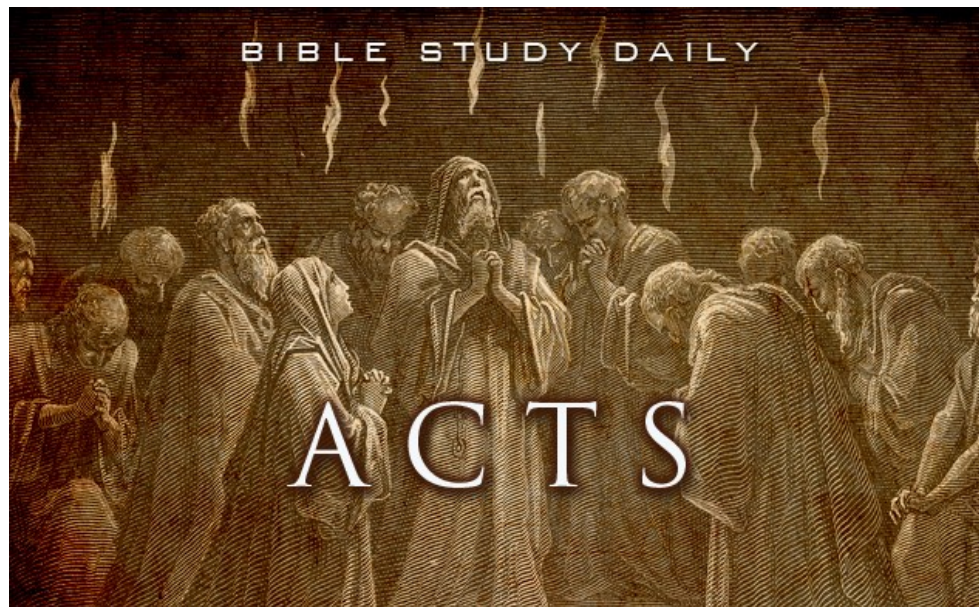




BIBLE STUDY DAILY



This document contains the introduction to the book of Acts as well as my study notes for the book.



Name

The title “Acts” comes from the content of the book: a historical narrative of the acts of certain apostles in the early church. The book of Acts covers about a 30-year period of history of the early church from A.D. 30-63.

Author

Strict speaking the book of Acts is anonymous because the author is not specifically named. However, traditional consensus is the author is Luke, the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke.

Early church documents attest to Luke as the author. Early church fathers including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen all name Luke as the author of Acts. Later church historians Eusebius and Jerome also attest to Lukan authorship.

Internal evidence also points to Luke as the author of Acts. The writing style is similar, as are a number of the themes. There are several “we” passages [16:10-17](#); [20:5–21:18](#); and [27:1-28:16](#), in which the author provides a narrative in first person plural (we) indicating the author was present during the events described. Luke is the one person who best fits these situations..

Genre

History

Literary Form

Biographical narrative

Time Frame

There are two opinions regarding the date for the writing of the book of Acts.

One view suggests the book was written between A.D. 70-80. This would have meant that Luke would have likely had Mark’s gospel available to him.

The second view, which I support, suggests the book of Acts was written between A.D. 60-62. This is shortly after the period of history recorded in the book, and would have been during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome. The early date is supported by the fact that Luke did not record any of the persecution of Christians that occurred between A.D. 63-70.

Emphasis

The emphasis of the book of Acts is on the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of apostles and others who devoted themselves to spreading the Gospel as Jesus had commanded during the early years of the church.



Outline

- The church in Jerusalem (1:1-6:7)
 - The empowerment of the chosen (1:1-2:47)
 - The expansion in Jerusalem 3:1-6:7)
- The church in Judea and Samaria (6:8-9:31)
 - Stephen (6:8-8:1a)
 - Philip (8:1b-40)
 - Saul/Paul (9:1-31)
- The church goes to the ends of the earth (:32-28:31)
 - Antioch (9:32-12:24)
 - Asia Minor (12:25-16:5)
 - Aegean (16:6-19:20)
 - Rome (19:21-28:31)

What I Noticed Today (Acts 1-3)

Acts 1

In verses 1-3 Luke refers to his gospel which was also addressed to Theophilus, continuing the account where he left off in Luke 24.

Note: We do not know a lot about Theophilus. His name means “lover of God” or “loved by God.” He apparently was a Roman official, a Christian, and someone Luke had instructed in the gospel.

In verses 4-8 while Jesus was still with the disciples He promised they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them while they were in Jerusalem. After that, they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Note: The phrase “you will be My witnesses” is a future tense imperative, meaning a command that will be executed in the future and will be ongoing.

In verses 9-11 after Jesus had said this, He ascended into heaven. While they were watching Jesus ascend, two men dressed in white appeared saying Jesus would come again in the same way you have seen Him go to heaven.

Note: Jesus’ return, in the same way, means He will return physically, in a cloud from heaven that everyone can see (Revelation 1:7), to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4).

In verses 12-14 the eleven disciples returned to Jerusalem, from the Mount of Olives. They went to the upper room and prayed along with the women who had been following Jesus, his mother, and His brothers.

Note: A Sabbath Day’s walk is about 3,000, or just over 1/2 mile.

Note: Jesus’ brothers are listed among those in prayer with the disciples. Jesus’ resurrection may have led to their conversion, and if so, represents the only recorded appearance of Christ to unbelievers after His resurrection.

In verses 15-26 Peter stepped forward in the crowd of 120 believers to remind them that one of their number (Judas) was unrighteous and died in a field named the “Field of Blood.” He quoted from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 to say they must replace him. Two names were suggested. The disciples prayed and cast lots and the lot fell to Matthias, so he was numbered among the apostles.

Note: Judas’ death, described in Matthew 27:3-8, says Judas hung himself. Luke’s account says Judas fell, he split open, and his insides spilled out. Both accounts are likely correct: Judas hung himself, then after some time the rope gave way, he fell to the ground, and due to decomposition he split apart just as Luke described.

Acts 2

In verses 1-13 Luke describes the infilling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The day of Pentecost had arrived and all the apostles were gathered together.

Note: Pentecost (also called the Feast of Weeks) followed the Feast of Firstfruits by 49 days. “Pentecost” is a Greek derivation which means 50 because Pentecost was celebrated the 50th day after the Feast of Firstfruits.

