2:36 – Lord (Greek title as well as Hebrew) and Messiah (anointed one)
- 2:37 - What shall we do?
 - o The crowd initiates their own invitation
- 2:38 - Repent (turn, change of thinking)
 - o We get into the meaning of the word without thinking of the history of the word
 - o Peter falls into a long line of prophets who call the people of God to repentance.
 - o This is all through the OT prophets and in John and Jesus
 - o Peter’s message is an old message calling the hearts of the Jewish people (at this point) back to God.
 - o In its immediate context this verse we use to understand steps of salvation is a call to the Jewish people first and to us second.
- 2:38 - Be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ
 - This implies confession
 - This isn’t Jewish proselyte baptism
 - This isn’t Jewish ritual washing
 - This isn’t John’s baptism of repentance
 - This is required of all because something new is happening – baptism in the name of Jesus to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit
 - o They have found many mikvah (baptismal pools) around the temple mount because part of temple worship required ritual washing. Some have been skeptical on their ability to baptize 3000 people but the amount of baptismal/washing pools in that exact area is substantial.
- All who are far off – at this point in the story that probably means the scattered Jewish people. Peter may not fully understand the whole scope of what that means – the Gentiles.

2:42-47: Fellowship of the believers & the Jewishness of it all:

- Wanted the restoration of Israel
- Maintained 12 apostles – the 12 tribes
- They met in the temple courts
- 3:1 – they went to the temple at the hour of prayer
- Acts 10 – Peter is still kosher
- Paul – is meeting in synagogues
- Acts 21 – Paul’s vow (21:24 – no truth in these reports)

Baptism, Spirit and Future

We talked last week a bit about the work of the Spirit today. I said I am open to that because to be wrong on that runs too many risks. Besides that, I see the work of the Spirit in the world today in various ways as do many of you. Where we might differ is on what we would call the miraculous work of the Spirit in giving spiritual gifts to the church (speaking in tongues, prophesy, healing, etc). We typically have some skepticism toward those things because they have been frequently abused. But no one stops taking \$100 dollar bills because there are a few fakes out there (N.T. Wright).

So let's look at baptism for a moment:

- Repent and be baptized (immersed)
- Baptism is a passive verb – it is done to you just as you don't bury yourself or raise yourself from the dead. You receive it, you do not action it. You submit to it being done to you, you don't do it to yourself.
- So baptism is not a work unto salvation. Baptism is something we receive where God does all the work.

The person doing the baptism:

- Was a debate long ago about what if the person who baptized you, unknown to you, was in rebellion with God and lost. Would your baptism take?
- We certainly want faithful Christians baptizing us – of course
- I believe it is God who does the work in baptism. They dying and rising...the taking care of the old man of sin.
- Women can baptize people – the legitimacy of your baptism isn't contingent on who does the baptizing but that it is done in faith and obedience to the command of Christ.

The means of baptism

- In water by immersion
- Ancient Christians would be baptized naked (gender segregated baptism – lends even more to women baptizing women) and would be clothed in white when they came out of the water. This goes into Paul analogy of clothing ourselves with Christ by first taking off the old garment in order to put on the new (**Gal 3:27, Col 3:9-14**)

The work of God in baptism

- Dying and rising – Rom 6
- Never directly says the water washes away our sins but Peter does say in 1 Peter 1:2 that we are sanctified by the Spirit as we are sprinkled in the blood of Christ – this is more an OT analogy than a baptismal analogy – they would sprinkle blood on the altar.
- 1 John 1:7 – the blood of Jesus purifies us of all unrighteousness
- Acts 20:28 – the church is bought with the blood of Jesus (ransom language)
- Eph 1:7 says that forgiveness of sins comes through his blood
- Heb 9:22 connects cleansing with the blood of Jesus (again as an OT parallel)

- Rev 7:14 – robes washed white in the blood of Jesus

Receive the gift of the Spirit (to be gifted by the Spirit)

Duration – multi-generational (all time)

Inclusivity – for all people (all who are far off).

Some call “Acts of the Apostles” the “Acts of the Holy Spirit” because of the Spirit’s role in all that happens in Acts.

Fellowship of believers (Acts 2:42-47)

- This is what life looks like by those who have newfound faith in Christ.
- This is why our participation in Christian community is so important.
- Does it matter that we don’t strictly follow this example today? Why or why not?

Jewish connections with Acts 2-3

- Met in the temple courts – still going to the temple.
- First Christians were thoroughly Jewish.
 - o Remember Acts 1:6 – they were still thinking about Israel
- Jesus told them a time would come when they would get kicked out of synagogue – **John 16:2**
 - o One might have thought they would have stopped with synagogue when Jesus rose or when the church began. But they didn’t.
 - o They continued to attend for quite some time.
- Met in the temple courts – Solomon’s colonnade (right down one side of the temple courts)

Acts 3:1 – the time of prayer

- Going to the temple
- At the time of prayer – misses the significance of the word “hour of prayer” not “time of prayer”
- Judaism had hours of prayer
 - o At this point in time the morning and evening prayers coincided with the temple offerings.
 - o This one is the evening prayers – 3pm
 - o Literally says time of prayer at ninth (ninth hour = 3pm)
 - o Hours start at 6am. Noon is the 6th hour. So the 9th hour = 3pm
- You can see why translators gave you the time rather than literal (NIV) but see NASB for literal.
- See Cornelius in Acts 10 – he is a god-fearer and he prays at the Jewish hours of prayer – see **Acts 10:3**

3:2 – gate called Beautiful

- Largest gate on the East side of the temple. In the court of women and made of bronze.
- Steps went up from this gate and only the clean, pure males could pass – no women, no lame, no unclean. They would sit on the steps and beg those going up.

Peter spends the rest of the chapter preaching Jesus from the OT, just as he did in chapter 2.

4:1 – priests, captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees.

- These are all Levites
- Priests = Levites
- Captain of temple guard = Levite
- Sadducees = Levites
- They were more conservative/strict than the Pharisees
- They helped run the temple which gave them a tremendous amount of power
- Sadducees accepted only the Torah as scripture and nothing else
 - o This led to the widely known idea that they didn't believe in the resurrection
 - Acts 23:8 states this
 - Matt 22:23-33 – silences the Sadducees and their ridiculous example
 - They use this example because they don't believe in resurrection because it isn't found in Torah
 - So Jesus' answer is perfect because it comes from "their Bible" so they must accept it as true.
- **Now notice Acts 4:2 – what was it that greatly disturbed them?**
 - o Acts 3:15 – the resurrection of Jesus
 - o They were arrested at first because of their teaching on resurrection
 - o In their trial the healing of the lame man comes up (4:7)
 - o Peter goes right back to resurrection – 4:10
- 4:13 – ordinary, unschooled (which was ordinary!)

4:15 – Sanhedrin

- Sharon asked last week about transliterated words like baptizo – baptism
- Sanhedrin is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for "council"
- Deacon = servant (diakonos)
- Angel = messenger (angelos)

This begins a long series of the apostles under scrutiny of the religious officials in Acts.

- What was the Sanhedrin's response?
- What was the believers response?
- What was the Holy Spirit's response?

Chapter 4 ends with us being introduced to Bar-nabas (son of encouragement – also transliterated. Most names are transliterated Greek. Those Greek names are usually translated from Hebrew to Greek in the NT. Here is a name that is still in its Hebrew form). Paul would have been his Greek name, Saul his Hebrew name.

- It never says God changed Paul's name from Saul to Paul.
- Acts 13:9 – Saul who was called Paul – same name just two languages.

Pharisees, Sadducees and Notable People in Acts

Sanhedrin

4:5, 15 – you find the Sanhedrin

- Although unnamed this is who met in the trial of Jesus – Luke 22:66
- 71 members in the Sanhedrin

This was the high priests council. They settled cases, interpreted the law, and were the “highest legislative body in Jewish Palestine” (ABD). They also kept order in the temple (which is why they get involved in Acts 4)

Jewish political and religious power was in upheaval around the first century. They were very much at the mercy of the Romans and even the high priest would/could be selected by the Roman overlords rather than by their own traditions and customs (lineage).

4:6 – Annas and Caiaphas (high priests) were there. Annas was Caiaphas’ father-in-law. He turned over the high priestly duties to his son-in-law while he was still living. More on them in a moment. The high priest had tie breaking vote when needed (with 71 it shouldn’t happen often but not everyone could be there every time they met).