Suddenly a sound like a rushing wind filled the house, and tongues like flames of fire touched on each of the apostles. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages as the Spirit gave them the ability.

Note: The Greek word for “languages” (some translations say “tongues”) is *dialecto* which means real languages, not excited utterances. The word for excited utterances is *glossias*.

A crowd of people who heard this gathered around and heard the apostles, all Galileans, speaking in their own languages: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, and Rome. Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs all heard the acts of God. But some rejected what they heard saying the apostles must be drunk.

In verses 14-40 Peter preached his first sermon to the other apostles, men of Judah, and residents of Jerusalem, which depicts Jesus as the Messiah and Lord.


In verses 15-21 Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 stating that what has happened is a fulfillment of prophecy.

In verses 22-32 Peter calls on the men of Israel to listen. He proclaims Jesus as Messiah and as proof offers up His works and describes His death on the cross and His resurrection. Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11 in which David describes the Messiah as one who will not see decay. God resurrected Jesus and we are all witnesses.

In verses 33-36 Peter describes Jesus the glorified Messiah and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (quoting Psalm 110:1).

In verses 37-40 the crowd is convicted and Peter says they must repent, and be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Note: Verse 38 has some interpretive difficulties. The way it is written it seems like repentance and baptism are required for the forgiveness of sins, but this does not align with the balance of scripture (including Peter’s) which states that the remission of sin comes from faith and faith alone. The phrase “repent so that your sins may be forgiven” is plural. Whereas, the phrase “be baptized” is a singular imperative. The best interpretation then is to consider the phrase “and be baptized,” as a parenthetical comment.



In verses 41-47 that day about 3,000 became believers as a result of Peter's sermon. They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, to fellowship, to breaking bread together, and to prayer.

The believers were together and held things in common. They sold possessions and distributed to those in need. They met every day in the temple complex and broke bread from house to house. Every day the Lord added to their number.

Note: The acts of selling and sharing is not socialism or communism. It was done voluntarily and the distribution was to those in need. It is likely that by professing their faith in Jesus as Messiah they would have been excommunicated, thrown out of the synagogue. They had to band together to support and care for each other because they no longer were able to do that through Jewish channels.

Acts 3

In verses 1-10 Peter and John went to the temple complex at the hour of prayer, about 3pm. A man lame from birth was carried to the Beautiful Gate every day so he could beg from those entering the temple complex. He called out to Peter and John when he saw them approaching. Peter said I have no money but in the name of Jesus Christ get up and walk. Immediately the man stood up, strong, and walked with them into the temple complex praising God. People who knew him as the lame beggar were astonished.

In verses 11-26 the man along with Peter and John went to Solomon's Colonnade (a portico of columns that run along the entire east side of the temple complex). Seeing the crowd Peter preached again.

In verses 12-16 Peter explained what had happened; that God had healed the man through the power of faith in Jesus' name.

In verses 17-26 Peter explained what the people must do: they must repent, turn away from their sins, and believe in Jesus as Messiah (quoting Deuteronomy 18:15-19). He reminded the people that all the prophets spoke of the Messiah and the kingdom age, and God had sent His servant Jesus to them (the Jews) first.

What I Noticed Today

(Acts 4-6)

Acts 4

In verses 1-4 Peter, John, and the healed man were arrested while Peter was still speaking in Solomon's Colonnade (Acts 3:11-26). The temple police, the priests, and the Sadducees arrested them because they were preaching resurrection of the dead using Jesus as an example.

Note: Many of the priests were Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in bodily resurrection, angels, or spirits. They also only accepted the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible).

The number of men who believed that day was about 5,000.

In verses 5-12 the next morning the Jewish rulers, elders, scribes, Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander, and members of the high priestly family came together in Jerusalem. They brought Peter and John forward and demanded to know, by what power or name have you done this.

Note: We don't know anything about the John and Alexander mentioned among the group who questioned Peter and John.


The power of the Holy Spirit came over Peter and he testified the healing of the man who had been lame came through the name of Jesus Christ whom they had crucified, who was raised from the dead. He quoted Psalm 118:22 noting they had rejected the stone that became the capstone. Salvation comes only through His name. There is no other name under heaven that can save.

In verses 13-22 The authorities were astonished that Peter and John, who they considered unschooled, could speak with such courage. They ordered them to leave and the Sanhedrin conferred among themselves. They could not deny the miracle, so they called Peter and John back and told them not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John said they must obey God rather than the religious authorities. After threatening them some more they released them. They were afraid to punish them because the people in the crowd were giving glory to God for the miracle.

In verses 23-31 after they were released Peter and John returned to their people and reported what had happened. They realized the prophecy of their persecution spoken of by David was being fulfilled (Psalm 2:1-2).

Note: There are parallels between verses 25-26 and 27: nations (v. 25) = Gentiles (v. 27), people (v. 25) = people of Israel (v. 27), kings (v. 26) = Herod (v. 27), rulers (v. 26) = Herod (v. 27).

Peter and John prayed for God's power and the ability to heal and perform other signs in Jesus' name. When they finished praying the place where they



were, shook and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking God's message boldly.

In verses 33-37 the believers were of one heart and mind and shared what they had with each other. There were no needy among them because people sold possessions and gave the money to the apostles who distributed it to those in need. Barnabas, a Levite from Cypriot sold a piece of land and gave the money to the apostles.

Note: Luke introduced Barnabas and his actions in verses 36-37 as a contrast to Ananias and Sapphira in Luke 5:1-10. Also, Levites were prohibited from owning land in Israel so the presumption is the land he owned and sold was outside of Israel, probably his property in Cyprus. Another possibility is simply that the restriction of Numbers 18:20-24 was no longer being observed.

Acts 5

In verses 1-11 Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and conspired together to keep a portion of the proceeds and give the rest to the apostles. Peter asked Ananias why he lied when he said this was the entire proceeds from the sale. Ananias dropped dead on the spot and men came to wrap his body and carry it away to be buried. Three hours later Sapphira came and also lied saying this was the full amount of the sale. She also dropped dead instantly and was carried out to be buried next to her husband. Great fear came on the whole church who heard about this.

Note: This passage reveals God's immediate punishment for sin, in this case for lying. The act of donating the proceeds was voluntary, there was no reason to lie about what they gave. They lied to man, but the greater sin was in lying to God.

Note: This is the first mention of the "church" (v. 11) referring to the universal body of believers.

In verses 12-16 many signs and wonders were being done as the apostles gathered regularly at Solomon's Colonnade. People brought their sick to be healed just by being near Peter. Large numbers of men and women became believers.

In verses 17-21a the high priest along with the Sadducees arrested the apostles out of jealousy. But an angel of the Lord came and opened the door of the jail and told them to go to the temple complex and preach. So they did.

Note: This is the first of three jail miracles recorded by Luke (See also Luke 12:6-10, and Luke 16:26-27).

In verses 21b-32 the next morning, the high priests and the Sanhedrin met to conduct a trial of the apostles. They called for them to be brought from their jail cell but they were not there. Someone told them the men you arrested are in the temple courts teaching. So they sent the temple police to get the apostles and bring them before the court. The high priest said, did we not tell you

not to preach in this man's name.

Note: The high priest usually referred to Jesus as “this man” rather than using His name.

Peter and the apostles said we must obey God rather than men. God raised up Jesus whom you murdered and exalted Him to His right hand. As Savior over Israel with the power to forgive sin. We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit.

Note: Testimony in a Jewish court was validated based on two witnesses. The apostles are testifying that what they said is true, and so is the Holy Spirit.

In verses 33-42 when they heard this the priests and Sanhedrin wanted to put the apostles to death. But a man named Gamaliel excused the apostles and spoke to the court saying they should be careful what they did. If this preaching was of men it would die away soon enough, but if this was indeed from God they would be fighting against God. Based on this they had the apostles brought in flogged, ordered them again not to preach about Jesus, and released them.

The apostles left joyful that they had been worthy to be dishonored in Jesus' name, and they continued to teach every day in the temple complex and in homes that Jesus is the Messiah.

Acts 6

In verses 1-7 as the number of disciples continued to grow the Hellenistic Jews complained that their widows were being overlooked by the Hebraic Jews in the daily distribution.


Note: The Hellenistic (Grecian) Jews were likely Gentile proselytes who became Christians. The Hebraic Jews were natives of Israel who had become Christians. The Hellenistic Jews spoke Greek and their native tongues. The Hebraic Jews spoke Aramaic and Greek. The Hebraic Jews were ignoring the needs of the Hellenistic Jews.

The apostles called the disciples together and said they must continue to preach, so seven men full of wisdom and the Spirit were to be selected to oversee and administer the daily distribution. They chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. The apostles laid their hands on the men and prayed over them commissioning for their service.

Note: Based on their names most of these men were Greek speaking Jews which should have dealt with the complaints about the fairness of the distribution to the needy.

Note: There are three common interpretations of verses 1-7:

- These were the first deacons. The conclusion is based on words similar to the word for deacon (*diakonos*) appear in the passage: *diakonia* (distribution or service), and *deakonein* (to wait).

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- These are precursors to the office of deacon or elder. The conclusion is based on Luke 11:30 where deacons handled funds.
 - These are temporary positions created to fulfill a specific need.

In verses 8-15 Stephen was performing many signs and wonders and was full of grace and power. Men from the Freedmen's Synagogue came forward to debate Stephen, but they were unable to dispute his wisdom which came from the Holy Spirit.

These men arranged for some men to testify that Stephen had blasphemed Moses and God to the point that they dragged Stephen off to appear before the Sanhedrin. They accused him again of speaking blasphemy against the temple (the holy place) and the law because he said that Jesus would destroy this place and change the customs handed down by Moses. As the court looked down on Stephen he had the appearance of an angel.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

- *The religious leaders attempted to stop Jesus' message by crucifying Him and continued to reject Him through their persecution of the apostles.*
- *Barnabas' gift stands in stark contrast to the gift of Ananias and Sapphira. The difference lay in their heart and their motives.*
- *We are each called to do specific work in the kingdom. The apostles recognized this and continued to do what God called them to do while making sure that others were appointed to do other work that was necessary.*

What I Noticed Today

(Acts 7-8)

Acts 7

In verses 1-53 Luke records Stephen's speech in response to the high priest and the Sanhedrin.

Note: This is the longest recorded speech in Acts. Stephen was a Grecian Jew who became a believer. The high priest mentioned in verse 1 is probably Caiaphas (the same high priest who presided over Jesus' trials).

In verses 2-8 Stephen traces the beginnings of the nation of Israel back to God's promise to Abraham (See Genesis 12:1), the prophecy of the people's enslavement in Egypt (See Genesis 15:13-14), and the covenant of circumcision given to Abraham and his 12 sons that became the 12 tribes of Israel (See Genesis 25:26).

In verses 9-16 Stephen recalls how Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt fulfilling the prophecy (mentioned in verses 6-7,) and how God protected him and raised him up to a position of power. Then Joseph was able to bring his entire family to Egypt during a time of great famine.

In verses 17-36 Stephen recounted how at the end of the time in Egypt the king dealt deceitfully with the people of Abraham. Moses was born, taken in by Pharaoh's daughter, and God raised him up to be a great leader.

Note: Moses' life is divided into three 40-year periods: 40 years in Egypt, 40 years in Midian, and 40 years in the wilderness.


When Moses was about 40 years old he saw an Egyptian oppressing an Israelite, so Moses killed the Egyptian. He thought the people would understand that God would give them deliverance through him but they did not. They rejected him, saying who appointed you as ruler over us (See Exodus 2:14).

Moses fled to the land of Midian where he married and had two sons. When 40 years had passed an angel of God appeared to Moses in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai, in a burning bush (See Exodus 3:5-10).

Stephen reminded the rulers their forefathers had rejected Moses whom God had sent as a redeemer, and who ultimately led the people out of Egypt performing signs and wonders for 40 years as they journeyed in the wilderness.

Note: Perhaps this reminder was given to suggest a parallel between the rejection of Moses by the religious leaders, and these religious leaders who had rejected Jesus and His followers.

In verses 37-43 Stephen continued as he reminded them how the people had rebelled against God in Moses' day. They made golden calves to worship (See Exodus 31:1) and even worshiped foreign gods (See Exodus 16:3).



In verses 44-50 Stephen recounted how God had given Moses instructions for the tabernacle in which God met with Moses and how God drove away their enemies until the days of David. And how David made provision for the house of God and the temple was constructed by his son Solomon. However, God does not live in sanctuaries made by men's hands (See Isaiah 66:1-2).