Made up of Pharisees and Sadducees.

- These are two of the four major sects of Judaism according to Josephus. He also listed the Zealots and the Essenes (dead sea community)

4:1 – priests, captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees.

- These are all Levites
- Priests = Levites
- Captain of temple guard = Levite
 - o This person was just under the high priest
 - o He was responsible for maintaining order in the temple
 - o He was involved in the arrest of Jesus – Luke 22:4, 52
- Sadducees = Levites
- They were more conservative/strict than the Pharisees
- They helped run the temple which gave them a tremendous amount of power
- Sadducees accepted only the Torah as scripture and nothing else

Pharisees – name means those who are separate

- They came out of the period of the Maccabees when the Jewish people regained control of their land and emphasized purity from the Gentiles.
- They wanted to impose their religious views on all the people – to purify Israel.
- Again, the Sadducees were even more strict/conservative
- This was an effort to impose priestly cleanliness regulation on more than the Levites – on all Israel.

- Sadducees believed only the priests (themselves) could properly interpret Torah
- The Pharisees believed it was given to all of Israel and so all could interpret (E.F. Backgrounds, 515) – they believed the Pharisees were lax!

Scribes – who are often paired with the Pharisees

- They go together because they were the non-levitical legal experts
- Today we would call them a lawyer with the law being Torah
- They were the interpreters of Torah that the Pharisees paid attention to

Pharisees had two foundational pillars

- Torah – Gen-Deut, esp Deut
- Tradition – interpretations given over time

Sad irony – they didn't get Jesus when he showed up. They should have been his first followers. Jesus also didn't pick them

- But also notice Acts 15:5 – Pharisee Christians
- Acts 6:7 – priests also became Christians

Sanhedrin – Acts 23:1-8

- 23:6 – Paul uses a lightning rod to divide them – resurrection!
- Divided might not just be one group with two opinions. In that day those in agreement with Paul may have taken his “side” by actually going over and standing with them.
- **23:9 – the Pharisees see nothing wrong with him because he is on their side!**
- **23:9 – then the Pharisees even poke at the Sadducees – what if an angel had spoken to him – see 23:8 on the beliefs of the Sadducees!**

Annas – Was high priest from 6-15 AD. Quirinius, a Roman governor, appointed him to the position. Five of his sons and his son-in-law (Caiaphas) became high priest after him.

Caiaphas – followed Annas and held the position for 19 years (through Jesus' crucifixion – Matt 26:3, 57) and into the early church era.

- Not long after Acts 4 Caiaphas was deposed by a ruler from Syria and another of Annas' sons were put in as high priest – Jonathan. Eventually all 5 of Annas' sons would serve as high priest.

Acts 5 – the apostles heal people and again upset the high priest and the Sadducees (again remember they are interconnected as Levites). “all his associates” apparently didn't include the rest of the Sanhedrin = Pharisees.

Put the apostles in jail. Angel sets them free in the night. High priest and Sadducees call for them but they aren't there. They find them preaching in the temple courts (again the H.P.'s jurisdiction) – they bring them in again and tried to put them to death but Gamaliel had something to say – **Read Acts 5:33-42**

Gamaliel – a Pharisee and teacher of the law (scribe)

- He was a highly respected teacher of Israel
- He taught Paul – Acts 22:3
- Stood up and spoke – typical of someone addressing the assembly

Theudas and Judas (5:36-37)

Theudas (44-46 AD via Josephus)

Josephus – “It came to pass, while [Cuspius Fadus](#) was [procurator](#) of [Judea](#), that a certain [charlatan](#), whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the [Jordan river](#); for he told them he was a [prophet](#), and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it. Many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them. After falling upon them unexpectedly, they slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem.^[3] (*Jewish Antiquities* [20.97-98](#))”

Josephus mentions Theudas and puts these events at 44AD, later than this point in Acts.

- It is entirely possible Josephus is wrong, as Keener points out, Josephus even contradicts himself at times. (although Keener ultimately believes Josephus got the time right and Luke is the one in error)
- He tried to put himself forward as a prophet and even tried to part the Jordan.

Judas led a revolt around the same time as the census that took place at Jesus’ birth. His rebellion was stopped and his family was crucified. This happened in 6 AD (which wasn’t after Theudas at all but before, however, the year after Theudas, Judas’ children were executed (Fitzmyer)

The point here is that other people had gained large followings and they fell apart because they were not from God. If the apostles also aren’t from God then it will take care of itself.

Luke 6 – Hellenized vs Hebraic Jews

- **Hellenized** = had Greek as their first language. Probably diaspora Jews who had come back to Jerusalem. So they knew little to no Aramaic or Hebrew. They also probably came with some cultural connection with the Gentiles, although still clearly monotheist Jews. Keener estimates this was 10-20% of Jerusalem’s Jewish population
- **Hebraic Jews** – could have had Greek as their second language but were **Hebrew/Aramaic (language of Persia) speakers.**

Stephen:

- Synagogue of the Freedmen – roman slavery allowed manumission (being set free) under certain conditions. So it seems these were former Jewish slaves who gained their freedom and came to Jerusalem and established a synagogue.

Acts 6:7 – a large number of priests believed

- **This ties into them being stirred up over Stephen (6:12-15)**

Gospel to the Jews

Jesus came first for Israel

- The covenant came to Abraham to go to the nations
- Jesus comes first for the Jewish people. Once they get squared away then the door is opened to the Gentiles. (Romans 1:16 – first for the Jew then for the Gentile)

God's intention:

- The Jewish people to be his holy priests in the world (Exo 19?)
- The descendants of Abraham to bless the nations
- The descendants of Abraham to be a light to the gentiles/nations/ethnos (see Isa 49:6 & Acts 13:47)

Jesus, then, said he came first for the Jewish people

- When he sent the disciples (who are then apostles) he sent them only to the Jews (Matt 10:5-6).
- Before his arrest some Gentiles came to him and he refused to see them (John 12:20-26)
- He hinted at a Gentile mission in his ministry:
 - o Syrophonecian woman in Mark 7:26 who is called a Canaanite in Matt 15:22
 - o Roman centurion – healing his servant
 - o Feeding on east side of Jordan may have been mixed crowd
 - o John 10:16 – other sheep not of this fold (Gentiles)

Gospels end with another hint at a worldwide mission (which again had always been Israel's vocation/job – Isa 49:5, Gen 15, etc) – Go into all the world and make disciples. Here is how – not circumcision – baptism and teaching.

Acts starts on the same note – Acts 1:8 – to the ends of the earth.

Acts 10 it finally happens with Cornelius.

You will notice in the missionary journeys that they follow the pattern – first to the Jews then to the Gentiles.

There are two things that get us off on the wrong foot when it comes to understanding the Jewish acceptance of the Gospel.

- The offer to the Gentiles didn't hinge on the Jews rejecting
- God had always planned to reach them and had always planned on his people, the Jews, doing the outreach.
- Here is where we get the Jewish rejection for Gentile acceptance view:
 - o Paul's missionary journeys – there are stories where he turns his focus to the Gentiles have facing resistance from the Jews (This happens in Acts 13 – amazing speech there that is thoroughly a Jewish gospel presentation. We see this also in

Acts 14 – but then we see in 14:21ff that they actually had won converts during all of those hard times and Jewish persecutions)

- Romans 11:25 – where Paul seems to say this in 11:11-25.
- Paul is describing some of what has happened but if you read all of what he says there he is saying even those Jews who reject still have hope to return.
- Paul is describing his experience – that when the Jewish people rejected he checked the Gentiles in a town for their openness. Their openness then also opened a window to those Jews who rejected that even some of them might have another shot at coming around again.

God's intention was for the descendants of Abraham to readily adopt/accept the Messiah when he came. Just like it always had been since the beginning – there were Jews who believed and observed correctly (accepting Jesus as Messiah) and those who didn't. It had always been that way. It was not God's intention to send Jesus to get the Jewish people to reject.

So when you read Acts with an eye for this you actually find mass Jewish conversions:

- Acts 2:41 – 3000
- Acts 4:4 – number grew to 5000
- 5:14 – more and more
- 6:1 – number was increasing
- 6:7 – number grew rapidly
- Acts 6:7 – large number of priests became obedient to the faith
- 9:42 – many believed
- 12:24 – grew and spread
- 13:43 – many followed P and B
- 14:1 – great number believed
- Acts 15 – Pharisee converts to Christianity
- 17:10-12 – many believed
- Acts 21:20 – how many thousands of Jews have believed and all of them are zealous for the Law.