In verses 51-53 Stephen issued a harsh rebuke of the religious leaders calling them a stiff-necked people of uncircumcised hearts and ears.

Note: The phrase “stiff-necked people of uncircumcised hearts and ears” was a common phrase used by the Old Testament prophets condemning the people's unbelief and disobedience (See Leviticus 26:41, Jeremiah 4:4, Jeremiah 6:10, Jeremiah 9:26, and Ezekiel 44:7-9).

Stephen said they killed the prophets who announced the coming of the Lord, and they are doing the same thing again.

In verses 54-60 when the leaders heard this, they were angry. Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. When he told them what he saw they rushed him, took him out of the city and stoned him. As they were stoning him he called out to God to receive his spirit, not to charge them with this sin, and he died.

Note: Stephen's strong rebuke was designed to bring the leaders to recognize their sin and repent, but they did just as he said: they rejected his message and killed him. The phrase “he fell asleep” is a common way of referring to death.

Acts 8

In verses 1-3 Saul agreed to Stephen being put to death. Severe oppression broke out against the believers. All but the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Saul actively opposed the church by hauling off believers and throwing them into prison.

Note: The reference to Saul agreeing is in active voice rather than passive, which indicates he was not merely standing nearby, but giving active approval.

In verses 4-8 the scattered believers went on preaching the Good News. Philip went to a city in Samaria and performed many signs and healed many. They had great joy from Philip's message.

Note: Philip going to Samaria made it clear that the message of Jesus was not just for the Jews, and it was time for the old prejudices between Jews and Samaritans to be done away with.

In verses 9-13 Simon the sorcerer was in the same city as Philip. The people called Simon, “The Great Power of God.” But as Philip preached the Gospel many believed and were baptized. Even Simon believed and was baptized and he followed Philip.

Note: There is debate among scholars as to whether or not Simon was

saved. We cannot be sure because only the Lord knows who are His. Scholars who believe he was not saved offer several reasons: 1) the word believe is not always used to indicate a saving belief, 2) Luke never indicates that Simon received the Holy Spirit, and 3) Simon continued to live in a very self-centered manner.

In verses 14-25 when the apostles in Jerusalem heard about what was happening in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to be with Philip. When Peter and John arrived they laid hands on those who had been baptized and prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw the Holy Spirit came through the laying on of hands and prayer he offered Peter and John money to also receive the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked him for trying to buy the gift of God and said you will have no share because your heart is not right before God. Peter told him to repent and the Lord might forgive him because otherwise he was bound for iniquity. Simon asked Peter to pray for him so this would not happen.

After this Peter and John journeyed back to Jerusalem preaching the message of Jesus in many Samaritan villages.

Note: Peter and John were Jewish Christians so preaching to Samaritans represented a major change in their hearts.

In verses 26-40 Luke records Philip's interaction with the Ethiopian eunuch.

An angel of the Lord directed Philip to go to Gaza to preach the Gospel (Gaza is southeast of Jerusalem). As Philip was traveling he met an Ethiopian eunuch who was a servant of Candace the queen and was in charge of her treasury. The eunuch had been in Jerusalem to worship and was on his way home.

Note: According to Deuteronomy 23:1 a eunuch was not allowed to enter the assembly of God, yet this man worshiped God anyway.

The eunuch was sitting in his chariot reading from Isaiah. The Holy Spirit urged Philip to join the eunuch, and as he did he asked if he understood what he was reading.

The eunuch said how can I understand it unless someone explains it to me, so he invited Philip into his chariot. The eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8. So beginning with that scripture Philip explained the Good News to the eunuch. The eunuch saw some water as they were traveling and asked if he could be baptized. Philip said yes if you believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The eunuch was baptized, and as soon as he came up out of the water the Holy Spirit carried Philip away. The eunuch went on rejoicing. Philip appeared in Azotus and preached the Good News through towns all the way to Caesarea.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

- *Stephen empowered by the Holy Spirit attempted to reach the religious leaders, but they were just as stubborn and hard-hearted as ever. They had rejected God the Father when they allowed John to be slain, they*



rejected the Son when they crucified Jesus, and they rejected the Holy Spirit when they killed Stephen.

- *Despite the death of Stephen and the persecution of the church the church grew and the Gospel was taken to Samaria. Persecution did not stop the growth of the church, it accelerated the growth.*
- *Note that Philip obeyed the leading of the Holy Spirit and because he obeyed he was able to witness to the eunuch. Also, note the eunuch had questions about a section of Isaiah so Philip started there and continued to explain the Good News, and the eunuch accepted Christ as Messiah.*

What I Noticed Today (Acts 9-10)

Acts 9

In verses 1-19 Luke records the conversion of Saul to Paul.

In verses 1-2 Saul continued his persecution of the church by going to the high priest and asking for letters giving him permission to capture any believers and bring them to Jerusalem as prisoners.

Note: The phrase in verse 1, “Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing threats...” looks back to Acts 8:3.

In verses 3-9 Saul was on his way to Damascus looking for Christians to arrest when a bright light flashing from heaven surrounded him. He fell to the ground, and a loud voice asked him why are you persecuting me. The voice told Saul he was persecuting Jesus, get up and go into the city, and do what you are told. The men who were traveling with Paul heard the noise but didn’t see anything. When Saul got up he could not see anything so the men led him into Damascus where he stayed. For three days Saul was not able to see, and he took no food or drink.

Note: The “noise” his companions heard was apparently the voice of Jesus speaking to Saul, but they only heard noise because His words were meant only for Saul.

In verses 10-18 Saul accepts Christ as Messiah and is baptized by Ananias.

In verses 10-16 The Lord sent a disciple in Damascus named Ananias a vision instructing him to go to the house of Judas and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, and lay hands on him so he might receive his sight.


Ananias was reluctant because he knew Saul was searching for believers to arrest, but the Lord reassured him saying this man is My chosen instrument to the Gentiles, kings, and Israelites.

In verses 17-19 Ananias went to the house and laid hands on Saul, saying the Lord Jesus had sent him to restore his sight and receive the Holy Spirit. Saul immediately regained his sight and was baptized.

Note: Ananias referred to Saul as “Brother Saul” in anticipation of his conversion.

In verses 19b-25 Saul was in Damascus for several days with the disciples and immediately began proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues. Saul became more capable and confounded the Jews, as he proved Jesus was the Son of God.

After many days the Jews in Damascus planned to kill Saul so the disciples lowered him through a hole in the city wall at night.