The Gospel did what it was intended to do – reach the Jews first and from there go to the Gentiles. The GOALS was that BOTH would accept the message in order to create a new humanity by the power of the Spirit out of the fractured and divided humanity that had always existed.

Jews and the Law

Let's shift gears now to **Acts 21:20** – Jewish Christians who are zealous for the Law.

- Should they be zealous for the Law or are they mistaken?

Read Acts 21:17-26

- **Was Paul right to take the vow or wrong?**
- **Was it right to keep the Law or wrong at this point?**

Jesus said he came to fulfill the law – not to abolish it.

- **Jesus was the embodiment of Torah**
- **He didn't nail it to the cross – that is something else in Colossian 2:14**

Jewish Christians very much maintained their Judaism as it connected with their faith in the Messiah Jesus.

- **Acts 15 reflects this – all the stipulations are from the Torah (15: 1- custom taught by Moses). Notice the justification for the three rules – 5:21 because Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and read in the synagogues on every Sabbath. What does that have to do with the rules they picked (notice I didn't say created)**
- **The "Gospel" sermons reflect this – keep going back to the OT as the Bible**
- **2 Tim 3:16 reflects this – keep looking to OT as inspired**

Paul's defense in his trials:

- Acts 6:11, 14 – notice the charge
 - o Stephen mentions Moses 13 times in his defense speech – the point is he wasn't preaching against Moses but rather the Christ was in line with Moses himself. To preach Jesus was not to preach against Moses but to fulfill what Moses point to.
- 21:21 – accusation against Paul
 - o Paul's response – go to things found in the Law
- 25:8 – I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish Law...
- 25:10-11 – I have not done any wrong to the Jews...charges are not true
- 25:19 – charges were about Jewish religious matters
- 25:27 – the chapter ends on a request for formal charges to send to Rome
- 26:22 – only saying what Moses said

Paul was in line with Moses because Moses is in line with Jesus.

- We often view OT and NT as not in alignment but they are perfectly in alignment. The OT points to the NT. The OT sets up the NT. They are consistent.
- The Jewish Christians didn't give up the Law because it was the Bible.
- We too should read the OT through the lens of Christ in order to still find it useful for our faith today.

Gospel to the Gentiles

Anyone here ethnically Jewish or have you ever been a convert to Judaism during your lifetime?

- We are Gentiles – the ethnos (where we get ethnicity) – non-Jews.
- The Jewish people divided the world up into the children of Abraham (Jews) and then everyone else (Gentiles)

They got in by being born in.

They stayed in by doing things that were Jewish identity markers (Works of the Law)

Hints of the Gentile Mission in the OT:

- Abraham – blessing to all nations
- Jonah – prophet to Ninevah
- Isaiah – light to the Gentiles (42:6, 49:6)

Jesus' ministry:

- Syrophonecian woman
- Feeding on the East side of the Jordan
- Sends the demoniac to the Decapolis
- Great commission – go into all the world

Acts:

- 1:8 – ends of the earth

It wasn't until Acts 10 that this first took place – the first Gentile converts

- First, God had to prepare Peter through the vision
- God wasn't just declaring all food clean (doing away with Kosher) it was about declaring people clean as well.
- That which used to defile no longer does
- Notice Peter's language – I would never eat that, I would have never gone into your home except God told me to
- Peter also would have never baptized Gentiles apart from them first being Jewish except the Holy Spirit showed him differently.

Most Gentiles in the 1st century:

- Most were idolaters
 - o There were lots and lots of "gods" in their world
 - o These gods had a variety of responsibilities
 - o Temples were put up all over their towns in recognition of the gods, to win their favor
 - o To be part of their world was to participate in pagan idolatry.
 - o Rev 13:16-17 – the mark of the beast, none could buy or sell without it

- That is typical of pagan idolatry
 - In the first century this even included emperor worship.
- We talk often about how Jews and Gentiles didn't get along:
 - Acts 10:20 – God had to tell him to not hesitate
 - Acts 10:28 – against our law to associate with a Gentile
 - Why?
 - Because they were unclean because they were typically engaged in things that would make one unclean – idol worship, sexual immorality, their eating practices (not kosher plus the way they prepared food was against Torah).
 - Acts 10:34-35 – “now I see God doesn't show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”
- Some were “god-fearers” (Acts 10:2 – God fearing)
 - See also Acts 13:16, 26 as well as later in Acts 10:35
 - These were monotheist Gentiles – believing only in the God of Judaism.

Peter was criticized - -Acts 11:1-3

- See 11:15-18 for Peter's explanation and their acceptance that they were converted without proselytizing to Judaism
- Acts 11:19-21 – others, as they scattered from persecution, also reached out to Gentiles with the message of Jesus – many Gentiles converted
- Acts 11:22 – Jerusalem had to investigate – Sent Barnabas

Paul was later criticized for his Gentile associations

This is also what got Paul in trouble:

- Jesus was always accused of hanging out with the wrong people – tax collectors and sinners (tax collectors because they stole from the people and because of their close association with the Gentiles - -Roman overlords). They thought being around unclean people made clean people unclean.
- Paul befriended Gentiles – once Acts 10 happens when God okays the Gentile connection, association with Gentiles is no longer about who is clean or unclean
- But the Jewish, non-converts to Christianity, don't get this
- So they get upset with Paul for his Gentile associations
- This is what gets Paul in trouble once he makes it to Jerusalem
 - Acts 21:20-21
 - Acts 21:28-29
 - 21:38 – the Egyptian (historically verified)
 - Last verse in 21 – spoke to the crowd in Aramaic (there is a reason for that based on the charge)
 - 22:2 – when they heard him speaking in Aramaic they got quiet
 - 22:21 – God told him to go to the Gentiles
 - 22:22 – The crowd got VERY mad at this
 - 23:29 – the charges have to do with Jewish laws
 - 24:14 – Paul believes in the Law

- 25:8 – I have done nothing against the Law or against the temple (bringing in Gentiles – the stone with the warning has been found)

Paul- Jesus parallels

- Both on their way to Jerusalem
- Both go through several trials
- Both are executed

Historical connections

- Famine in the time of Claudius (11:28)
 - Verified by Josephus.
- Death of Herod (12:19-24)
 - Also verified by Josephus who tells a very similar story
 - Josephus even calls out Herod's vanity – that he was called a God and didn't correct the person and he was struck down

Enter the world of the Gentiles:

Acts 12 ends with Paul and Barnabas being sent off on mission (12:25)

Acts 14:8-18 – Lystra

- Paul and Barnabas heal a man
- Crowd reaction of the people spoken in Lycaonian (14:11) – the gods have come down to us in human form.
- Called Barnabas Zeus
- Called Paul Hermes – because he was their chief speaker (Hermes was the messenger of the gods)
- The crowd was going to offer sacrifices to them
- **Historical parallel in that cities recent past**
 - This was part of Greek mythology – Homer told stories of gods coming down, looking like humans, and interacting with people
 - **Even more specific** – Ovid's book Metamorphoses – Zeus and Hermes had come down together and visited people. This was supposed to have happened near this location.

Again, this is typical practice for a pagan town

- The gods might be watching
- You better pay them homage so they don't get upset
 - In Ovid's story about Zeus and Hermes visiting a town they rewarded the town by telling them to go to a high mountain and watch the flood waters destroy another town nearby that hadn't been hospitable to them when they visited.

Acts 17 – Athens

- Idols are everywhere

- Philosophers sitting around talking about things

Acts 18-19 – Paul in Ephesus

- Ephesus was known for its magic
- Ephesian grammata (Ephesian letters) were thought to be an incantation that could ward off an evil spirit.
- Spells and incantations – right words said the right way were thought to have power
- Book burning – this was practiced in the ancient world. The books were in conflict with Jesus and so they didn't just get rid of them, sell them, etc (Rowe) but they burned them.
- The price reminds us that scrolls were expensive.
- Artemis cult/fertility
 - o Cult prostitution
 - o Marketplace meat – offered to idols

Baptism and the timing of the Spirit

- The Spirit is oddly timed in exceptional/groundbreaking circumstances
- People point to the variety of the Spirit's work as it being arbitrary.
- Now the Spirit can do whatever the Spirit wants
- But the Spirit's work isn't arbitrary – it is all purposeful
 - o Samaritans – Spirit came after baptism with the laying on of Apostle's hands
 - o Cornelius – Spirit came before baptism
 - o Both vary from Jewish converts because the Spirit is demonstrating God's acceptance for baptism.

Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-14:26)

Paul and Barnabas didn't come up with the idea of going on missionary journeys. This was God's idea – Acts 13:1-3.

Antioch – home base in many ways for Paul.

The city is in Syria (which is near Israel and also in the news a lot today)

Population – 300k with 22k-65k Jews (Dictionary of Paul and his letters, 23) = third largest city in the Roman empire (Rome and Alexandria = 1,2)

Christianity came to Antioch after Stephen was stoned in Acts 7 and the Christians were scattered. This was an early setup for the missionary activity that would launch out of Antioch.

- See Acts 11:19-20 – this tells of them coming to Antioch after Stephen's death
- This also tells of Christians going from Cyrene to Antioch to preach the Gospel (notice Lucius was from Cyrene and was in Antioch – this may be how he got to Antioch).
- Barnabas was sent to Antioch in Acts 11:22-24 to check on what was happening there.

This explains the presence of Christians in Antioch.

“Beside Jerusalem, no other city of the Roman Empire played as large a part in the life of the early church as did Antioch.” – Dictionary of Paul and his letters 24

Famous people from history played a role in its growth and building including Pompey and Julius Caesar (he built an aqueduct there), Augustus, and Tiberius. Herod the Great also built there – lining the main street with colonnades and a polished stone street. The city was laid out in a grid.

People were also first called Christians there – Acts 11:26

The leaders in Antioch

- Barnabas – he was a Levite (Acts 4:36-37). This would certainly help him teach/know the scriptures. He was also from Cyprus and was sent to Antioch two chapters earlier (11:22-24) to check on what was going on in Antioch with the gospel.
 - o One dictionary said Barnabas was his Greek name (Dictionary of Paul..., 66) and his Hebrew name was Joses or Joseph (Acts 4:36). It is more likely that Barnabas is an Aramaic name but we have no examples of this name in Aramaic. Luke interprets it for us in Acts 4 – son of encouragement.
- Simeon (Niger which means dark – may have had a dark complexion). Keener points out that people who had common names often had nicknames. Simeon was a very common name. He may have been a north African Jew (Keener, 1985). Niger could also be his Roman name (Like Saul/Paul) and it was a fairly common Roman name.

- Lucius of Cyrene – Cyrene had a large Jewish population at this time. Cyrene is in Libya (Africa)
- Manean (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch = Herod Antipas. This is the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded.) – Herod Agrippa is the one who died in Acts 12. These Herods were half-brothers, children of Herod the great born to different mothers (Herod had many wives). This man was “raised in the royal court” (Keener, 1989)
- Saul – still called Saul
 - o Acts 13:9 – Saul who was called Paul
 - o Saul = Hebrew name (named after King Saul – notice both Saul’s are of the tribe of Benjamin)
 - o Paul = Greek name
 - o He was perfect for the mission – raised a Pharisee, taught by the great teacher Gamaliel, he knew multiple languages, Greek philosophy (quoting stoics from memory in Acts 17 in Athens). Paul knew both worlds (Jew and Gentile) as well as anyone.

First missionary journey locations:

- Antioch was on the Orontes river that went down to the Mediterranean near Seleucia so they probably went down the river and then up the coast five miles to get a ship to Cyprus
- Cyprus is where Barnabas is from – this is his hometown so there was no better person to go there with Paul than this man.
- The “John” they meet is “John Mark” who is Barnabas’ cousin

Bar-Jesus (13:6)

- Jesus was a common name – Yeshua = Joshua, Greek = Jesus.
Bar Jesus = son of a guy named Joshua/Jesus (Heb/Gk)
- This got them connected with the leader of all Cyprus – Sergius Paulus who sent for B & P and believed their message (13:12) based on a miracle they did on a sorcerer named Elymas who tried to twist their message and persuade SP not to listen to them.

Pisidian Antioch

- This is the other Antioch.
- This one is in Asia Minor (North of the first Antioch). Think of the first Antioch as being along the eastern Med coast (near the crux of Syria and Turkey) and this one west along the southern coast of Turkey and then north up into Asia Minor
- It was a city full of beautiful architecture and sculptures (Dictionary NT background)
- Lots of things celebrating Augustus (Octavian) the most famous of which was a triple arched gate celebrating Augustus’ three main victories. This still stands today.
- Sergius Paulus (who they just converted) was from Pisidian Antioch and owned a lot of land there
- Some have speculated that Paul may have taken on SP as a patron and then changed his name to Paul but that isn’t very likely.

- John Mark leaves them (13:13) – Paul wasn't happy about his departure and it splits he and Barnabas later (Acts 15:37)

Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch:

- Notice they are in the synagogue on a Sabbath
- They are recognized as fellow Jews
- There are Gentiles present (God fearers) as Paul acknowledges their presence in 13:16 and in 13:26 where he calls them "God fearing Gentiles"
- Some believe he is using their status as diaspora Jews to help them receive the message in 13:27 – the Jerusalem/Judean Jews didn't get it...they didn't recognize the Messiah – but now you can. Not sure that is the case.
- Gospel – 13:32 – "We tell you the good news..."
 - o It is what God promised their ancestors (The Jewish ancestors)
 - o Fulfilled in Paul's day
 - o The raising up/resurrection of Jesus.
- Then Paul backs up the point with scripture
- What he says next is a result of the gospel:
 - o 13:38-39 – forgiveness of sins, set free from every sin, justification
 - o Notice they never offered the invitation song – they just put it all on the table and started to leave.
 - o Those who were interested asked for more – they weren't going to let them get away.

Persecution (Here in Acts 13 and in 14:1-5, and 14:19-20)

- Paul and Barnabas were persecuted for their message.
- Jesus was persecuted for their message
- Why do you think we aren't more persecuted for our message today?
 - o When was the last time you shared it and chanced rejection?
 - o You cannot face consequences for things you don't do
- Paul and Barnabas weren't being jerks.
 - o If you are persecuted for being a jerk you aren't persecuted for your faith
- There is a difference between being direct and being obnoxious.

Derbe

- Can't help but think of Larry on the 3 Stooges – Drop the vernacular, that's a Derbe!
- 14:21 – one a great number of converts in Derbe
- Go back through the cities where they had the trouble.
 - o Why?
 - o Because there were converts there who needed encouragement
 - o Imaging you only knew the gist of the gospel for a few months and were left on your own!
 - o 14:22 – they tell their converts that they must go through hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

- They appointed elders in those churches, fasted prayed and committed them to the Lord
- That would make a great elder appointing process

Back to Antioch – 14:26-28

They had completed the work – 14:26

Gather the church – report what happened.

This is something I wish we would do more of – talk about what God is doing and celebrate it together. It would be a great way to inform our worship. So that when we sing we have specific things of praise in mind based on the report we heard. What if we saw ourselves as missionaries and each Sunday at welcome had a brief report of what God had done that week leading into our praise?!?

Acts 15 – The Council in Jerusalem

Acts 14 – we already discussed this history of Paul and Barnabas being confused by the pagans for Zeus and Hermes.

- Paul was identified as Hermes because he was the chief speaker – Hermes was the messenger of the gods
- There are ancient authors within 50 years of this event who told stories of Zeus and Hermes coming down in human form and destroying cities who didn't accept them
- So guess what? The city accepts Paul and Barnabas!

14:23 – appointed elders

- They go back through the towns they had already come through.
- They appoint elders
- Their process – prayer and fasting to make this decision. Paul and Barnabas appoint them.
- How long had these people been Christians?
 - o This may help us understand the difference between Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7
 - o Titus doesn't mention they cannot be a new convert. Paul does in 1 Timothy. Ephesus had been around longer. This wasn't possible in newly established areas.
 - o The qualifications have universal principles embedded in some things that depend on the situation.

Acts 14 ended with Paul and Barnabas back in Antioch. They reported all the conversions and establishment of churches on their mission. They stayed there quite some time (14:28).

Acts 15

Word gets to Jerusalem (primarily Jewish Christians) about the conversion of the Gentiles.

- Some Jewish believers get upset that they haven't been following Torah and go to confront Paul and Barnabas on this in Antioch (15:1)
- They were making salvation contingent on circumcision

Paul and Barnabas disputed with them – they did this because of their experience with the Gentile converts.