Note: Saul's intention was to go to Damascus to persecute believers. He was blinded by God going into the city but ended up having God restore his sight, and became a believer and was persecuted himself.

In verses 26-31 Saul returned to Jerusalem, but the disciples were afraid to be with him. Barnabas took Saul before the apostles and vouched for Saul. Saul was with the apostles in Jerusalem preaching to the Hellenistic Jews, but the Jews planned to kill him, so the brothers took Paul to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus.

And all the church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and grew in numbers.

Note: Caesarea was a seaport town about 65 miles from Jerusalem. From there Saul sailed north to Tarsus (Galatia, modern Turkey).

In verses 32-36 as Peter was traveling he visited the believers in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed and had been bed-ridden for 8 years. Peter healed him in the name of the Lord and all the people of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Note: Lydda is modern day Lod, just north of the city of Jerusalem. Sharon was not a town, but a fertile plain some 10 miles wide and 50 miles long.

In verses 36-43 while Peter was in Lydda a woman in Joppa named Tabitha (translated Dorcas), a disciple, became sick and died. She was well known for her acts of charity. Believers in Joppa sent word to Peter in Lydda asking him to come. When Peter arrived he sent all the people out of the room, knelt down and prayed, and commanded Tabitha to get up. Peter helped her up and presented her to the believers alive. As a result of this miracle many in Joppa believed in the Lord. Peter stayed in Joppa for many days with Simon the Tanner.


Note: Tanners were considered impure by Jews because of their contact with dead animals (See Leviticus 11:40). It seems Peter in staying with Simon was already stepping away from Jewish law to enjoy freedom in Christ.

Acts 10

In verses 1-8 Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, who lived in Caesarea was a devout man as were the members of his family. He was a man of prayer and known for his acts of charity toward the Jewish people.

About 3pm a vision appeared to him telling him his prayers and acts of charity had been received as an offering by God. He was instructed to send men to Joppa to the house of Simon the Tanner, and call for Simon Peter. Cornelius explained the request to his servants and sent them.

In verses 9-15 the next day about noon, Peter went to the rooftop to pray but saw a vision of heaven opening and a large sheet descending to earth. In it were all kinds of four-legged animals, reptiles, and birds. A voice called out for Peter to rise, kill, and eat. But he protested saying the animals were unclean. The voice said what God has made clean you must not call unclean.



This happened three times and then the object was taken back up into heaven.

In verses 17-23a while Peter was still trying to figure out the meaning of the vision, the men Cornelius had sent arrived and called out for Peter. The Holy Spirit told Peter to go with these men because He had sent them. The men told them about Cornelius and their mission to bring Peter to Cornelius to receive a message.

In verses 23b-33 the next day Peter set out with the men from Caesarea and some of the believers from Joppa, and they arrived in Caesarea the following day. When Peter arrived Cornelius fell to his knees and worshiped Peter.

Peter told Cornelius to stand up, he was only a man. God had told him (Peter) it was no longer forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with a foreigner.

Cornelius recounted how the vision had come to him four days before and how he had immediately obeyed, sending for Peter. They were all together now, present before God, to hear God's message.

Note: In verses 1-29 we see mention of two days passing, but in verse 30 Cornelius says four days ago. The difference is the Jews count any portion of a day as a day, and their day begins at 6pm. So when the men left Cornelius at 3pm that was day one, they arrived at Peter's on day 2, left in the afternoon, and arrived at 12n two days later. Total 4 four "days."


In verses 34-43 Peter explained he now understood that God does not show favoritism toward any nation or person who fears Him and does righteousness.

Note: There is some controversy over verse 35. This is not saying there is salvation by works, but that all peoples and nations can receive Christ as Messiah. In the past the Jewish people were considered God's chosen people, and it was through them that other people came to know God. Now, all people can know God through Jesus Christ.

Peter then described the history of Jesus, the ministry of John the Baptist, anointing of the Holy Spirit on Jesus, the many healings He performed, and how He was persecuted and killed. God raised Him up on the third day and commanded the apostles to witness to what they had seen and heard that everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins.

In verses 44-48 Peter's speech was interrupted by the sudden appearance of the Holy Spirit which descended on all those who heard the message. The circumcised believers (Jewish believers) were amazed because the Holy Spirit also came to the Gentiles. The Gentile converts spoke in other languages declaring the greatness of God just as the Jewish believers had done at Pentecost.

Note: The conversion of the Gentiles and the descending of the Holy Spirit on them is often referred to as the Gentile Pentecost.



Note: In Acts 2:8 the word used for foreign languages is *dialecto*, which are real languages as opposed to excited utterances. In Acts 10:46 the word used for other languages is *glossais*. *Glossai* is often translated “tongues” meaning excited utterances but is also used in the context of unnaturally learned languages. It seems most likely that these languages were real because the people nearby heard and understood them to be declaring the glory of God.

With that Peter said these people should not be prevented from being baptized since the Holy Spirit had come upon them. They were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and he stayed with them several days.

Note: Luke has detailed three distinct conversions thus far in Acts: the Ethiopian eunuch was a son of Ham, Saul of Tarsus was a son of Shem, and Cornelius was a son of Japheth. These are the three sons of Noah (Genesis 10:1).

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

- *We are not all called to the same ministry in the kingdom. Ananias obeyed the Lord, went to Saul, laid hands on him, and baptized him. We never hear of Ananias again. We do not even know the names of the brothers who helped Paul escape through the wall of the city, but they were doing God’s work. We are all called and equipped to do the work the Lord has called us to do!*
- *The importance of the Gentile Pentecost cannot be underestimated. The Gentiles heard the Word and believed (v. 44), they received the Holy Spirit (vv. 44, 47), and they were baptized (v. 48). The Gentiles were saved in the same manner as the Jews, and in neither case is there a mention of laws that need to be kept, no mention of rituals to be performed (like circumcision), and no works that must be completed. We are all saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.*

What I Noticed Today (Acts 11-13)

Acts 11

In verses 1-3 the apostles and brothers heard about the Gentiles who had become believers. But there were Jewish Christians (circumcised believers) who opposed Peter in Jerusalem accusing him of visiting and eating with uncircumcised men.

Note: Preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles was not so much of a problem to the Jewish Christians, but eating with them signified acceptance and fellowship, and that was a violation of the Mosaic Law.