Paul and Barnabas take the matter to Jerusalem where James and the other apostles (Peter) can give their opinions.

As Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem (they are going down the coast, north to south through Samaria) they got even more confirmation that what they were doing was right – 15:3

15:4 – they took all this information and reported it to the believers and apostles in Jerusalem.

15:5 – The Pharisee converts to Christianity make their case – circumcision is required for salvation – they must keep the law of Moses to be Christian.

15:7-11 – Peter tells his Cornelius story where that was clearly not how God saw the matter.

- Notice this is a purity issue – 15:9
 - o Of course it was remember Acts 10 with the sheet, animals – kill and eat being connected with Gentiles knocking at the door and Peter’s claim nothing “unclean” had ever entered his mouth and God told him not to call anything unclean God had made clean – Peter gets it! The Gentiles have been made clean by God. They need to recognize this.
- They can be pure even if not by means we traditionally consider
- 15:11 – saved by grace! Not just us but them also or not just them but us also.
 - o We aren’t any different than they are.

Now Paul and Barnabas share their stories – 15:12

- They tell of miracles – signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles
- God had accepted them
- God had purified them

James now stands up (15:13)

- Acts 12:2 – James the brother of John was killed by Herod
- This is James the half brother of Jesus who later writes the book of James in the NT
- He didn’t come around to faith until after the resurrection
- He quotes the OT – Amos 9:11-12 to say that this shouldn’t surprise us as the prophets already spoke about this happening.
 - o His point = we aren’t tossing out the scriptures in order to let the Gentiles in. Letting them in is what we were always supposed to do.

Read Acts 15:19-21

- This seems contradictory
- The Pharisees said the Gentiles should follow the Law of Moses
- James says these rules are to be placed on the Gentiles because of the Law of Moses
- But it seems James is in disagreement with the conclusion of the Pharisee converts
- James is saying:
 - o One doesn’t have to do what one had to do to BECOME a Jew to BECOME a Christian
 - o If one is to be a non-Jewish Christian, there are still some things that are found in the Law of Moses that are going to make this helpful moving forward BECAUSE that will put the Gentile converts in fellowship with Jewish converts and their scruples will be violated if the Gentiles continue to act like they used to
- The rules:

- No food polluted by idols – marketplace meat came from the temples. Most people weren't wealthy enough to eat much meat.
- No sexual immorality
- No meat from strangled animals
- No eating blood
- What does this have to do with the Law of Moses?
 - Everything – these were the standards for Gentiles living among the Jews from the beginning.
- The rules again – change the order to make sense out of it
 - Notice Leviticus 17-18 are about food/blood and then about sexual immorality (the same two categories covered in Acts 15)
 - No eating of food from idols
 - Lev 17:1-9 covers this
 - Lev 17:5 – these are fellowship offerings (you ate the meat) and no longer to false gods but in the camp to the real God.
 - Lev 17:8 – this is for the alien and foreigner living among you
 - No eating blood
 - Lev 17:10-14 – no one (alien and stranger included) can eat blood
 - Rare steak is not eating blood – red in steak is myoglobin (protein from muscle tissue, not blood).
 - Our food doesn't have blood because we drain the blood from the animals.
 - No eating strangled animals
 - Since the throat wasn't slit the blood wasn't drained
 - This rule goes with the no blood rule
 - So this also applies to the alien and stranger
 - No sexual immorality
 - Lev 18:26 – after the long list he prohibits the foreigner (Gentile) from doing these things.
- This is not an arbitrary list
- This is a list of things that people must do to be in a clean relationship with each other
- To know the Gentiles are required to uphold these things allows the Jewish Christians to fellowship them.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey and His Letters (Part 1)

After the Jerusalem council on what was required of Gentiles to be Christians a few things happened that lined things up for Paul's second missionary journey:

- Paul, Barnabas, Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas left Jerusalem for Antioch (15:22)
 - o Judas and Silas were prophets (15:32)
- They took a letter detailing the results of the Jerusalem Council
- Judas and Silas were sent back to Jerusalem (15:33)
- Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch to teach the word of the Lord (15:35)
- Paul decides it is time to go back and visit the churches from the first missionary journey (15:36)
- Barnabas wants to bring John Mark but Paul doesn't want to since John Mark had left them on a hard journey
- They part ways and Paul ends up taking Silas with him on the second missionary journey. While Barnabas and John Mark leave for Cyprus (again which is where Barnabas was originally from) – 15:39
 - o Paul and Barnabas had already had a falling out – Galatians 2:13 – the dispute with Peter. Things would never be the same.
- Paul and Silas go through Syria (which is where Antioch is) and Cilicia strengthening the churches – this ends Acts 15
 - o Paul and Silas had a lot in common – both had two names – one Jewish and one Gentile/Greek. Both were Roman citizens (Acts 16:37). Silas was a Jewish Christian from Jerusalem giving him a credential Paul didn't have.

Acts 16:

- They visit the locations of the first missionary journey
 - o Derbe – 16:1 vs 14:20
 - o Lystra – 16:1 vs 14:6-8
- Timothy joins them
 - o This is the man Paul would later write 1-2 Timothy too and then Timothy would be in Ephesus (where they end up at the end of this journey)
 - o His mother was Jewish and his father a Greek
 - o Paul has him circumcised because of the Jewish presence in the area and yet Paul is also announcing the news from Acts 15 – that circumcision is not required of the Gentiles per 16:4
- *So why do you think Paul had him circumcised when they had come to the conclusion it wasn't necessary for salvation or fellowship?*
 - o Because it was an unnecessary stumbling block in their journey, it seems
 - o Paul thought so highly of Timothy that he would send him into difficult situations in Paul's own absence – 1 Cor 16:10 & Philippians 2:19-22
 - o Paul had Timothy with him when he wrote several of his letters – Philippians 1:1, Col 1:1, 1 Thess 1:1, 2 Thess 1:1, & 2 Cor 1:1. Timothy also appears as recipient in

2 of Paul's letters making Paul present in the intro to over half of Paul's letters (7 of 13)

Phrygia and Galatia next – not much commentary given there

- Galatia was also visited on the first journey as Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch are all in Galatia
- Phrygia wasn't mentioned but it was in Acts 2 – so some of the Pentecost converts may have gone home and started churches very early on.

Luke joins them: They get to Troas – 16:9 when another person joins them. He is not named and it is a very subtle addition.

- Notice 16:10 – “After Paul had seen the vision, **we** got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them.”
- Luke may have stayed in Philippi, possibly Timothy too – the “We” passages run from 16:10-18 (Troas to Philippi) and then pick up again in 20:4-21:19 (Philippi to Jerusalem) and pick up a third time in 27:1-28:30.
- So it looks like Luke stopped at Philippi and spent some time there, which might back up Luke being the loyal yokefellow who has labored at Paul's side in Phil 4:2

They are trying to go into Asia (Turkey) but God directed them to go elsewhere via the Spirit of Jesus – 16:7 (can be a reference to the Holy Spirit)

- God had other plans
- God was pushing Paul to some pivotal cities – Philippi, Athens, Corinth and Ephesus. Can you imagine if God hadn't done that and the letters we wouldn't have in the NT?

Macedonia – Northern Greece

16:12 – they arrive in Philippi, a Roman colony

- Philippi was named after Philip II of Macedonia who was the father of Alexander the Great
- Years prior Philippi had a battle between Anthony and Octavian (Augustus) against those who had killed Julius Caesar – Brutus and Cassius.
- Find women at a “place of prayer” actually a way to say synagogue
 - o It is probably the case that there weren't many Jews in Philippi.
 - o It took 10 men to create an official synagogue – it seems there weren't enough. (Bruce, 219)
- This was a city founded by ex-roman soldiers
- Lydia dealer in purple cloth
 - o From Thyatira and probably an ex-slave (slaves could be named from where they were from and there is a town called Lydia).
 - o Purple was a big deal
 - o Romans wore purple on their togas to demonstrate their rank/importance
 - o Purple bands would be dyed on their toga
 - o The top tier people (Emperor, magistrates, etc) wore fully purple garments (Doug Campbell, 46)

- Philippi was a bigger imitator of Rome and Roman culture so it is likely that they were doing these same things in Philippi and Lydia was cashing in on it.
- Campbell says it took 12,000 snails to produce 1.4 grams of purple dye which was enough to stain “the hem of one robe”
- Douglas Campbell thinks she was probably either Euodia or Syntyche who he mentions in his letter to the Philippians – going back to her real name, not her slave name. Who knows.
- Paul casts out the demon in the slave girl and he and Silas are thrown in prison
- How many people are travelling?
 - 4 – Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke
 - How many go to jail? – Paul and Silas
 - What is the difference between Paul & Silas and Timothy & Luke?
 - Their ethnicity – Paul and Silas are Jewish. Timothy is half Greek. Luke is full Greek
 - But it turns out Paul and Silas are Roman citizens!
- Luke seems to stay in Philippi – we stops here

Thessalonica (17:1-9)

- This trip is short lived. Persecution breaks out but they do convert a few who they write back to later.
- Paul’s 2 letters to the Thessalonians were written around 40 AD – his first letters.
- 1 Thess 1:9 shows that many of Paul’s converts were Gentiles/God-fearers
- There was a larger Jewish population here as evidenced by the synagogue (17:1)
- They convert some but are driven out of town to Berea

Berea – 17:10-15

- 17:11 – the famous verse on the nobility of the Bereans who studied the scriptures daily
- Many in Berea believed
- The troublemakers from Thessalonica show up
 - Paul is sent to the coast (17:14)
 - Silas and Timothy stay in Berea (17:15)
 - Paul is sent to Athens 17:15 and Timothy and Silas are sent to meet him

Athens – 17:16-34

- Shows Paul’s adept handling of the scriptures and contextualizing it to Greeks/Gentiles
- By the end of the chapter he has converts who were Greeks

Next week – we will go to Corinth

Paul's Second Missionary Journey and His Letters (Part 2)

Review:

- Peter converts Gentiles – Cornelius – **Acts 10**
- Peter explains his actions – **Acts 11**
- Paul has success converting Gentiles – 1st missionary journey (**Acts 13-14**)
- This instigates the Jerusalem council in **Acts 15**
 - o Decided Gentiles don't have to become Jews to become Christians
 - o More specifically – Gentiles don't have to adopt traditional/Scriptural identity markers of Judaism to be "in" the family of God as children of Abraham and children of God.
- Paul decides that the churches he started on the first journey need to hear this landmark decision and this is what instigates the second missionary journey, that and the Holy Spirit's leading – **Acts 16-20**
- This will end with him going to Jerusalem where he is arrested and ends up in Rome by the end of Acts.

We pick up mid-way through the second missionary journey

Throw back to last week – Acts 17 (Thessalonica)

17:8 – politarches – scholars thought Luke got this wrong. Often translated city officials it is a title for a position. But until more recently we had no verification of this term except in Acts. Then archaeologists started finding this in inscriptions. We now have 32 examples and 19 of those were found in Thessalonica! I have a book published in 1981 (Finegan, 108) that says there is only one known example of this word outside the Bible and it was from a fragment of a huge gate in Thessalonica. The gate was built in the first century (probably just after Paul) but was torn down in 1867 to provide material to fix the city wall! Again, the example is from Thessalonica and we have found many more since.

The Egnatian Way

- "Road constructed by the Romans in the 2nd century BC" – Wikipedia
- 20 feet wide, 700 miles long
- Paul would have used this road to go from Philippi to Thessalonica
- The Romans put down mile markers like we have on the interstate.
- Two were found years ago and is in a museum in Thessalonica

Paul in Athens

Idols in the agora in Athens. 7500 inscriptions have been found that there were many idols there. In the early 80s they discovered 25 idols/statues from the agora. Petronius, "a satirist in the court of Nero" said it was easier to meet a god than a man in Athens – John McCray article

Altars to an unknown god were seen in Athens in 143 and 159 (Pausanias & Apollonius of Tyana). Also found in Pergamum (Deissmann)

**This section relies heavily on N.T. Wright in Paul: A Biography on Paul in Athens:
Greek – acropolis – fortified part of a city built on a hill**

- If you are familiar with Athens you will know that there is a large Acropolis in Athens
- On this Acropolis were several temples built several hundred years BC
 - o Parthenon – temple of Athena
 - o Temple of Nike (victory)
 - o Temple of Jupiter (Roman name of Greek Zeus)
 - o A few hundred yards to the northwest was the Areopagus/Mars Hill
 - o Mars Hill = “Hill of Mars”
 - o Mars was the Roman god of war
- Paul’s speech in the Areopagus was in a place used for public trials/hearings
- They had elected officials with elections for 9 of them each year
- When their terms were up they became members of the Areopagus (Wright, 194)
- Ancient world – the two most controversial topics were intertwined – religion and politics
- “The Areopagus was a court. Paul was on trial. It was a dangerous moment. It could have gone badly wrong.”

Luke’s recorded speeches in Acts are usually no more than 1-2 minutes read out loud.

- Paul’s is no different here
- Paul probably spoke much longer as did Peter in Acts 2

What was at stake?

- 400 years prior Socrates himself had been put on trial and forced to commit suicide in Athens. What was the crime he was convicted of that resulted in such a horrible fate?
- “Corrupting the young and introducing foreign divinities” – Wright, 196
 - o Socrates was seen as a threat to their way of life
 - o So was Paul – **Acts 17:18** – “A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.”

Paul engages the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers - 17:18

- Paul quotes a Stoic philosopher when he said “We are your offspring”
- Paul was from Tarsus – Tarsus was a philosophical center very much like Athens. Paul was in his element in this environment as much as he was in the synagogue.

Epicureans “held that though the gods might well exist, they live in a world of their own entirely separate from the human world. The world inhabited by humans carries on under its own impetus. Everything in the world and human life has natural causes and at death the atoms are dispersed beyond recall and the entire human person ceases to exist.” – Wright, 197

“The Stoics, were basically pantheists. ‘God’ and the world are more or less the same thing, and the divine spark of life, the logos, exists in everything. The world will go up in flames and start all over again” – Wright (biography) 197-198

Another philosopher, Aeschulus, wrote of the foundation of the court of the Areopagus where they believed Apollo presided – “and declared among other things and as part of the logic of trials for murder that when people die and their blood is spilled on the ground there is no resurrection.” – Wright, 198

It seems they believed Paul was putting forth Jesus and resurrection as a pair of divinities. Not unusual because some viewed logos (word) as divinity.

17:24 – God doesn’t live in temples built by human hands – Wright points out that they were in eyesight of the Parthenon.

17:28 – quotes two Greek philosophers

- Epimenides
- Aratus in his work Phaenomena – second most read poems after Homer

Paul is saying Epicureanism doesn’t work – God is interested in what happens and involved

Paul is saying Stoicism doesn’t work – God isn’t in everything. God is to be sought after and can be/wants to be found.

Their own writers and philosophies had been pointing to these things the whole time – these are not new things but old things.

17:34 – Paul converts several including Dionysius (a member of the Areopagus) and Damaris- Tradition is that Dionysius, who was converted, became a leader in the Athenian church

Paul's Second Missionary and His Letters (Part 3)

Acts 18 - Paul in Corinth – 53 miles from Athens

- Meets Priscilla and Aquilla – they had been kicked out of Rome due to Claudius
- 18:5 – Silas and Timothy finally arrive from Macedonia
- 18:9-11 – Paul stayed in Corinth a year and a half

Geography and Corinth

Corinth was on an isthmus that was 4 miles wide at its most narrow point. Instead of sailing around it some ships were put up on a system of limestone blocks 12 feet wide that was grooved where boats could be brought across. Many people thought about putting a channel in. Nero even got his own hands dirty, digging the first hole with a golden shovel (Finegan, 144) but it wasn't completed until more recently. Today there is a channel cut across it (1893).

People:

- Priscilla and Aquilla
 - o They had come from Italy to Corinth because of the Edict of Claudius (49 AD – 1 Cor written around 51)
 - o Acts 18:18 – they will accompany Paul to Ephesus from Corinth
 - o They end up back in Rome as Paul greets them in Romans 16
- Erastus - Paul also greets a guy named Erastus in Romans 16:23 who Paul calls Corinth's director of public works. Archaeology backs this up as does 2 Tim 4:20 which puts Erastus in Corinth. The inscription was found in Corinth and reads, "[. . .] Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense."¹ Paul wrote Romans from Corinth – this is helped by Rom 16:23
- Apollos -

Acts 18:4 – reasoned in the synagogue

- Archaeologists found an inscription for an early synagogue in Corinth to match Acts 18:4 (Finegan, 151).