In verses 4-18 Peter began to explain to the Jewish Christians about his vision with the sheet of animals being lowered from heaven and how God had told him not to call unclean that which God had made clean. He also told them about his journey to Caesarea to visit Cornelius and how the Gentiles accepted Christ and received the Holy Spirit and were baptized.

Upon hearing this the Jewish Christians realized God had granted repentance and salvation even to the Gentiles.

Note: Peter's defense focused on what God did, not what he did. He was not about to hinder God.

Note: While this brought the Christian church of Jewish and Gentile believers together, it also set the stage for the separation between traditional Jewish belief and the beliefs of the Jewish Christians.


In verses 19-30 the persecution of Stephen caused the believers to be scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, but they delivered the Gospel only to the Jews. Some men from Cyprus (an island close to Antioch) and Cyrene (a town in north Africa) proclaimed the Gospel to the Hellenists (Greeks) in Antioch. The Lord was with them, and large numbers believed and turned to the Lord

Note: There are several cities bearing the name Antioch. This is the Antioch in Syria. It was the third-largest city in the Roman empire behind Rome and Alexandria.

The report of the believers in Antioch reached Jerusalem, so Barnabas was sent to Antioch. When he arrived he saw the grace of God upon the new believers. He encouraged them to remain strong in their faith.

Note: Antioch was 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Barnabas was probably chosen because he was from Cyprus, and was known to be a thoughtful and generous man.

Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Paul, and when he found him they went



back to Antioch where they stayed for a year meeting and teaching. Believers were first called Christians in Antioch.

Note: The ending “-ians” means “belonging to the party of” so Christians were members of Jesus’ party. The name Christians is used only two other times in Scripture (Acts 26:28, and 1 Peter 4:16).

In verses 27-30 in those days prophets from Jerusalem came to Antioch. One of the prophets named Agabus predicted by the power of the Holy Spirit there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world (during the time of Claudius, A.D. 41-54). Each of the disciples, based on their ability, sent aid via Barnabas and Paul to the elders in Judea.

Note: Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would like have been excommunicated, and no longer able to receive help through the synagogue. The aid sent from brothers in Antioch was meant to lessen their suffering during the time of famine.

Acts 12

In Acts 12 Luke recounts the increased persecution of the young Christian church.

In verses 1-5 about that time (during the time of the famine) King Herod (Herod Agrippa I ruled A.D. 37-44) persecuted Christians and put James, John’s brother to death. When Herod saw that pleased the Jews he had Peter arrested during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the seven-day feast immediately following Passover) and put in prison. He assigned four groups of four soldiers each to watch Peter. He intended to bring Peter out to be executed after the Passover.

Note: The four guards were likely positioned so that two were chained to Peter on either side of him, and two stood guard to prevent another miraculous escape (See Acts 5:19-24). The four groups of guards rotated through the day in six-hour shifts.

While he was in prison the church was praying for him.

In verses 6-19 the night before he was to be executed Peter was sound asleep and an angel of the Lord appeared in the cell and told him to get up. The chains fell off of him, he got dressed, and the angel led him out of the prison to the city gate. Then the angel left him.

Peter realized it was the Lord who had rescued him from Herod’s grasp. He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many believers gathered together praying. He knocked on the door and once inside he told them how the Lord had rescued him. He told them to tell James and the other brothers and left.

Note: This is the first mention of John Mark, the Mark that wrote the Gospel of Mark. His father is not mentioned, so his mother may have been a widow.

Note: This is the first mention of James the brother of Jesus. He had not believed Jesus until the resurrection, but now he was with other believers praying for Peter's release

At daybreak there was a great commotion in the jail because Peter was missing. Herod interrogated the soldiers and then had them all executed. Herod left Jerusalem and went to Caesarea.

Note: Caesarea was the Roman capital of the province of Judea.

In verses 20-25 he (Herod) was angry with the Tyrians and Sidonians. They bribed Blastus, one of Herod's servants to get an audience with Herod because they depended on grain from his country (Galilee). On the appointed day Herod delivered a speech in his royal robes and the people shouted his was the voice of a god not of man. At once an angel of the Lord struck Herod and killed him because he did not give glory to God.

Note: Herod died in A.D. 44.

The Word of God continued to flourish and multiply. After they had completed their relief mission in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Saul took Mark and returned to Antioch.

Acts 13

In verses 1-3 in the church in Antioch, there were many prophets and teachers including Barnabas and Saul. As they were fasting and praying the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul. After they fasted, they laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, prayed, and sent them on their journey.

Note: The church in Jerusalem was the home of the Jewish Christian church, while Antioch had become the head of the missionary church committed to reaching the Gentiles.

Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:4-14:28)

In verses 2-12 Barnabas and Paul left Antioch and went to Seleucia, a seaport. They sailed to Cyprus, arriving in the city of Salamis (eastern edge of the island). They proclaimed the Gospel in the Jewish synagogues. John Mark was there as their assistant.


Note: Apparently the Jewish population in Salamis was fairly large because there were multiple synagogues.

They worked their way across the island to the town of Pathos where they met a false prophet, a sorcerer by the name of Bar-Jesus and the proconsul, Sergio Paulus.

Note: A proconsul was a governor appointed by the Roman Senate.

The proconsul summoned Barnabas and Paul to hear God's message, but Bar-Jesus attempted to stop him and turn the proconsul away from the faith.

Note: Bar-Jesus is identified in verse 8 as Elymas the sorcerer. The identity



of the man by either name is unknown. In Aramaic Bar-Jesus means son of Jesus, but Paul referred to him as the son of the Devil.

Paul, empowered by the Holy Spirit, rebuked Elymas calling him a son of the Devil, a fraud, and an enemy of righteousness. He said the Lord's hand is against you and you will be blind for a time. Immediately he was blind. The proconsul was amazed and believed Paul's teaching about the Lord.

Note: From here on in the Scripture Saul is referred to as Paul except when his testimonies referred to his former life. Also, Paul's name is listed before others indicating he has taken the leadership role.

In verses 13-41 Luke records the ministry of Paul at Pisidian Antioch.

Paul and his companions left Pathos and set sail for Perga in Pamphylia. John Mark left them and went back to Jerusalem. The rest continued on to Antioch in Pisidia.

Note: We do not know why John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. Whatever the reason, Paul considered it to be a defection from the ministry.