Acts 18:5 – Silas and Timothy return from Macedonia (this is where Philippi and Thessalonica are located). Many believe Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth at this time.

- See 1 Thess 1:1 – “Paul, Silas and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God...”

Acts 18:12 – place of judgment

They also found evidence of a “speaker's platform” in the middle of the forum. This is probably where Paul gave his defense in Acts 18:12-17. What makes that seem even more likely was a church was built there in the 5th century AD commemorating that spot. Churches were often later built on locations that were tied to specific events.

Paul's trip as outlined in Acts 18-19

- 18:1 – Athens to Corinth (just Paul)
- 18:2 – joins Priscilla and Aquilla in Corinth
- 18:5 – Silas and Timothy join Paul from Macedonia
- 18:11 – Paul stayed in Corinth a year and a half
- 18:18 – Paul with Priscilla and Aquilla leave Corinth for Ephesus. Paul leaves P&A there.
- 18:22 – heads back to Judea to Jerusalem then to Antioch
- 18:23 – Back into Galatia
- 18:24 – cuts back to Ephesus with P&A – they meet Apollos
- 18:27 – Apollos goes to Achaia (southern half of Greece – includes Athens and Corinth)
- 19:1 – Apollos is at Corinth (in Achaia) Paul arrives back at Ephesus (he said he would return (18:21))

Acts 19 - Paul in Ephesus (2nd time around) – From McCray “Archaeology and the Book of Acts”

Ephesus - Ephesus, a city of about 200,000 people, was called "a most illustrious city" (lamprotatoj Efesiwn polewj) in an inscription found in the city,⁹¹ and Strabo called it "the greatest emporium in Asia, I mean Asia in the special sense of that term [ie., Asia Minor]."⁹² The extensive ruins of Ephesus are well known, including the upper forum, the lower forum, the theatre mentioned in Acts 19:29, the town hall, the odeion, the beautiful paved streets, temple remains, and other civic structures. The extent to which the imperial cult was established in Ephesus is strikingly revealed in life-size marble busts of Tiberius and his wife Livia found *in situ* in *insula* VII of the excavations of private houses in Ephesus (the Hanghauser excavations). The imperial family seems to have been worshipped even "in a private context as guarantors of peace and prosperity."⁹³ Excavations in this sector of Ephesus have uncovered extensive remains of two huge *insulae* (ie., city blocks), constructed in the 1st century A.D., on the northern slopes of Mount Koressos (Bulbudag). They were built on a three-terraced hillside and had water piped into apartments on every level, unlike those of Rome and Ostia. In the eastern section, shops similar to those built in Pompeii and Herculaneum were built into the first-floor level, selling among other things, warm beverages. The owners lived in apartments behind the shops. Upper levels consisted mostly of middle class apartments and a large two-storied mansion. The western half of the area consisted of five large luxury apartments. Thus, we have an example in Ephesus of the rich, the poor, and the middle class, living in close proximity in these *insulae*.⁹⁴

A lecture hall, or auditorium,⁹⁵ mentioned in a 1st-century-A.D. inscription,⁹⁶ has been tentatively identified by the Turkish archaeologist E. Akurgal in the area adjacent to the east side of the Celsus library. It may be the lecture hall (or school, *scholē*) of Tyrannus

where Paul "reasoned daily."⁹⁷ Hemer thought the two Greek words *auditeiwrion* and *sxolh* were virtually synonymous.⁹⁸ The "auditorium"

Acts 18-19 – Paul in Ephesus

- Ephesus was known for its magic
- Ephesian grammata (Ephesian letters) were thought to be an incantation that could ward off an evil spirit.
- Spells and incantations – right words said the right way were thought to have power
- Book burning – this was practiced in the ancient world. The books were in conflict with Jesus and so they didn't just get rid of them, sell them, etc (Rowe) but they burned them.
- The price reminds us that scrolls were expensive.
- Ephesus was also known for the Artemis cult
 - o **19:35** – "Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?" – probably a meteorite they put in the temple to Artemis

19:10 – Paul preached in Ephesus for two years

Miracles and the power of God – 19:11-12

Abuse of the power of God – 19:13-17

Burning of the scrolls – 19:18-20

Read 19:21-22

- **Paul is going to go to Jerusalem. First he will stay a bit longer in Ephesus (the riot breaks out)**
- He sends Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica)
- Paul intends to collect money and take it to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Some believe Paul thought this might help sort out some of the difficult relationships between the mother ship and the outlying Gentile churches.
- 20:1 – Paul set out for Macedonia (see Rom 15:26 – names Macedonia as a place where he collected money for them)
- 2 Cor 8 – Paul explains the collection to the Corinthians. He mentions the giving of those in Macedonia. He explains Titus is coming to collect.
- 1 Cor 16:1-4 – another passage where Paul explains the collection. Notice 16:2 – this is our prooftext for the weekly offering. It was highly occasional.
- The collection hiding in plain sight – it isn't mentioned in Acts!
 - o But it may well lie behind Acts 20:1-5 and those listed are representatives from Macedonia, etc to take the money to Jerusalem.

Paul to Jerusalem

Paul has been warned about what awaits him in Jerusalem:

- Acts 20:22-24
- Acts 21:10-14

The problem in Jerusalem

- Acts 21:20-22 – some believe Paul is teaching against Moses because Paul believed you could be in the family without circumcision. Peter would have agreed with this as well.
- 21:24 – do the vow so they can see there is no truth to these reports
 - o Is there truth to the report? Yes and no
 - o Yes – don't have to circumcise your kids although Paul still did if it helped the mission (Timothy)
 - o No – Paul wasn't turning away from Moses – Moses pointed to these things himself
- 21:25 – reflects the Jerusalem council decision
- 21:26 – Paul does the vow/purification in the temple.
 - o Some have said he was wrong to do so. Others have said Paul was mistaken on this matter, “The truth is, that, up to this time, Paul had written nothing which directly conflicted with the service of the altar, and he did not yet understand the subject correctly...Peter finally discovered that he was wrong in that matter, and Paul at length discovered that he was wrong, in his connection with the offerings of these Nazarites¹” – MacGarvey
 - o They fail to understand the relationship of Judaism and Christianity. They fail to pay attention to Paul's speeches from here on out in regard to these accusations.
 - o We will get to that later

Paul arrested – Acts 21:27ff

- What was the assumption? He had brought Gentiles who he had been seen with into the temple
- Note the temple stone they found forbidding this action by penalty of death.

Paul confused with the Egyptian – Acts 21:38

- Josephus on the Egyptian: “Now these imposters and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, and pretended that they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs...Moreover, there came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the Mount of Olives. He would show them from there how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down (Ant 20.8.5, 167-170)

¹ MacGarvey, J. W. (1872). [A commentary on Acts of Apostles](#) (p. 260). Lexington, KY: Transylvania Printing and Publishing Co.

Acts 22 – Paul’s defense in Aramaic (22:2) – it is written in Greek but was spoken in Aramaic

- 22:3 – zealous for God as any of you are today – goes back to Acts 21 – many of them zealous for the law think Paul is perverting the law.
- 22:6ff – Paul gives his testimony about his Jesus experience
- 22:21 – he isn’t finished speaking. The crowd is finished listening. They couldn’t understand the mission to the Gentiles, especially apart from traditional Jewish conversion practices. The Jews thought this was a defilement of Judaism...a watering down of Judaism.
- Zeal was a big deal in Judaism
 - o Elijah – zealous (killed prophets of Baal – 1 Kings 19:10, 14)
 - o Phineas – zealous (Numbers 25:11 – he was zealous because he killed an Israelite who had been sexually immoral with a Moabite woman...he killed her too with a spear. This stopped the plague God had brought as a result of their immorality.)
 - o Maccabees – Judas M was seen as zealous for the Law
- The Jews thought that lack of zeal for the law was always associated with their poor circumstances and that zeal for the law could renew God’s favor for the people
- Paul is showing them that he is zealous for the law and for God AND is teaching what he is teaching – that they all work together (unlike McGarvey above).

Acts 22 ends with Paul standing before the Sanhedrin

Acts 23 – Paul before the Sanhedrin

- We covered this before when we covered Acts 4 – the Sadducees and Pharisees and how Paul tangles them up in talking about the resurrection (23:6-8)

23:11 – Jesus tells him he will go to Rome and testify there.

Acts 23 ends with a plot to kill Paul.

- This is one of the only mentions of Paul’s family aside from his parents
- Paul had a sister – 23:16

Paul is moved to Caesarea in Herod’s palace – 23:23ff

Felix from Wright “Paul: A biography”,

“Originally a freedman, Felix had risen quickly up the social scale as a favorite of the emperor Claudius; he was a brother of Pallas, one of Claudius’s right-hand men. Felix was a callous, corrupt official who had squashed a rebellion, instigated the murder of a high priest, and rather like Gallio when the mob beat up Sosthenes in Corinth, stood by as Jews in Caesarea were attacked by a local crowd. He was, however, married to a Jewish princess (his third wife), Drusilla [24:24], a daughter of Herod Agrippa.”

Look at 24:14-16 – Paul is in line with Judaism just as Jesus was in line with Judaism. It all aligns. It is not contrary to each other.

Paul is in prison here for 2 years!

- Felix leaves Paul in prison
- Festus takes Felix's position

Acts 25 – Trial before Festus (the new governor) & then Agrippa

- See 25:8 – Paul claims he did nothing against the Law or the temple.
 - o Not advocating circumcision is also not against the Torah even though the Torah had strict requirements about it. It must be done, it says...but now in Christ these things have been fulfilled.
- 25:11 – appeal to Caesar

Paul before Agrippa (25:23ff)

- He is more familiar with Jewish custom (26:3)

Acts 26 – Paul speaks before Agrippa

- 26:6 – promise
- 26:7 – fulfilled
- 26:8 – resurrection is that fulfillment
- Paul tells his whole story again
- Festus accuses Paul of being insane – remember resurrection would sound crazy to him
- Then Paul does a brilliant move against Agrippa in 26:25-27 – puts him against the prophets. Will Agrippa deny the prophets in front of his own people? 26:28 – Agrippa dodges the question.
- 26:29-30 – we keep seeing the officials conclude Paul has done nothing wrong
- Some believe Luke wrote this as a legal brief for Paul to use in Rome

Acts 27 – shipwreck – next week.

Paul to Rome

Let's back up a few steps and then move forward. We have been walking through the book of Acts.

Gospel starts off going to the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 2.

Acts 10 – the gospel goes to the Gentiles for the first time without them first having to become Jewish.

Paul does his missionary journey's and offers the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles.

The Jewish people didn't get along with the Gentiles for a number of reasons:

- They were polytheists
- They were sexually immoral
- They were idolaters
- All of this made them unclean and unable to be associated with in any close way.

So when Peter and Paul offer the Gentiles to be part of God's family without them having to become Jews they face resistance – oppositions, opponents.

Paul then creates some opponents, people who believe that anyone who comes to God must do so through Torah/Law.

They believe Paul is putting them at risk of destruction by breaking the rules with the Gentiles – think Maccabees, Elijah and Phineas (in backwards order chronologically – Wright points this out in Biography). Zeal for the law and lack of zeal for the law was hugely important to their future as a people, they believed.

- Phineas – intermingling with the Gentiles – threat of intermarriage with other religious peoples and bringing in idolatry (this wasn't a racial intermarriage issue)
- Elijah – destroying idolaters – keep it out of God's people.

So who was zealous for the law?

- His opponents – Acts 21:20
- Paul in his own defense to these same people – Acts 22:3

Paul is both zealous for the Law of Moses and accepting of Gentiles without circumcision which seems to be out of line with the Law. Paul knows his approach is the fulfillment of Moses. Moses would smile at seeing this happen.

Paul goes through three trials:

- Sanhedrin (Acts 23)
- Felix (Acts 24)
- Festus (Acts 25)
- Festus' consult with Agrippa – Acts 26

Acts 25:11 – Paul appeals to Caesar

- 25:1 – Festus leaves Caesarea to go to Jerusalem where some Jewish leaders try to get him to bring Paul to Jerusalem for trial
- This is the second time Paul's life has been in danger
- 25:9 – Paul is asked if he is willing to go to Jerusalem and face charges there (which would have been Paul's death)
- 25:10-11 – Appeal is made to Caesar

Roman appeal (F.F. Bruce – Paul, 363ff)

- Appeals to Caesar began with Octavian – the emperor hearing appeal (30 BC)
- Local officials couldn't execute Roman citizens or even sentence them if they made the appeal to Caesar. They had a set amount of time to go to Rome and present their case
- Some people think Luke is a legal brief for Paul's trial in Rome.
- Festus would have to prepare an explanation of the appeal – it makes sense he would have sought out Agrippa's help in writing that.
- Why didn't Paul appeal sooner, under Felix two years prior (all that time in jail) because Felix thought he was innocent and was waiting the right time to let Paul go (Bruce, 364-365)
- Maybe Paul expected to get an audience with Caesar himself – Nero
- But Nero had stopped hearing these cases and instead delegated them to other officials.
- Either way, this got Paul to the "ends of the earth" in getting him to Rome.

But first Paul had to get to Rome! **Acts 27**

- Paul is under guard
- He is with at least two friends
 - o Luke – "We" in 27:2
 - o Aristarchus – we don't know his status. Also in jail, Paul's helper? (Bruce)

27:3 – Julius, the centurion, allowed Paul to see friends to get needs met

- Imprisonment then wasn't at all like now
- Your captors didn't take much interest in your survival
 - o Somewhat better for a citizen but still not great
- They might feed you some and give you something to drink but by and large a long stay in prison meant you needed help!
 - o See Acts 28:30 – this was at Paul's own expense

27:6 – change ships

27:9 – getting late in the year and the storms get bad

27:9-10 – Paul warns but no one listens.

27:13ff – the storm.

- Weighed anchor – they used a series of anchors that would slow them down as each one got added to drag on the bottom

27:18 – throwing cargo overboard as the storm rages

27:21-25 – Paul encourages and prophesies two things: destruction of the ship and the preservation of all the people

Here Paul takes charge of the whole situation

27:33-38 – Paul encourages them to eat and has a moment with echoes of the Lord's Supper – took bread, gave thanks, broke it and they ate it.

27:36 – they were all encouraged

27:39-41 – the ship runs aground and breaks apart.

27:42 – soldiers planned on killing the prisoners – don't let them escape.

27:43 – Paul saves the prisoners because Julius liked him and so he kept them all alive.

Chapter 27 ends in 27:44 with everyone safe on land.

Still not in Rome!

Chapter 28

They are on an island called Malta (28:1)

- Malta means "refuge"

Paul gets bit by a snake – the island people think he must have been a murderer (28:4) and that the gods were judging him. But nothing happened – reminds us of the odd words in Mark 16

- When Paul survived the islanders thought he was a god – 28:6

Paul visits a local official named Publius (28:7) where he heals his father (28:8) and then heals everyone on the island who was sick (28:9-10)

This led the inhabitants of the island to be generous with their supplies – 28:10

28:11 – three months on the island (they needed those supplies for all those people!) God worked it for the good.

12-16 – they arrived at Rome.

- He immediately begins telling the Jewish people of Rome about Jesus – 28:17ff

Read 28:23-25

What happened to Paul next?

Luke doesn't tell us.

Tradition says he was executed in Rome.

There is a church built where he was supposedly killed.

We really don't know.

Some believe he was killed in retribution to the great fire in Rome in 64. The area where the Christians lived in Rome was untouched and they received much of the blame (maybe the gods were punishing Rome because of the "atheists" among them?)

It is also possible that Paul was released and continued on to Spain (see Wright's Biography on these points)

- Romans 15:24
- Romans 15:28
- It was his plan to visit Rome on his way to Spain
- This could have happened – we really don't know.

Clement wrote this within 30 years of Paul's death,

1Clem 5:5

By reason of jealousy and strife Paul by his example pointed out the prize of patient endurance. After that he had been seven times in bonds, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, had preached in the East and in the West, he won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith,

1Clem 5:6

having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached the **farthest bounds of the West**; and when he had borne his testimony before the rulers, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance.

Resources Used in Writing this Material

F.F. Bruce – Paul: Apostle of a Heart Set Free

Finegan – Archaeology of the New Testament

Hawthorne, IVP Dictionary of Paul and His Letters

McCray – Archaeology and the New Testament, Archaeology and Acts

The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting (5 volumes)

Wright, N.T. – Paul: A Biography

Commentaries:

Keener (4 volumes)

Bruce – NICNT

C.K. Barrett – A Shorter Commentary: Acts