They went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and were invited to speak after the reading of the Law and the Prophets. This is the first of Paul's sermons recorded by Luke. It can be divided into three sections:

- The Old Testament prediction of the coming of the Messiah (vv. 16-25).
- The rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus (vv. 26-37).
- The appeal to believe in Jesus as the Messiah for the forgiveness of sins, which could not be obtained through the Law of Moses (vv. 38-41).

In verses 42-52 as they were leaving many people asked for them to return the following Sabbath. Many proselytes and Jews followed them speaking with them, urging them to continue in the grace of God.


On the next Sabbath almost the whole town turned out to hear Paul, but when the Jews saw the crowd they were filled with jealousy and began to insult Paul.

Paul and Barnabas said it was necessary to preach to them (the Jews) first, but since they rejected the message from God and considered themselves unworthy of eternal life Paul and Barnabas will now preach to the Gentiles.

Note: As Paul traveled on his missionary journey he would often make a point of preaching to the Jews first, and when they rejected him, he would take the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

When the Gentiles heard this they rejoiced and believed in the Lord. The Gospel spread throughout the region. But the Jews incited prominent men and women who worshiped God against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from the region.

Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet and journeyed on to Iconium. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and joy.



Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *Barnabas had to vouch for Paul so that he would be accepted. Soon Paul became the leader of the disciples taking the Gospel to the Gentiles and Barnabas became the follower. It does not matter whether you are a leader or a follower as long as you are doing the work God has called you to do.*
- *Paul and Barnabas were faithful to preach the Gospel. When they were rejected by one group they moved on to another. They took joy in the success God brought, rather than dwelling on those who rejected God.*

What I Noticed Today

(Acts 14-16)

Acts 14

In verses 1-7 Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue in Iconium and began to preach the Gospel. A great number of Jews and Greeks (probably proselyte Jews) believed. But there were Jews who rejected the message and stirred up trouble trying to turn the Gentiles against the apostles. Regardless, they stayed there some time performing signs and wonders. The city though was divided between those who supported the Jews and those who supported the apostles. Eventually, the rulers planned to stone Paul and Barnabas, but they escaped and went to Lystra and Derbe and kept evangelizing.

In verses 8-20 in Lystra, a man lame from birth was listening to Paul, and Paul saw he had the faith to be healed so he commanded the man to get up and walk and he did.

Note: This is the third healing of a lame or paralyzed man recorded in Acts (3:1-10, and 9:33-35).

Note: Lystra was a Roman colony, but apparently did not have a synagogue, otherwise Paul would have likely preached there first.

The people's response to the healing of the man was to worship Paul and Barnabas thinking they were the Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes. The priest of the temple of Zeus brought bulls and wreaths to the city to make sacrifices. Paul and Barnabas objected saying they were ordinary men bringing a message of Good News from the God who made the heaven and earth.

Then some Jews came from Iconium and Antioch, won over the crowds, and stoned Paul. Assuming he was dead they took him out of the city. The disciples surrounded Paul, he got up and went back into town. The next morning Paul left with Barnabas for Derbe.

In verses 21-28 after evangelizing in Derbe and winning many converts, Paul and Barnabas began the journey home by revisiting the cities of Lystra and Iconium. They encouraged the believers to remain strong in the faith and appointed elders in every church, prayed and fasted, and committed them to the work of the Lord.

Note: the first formal establishment of leadership in the Christian church was Paul's appointment of elders.

Paul and Barnabas continued on preaching in Pisidia, Pamphylia, and Perga, finally arriving back in Pisidian Antioch. They reported to the church there everything God had done, and how He had opened the doors to the Gentiles to receive the Good News.

Note: This brings to a close Paul's first missionary journey which lasted

about 2 years from the spring of A.D. 47 to the fall of A.D. 48 (some scholars believe an earlier dating of A.D. 44 – 46). It encompassed some 1,200 miles (700 on land and 500 by sea).

Acts 15

In verses 1-5 some believers from Judea came to teach the brothers in Antioch insisting that to be saved, they must be circumcised as required by the Law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas engaged them in a debate and eventually went with them back to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders. Along the way they reported to the brothers in Phoenicia and Samaria about the Gentile conversions.

Note: The scripture says in verse 1 the men from Judea came down to Antioch. Antioch lies north of Jerusalem, but it is lower in elevation, thus the reference to “going down” to Antioch.

When they arrived in Jerusalem they were welcomed by the church, but when they described what God had done among the Gentiles some believers who were members of the Pharisee party insisted they keep the Law of Moses and be circumcised.

Note: The Jerusalem council took place in A.D. 49.

In verses 6-21 the apostles and elders met to consider the issue of circumcising believers. After some debate Peter spoke saying the conversion of the Gentiles took the same form and pattern as for Jewish believers. God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

Peter asked why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the Gentiles that not even our ancestors were able to bear (that of keeping the Mosaic Law). We (Jews) are saved by the same grace of the Lord that saves the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas described all the signs and wonders done through them among the Gentiles. James agreed with Peter’s report of how God brought salvation to the Gentiles and added this was in line with the prophets (quoting Amos 9:11-12, and Isaiah 45:21).

Therefore, said James, it did not make sense to burden the Gentiles with circumcision but to simply tell them to avoid sexual immorality, idols, and eating anything strangled, or its blood.

Note: James was the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem. He is the author of the book of James.

Note: There are differing opinions among scholars as to why James referred to Gentiles being instructed to keep elements of the Mosaic Law (vv. 220-21). Some believe it reduced barriers between Jews and Gentiles associating with each other. However, it is more likely these prohibitions were designed to encourage Gentiles to avoid Pagan practices that were common among them.

In verses 22-29 the apostles and elders selected Paul, Barnabas, Judas called Barsabas, and Silas to deliver a letter to the Gentile brothers in Antioch, Syr-

ia, and Cilicia. The letter recapped their decision, saying the decision was the Holy Spirit's.

In verses 30-35 the men set off to deliver the letter to the brothers in Antioch. They received the letter and rejoiced because of the encouragement. After some time Judas and Barsabas returned to Jerusalem, but Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch teaching and proclaiming the Good News.

Note: Most of our modern translations omit verse 34 which is not included in the best of the Greek manuscripts. Verse 34 simply says, "but Silas decided to stay there."

Acts 15:36-18:22 Paul's Second Missionary Journey

In verses 36-41 after some time in Antioch Paul proposed to Barnabas that they revisit the towns where they had already preached. Barnabas agreed but wanted to take John-Mark with them. Paul disagreed because John-Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and not finished the first missionary journey. There was a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas so Barnabas left with John-Mark and set sail for Cyprus, while Paul took Silas and travelled through Syria and Cilicia.

Note: Barnabas and Mark are not mentioned in the book of Acts after this disagreement with Paul.

Note: Paul's selection of Silas to accompany him on the second missionary journey into Roman colonies where Greek was spoken made sense for several reasons: 1) Silas was a Roman citizen, 2) he was a prophet, 3) he was well known to the people of Antioch, and 4) he was fluent in Greek.


Acts 16

In verses 1-5 Paul went on to Derbe and Lystra where he met a disciple named Timothy. Timothy's mother was a Jewish believer and his father was Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him. Paul wanted Timothy to go with him so he had him circumcised because of the Jews in those places and because his father was Greek. As they travelled they gave the message of the elders and apostles from the Jerusalem Council and the churches were strengthened.

In verses 6-11 they went through Phrygia and Galatia but were prevented by the Holy Spirit from going to Asia (the leading city of Asia was Ephesus). They were also prevented by the Spirit from going to Bithynia, so they bypassed Mysia and went to Troas. During the night a vision came to Paul of a man from Macedonia begging him to come and help. They immediately set out Macedonia assuming God was calling there to evangelize.

Note: In verse 10 Luke says "we" for the first time indicating that he had joined the group of Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

In verses 11-40 Luke describes the group's journey to and ministry in Philippi.



In verses 1-15 they sailed from Troas through Samothrace, to Neapolis, and finally to Philippi, which was a Roman colony.

Note: Philippi, being a Roman colony, had a number of Roman soldiers living there and Roman law was in effect.

On the Sabbath they would go outside the city gate by the river where there was a place for prayer and they spoke to the women there.

Note: Apparently there was no synagogue in Philippi.

A woman named Lydia from Thyatira, who worshiped God, was listening and the Lord opened her heart to Paul's teaching. She and her household were baptized and she invited Paul and his party to stay at her house.

Note: Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. Purple cloth was important in the Roman empire. Luke described her as a worshipper of God which means she was a Gentile who worshiped God, but not a proselyte.

In verses 16-24 one day when they were on their way to prayer, a slave girl met Paul and his party and told them she had the power of prediction and made a large profit for her owners with her fortune telling. She followed Paul and the men around proclaiming they were slaves of the Most-High God. Irritated, Paul turned and rebuked the spirit in her and it came out. When the girl's owners saw that their ability to make money from her was gone they seized Paul and Silas and brought them before the magistrates saying they were disturbing the city; they are Jews and they are promoting practices that are not legal for Romans.

The magistrates had them stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown in jail. The jailer put them in the inner prison and secured their feet in stocks.


Note: Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome not long before and antisemitism was common among Roman colonies. Although Rome allowed people to practice their own religion it was against the Roman law to proselytize Roman citizens. Paul and Silas were probably brought before the magistrate because they were Jewish, whereas Mark was half-Gentile on his father's side, and Luke was a Gentile.

In verses 25-34 about midnight Paul and Silas were singing and praying in the jail and other prisoners were listening. There was a large earthquake, the doors to the jail opened, and the chains fell off the prisoners.

The jailer woke up and thinking the prisoners had escaped was about to kill himself when Paul reassured him they were all still there.

Note: The jailer was held personally responsible for the prisoners. If any escaped he could be killed.

The jailer rushed in to Paul and Silas and asked what must he do to be saved. They explained the Good News to the jailer, and he and his entire household were baptized that night. He brought them to his house, fed them, and rejoiced because he believed in God.



In verses 35-40 at daybreak the magistrates order Paul and Silas to be released, but Paul protested saying they had been beaten without a trial even though they were Roman citizens and thrown in jail. When the magistrates heard this they were afraid because they had punished Roman citizens without a trial. They apologized and asked them to leave town. After leaving the jail they stopped at Lydia's house, encouraged her and the brothers, and then left.

Note: Being Born a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to a trial before any punishment, and no Roman citizen was supposed to be flogged.

Note: in verse 40 Luke reverts to "they" indicating Paul, Silas, and Timothy left and he stayed behind.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John-Mark caused the dissolution of their ministry partnership. We cannot always be in perfect unity with our brothers as the Lord calls us to different fields of ministry.*
- *The disagreement over the circumcision of Gentile believers shows that there can and will be honest disagreements within the body, but we must willing to listen to and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.*
- *Paul had it in his mind to go one direction for ministry, but the Holy Spirit said no. We need to remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit to ensure the ministry we engage in is what the Lord desires.*

What I Noticed Today (Acts 17-19)

Acts 17

In verses 1-4 Paul and Silas traveled from Philippi to Thessalonica.

Note: The journey from Philippi to Thessalonica was about 100 miles. They traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia which means they traveled on the Via Egnatia. The Via Egnatia was a Roman road built in the 2nd century B.C., about 700 miles long running east-west connecting the northern provinces of the Roman Empire.

When they arrived they taught the Good News in the synagogue for three weeks. Some of the people were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including some God-fearing Greeks and some of the leading women.

In verses 5-9 the Jews became jealous of Paul and brought a mob searching for Paul at Jason's house. The mob claimed Paul was teaching against Caesar when they said Jesus was king. This stirred up the city officials so they took a bond from Jason and released them.

Note: The bond was likely required to ensure Paul and Silas would leave town and not return. If they returned Jason would lose his bond money.

In verses 10-15 when it was night Paul and Silas left for Berea. As usual, Paul taught in the synagogue. The people welcomed them and searched the scriptures daily to see if what Paul was saying was true. A number of them believed including a number of prominent Greek men and women.

But when the Jews in Thessalonica heard about Paul's work in Berea they sent men to agitate the crowds. The brothers immediately sent Paul away, but Silas and Timothy remained. Paul went as far as Athens and then sent word for Silas and Timothy to join him.

Note: Berea was about 46 miles southwest of Thessalonica on the way to Achaia (Corinth, southern Greece).

In verses 16-21 while Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive he taught in the synagogue and in the marketplace. He noted the city was full of idols. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers argued with him saying he was a pseudo (false) intellectual. But they were intrigued by Paul's teaching and brought him to the Areopagus to teach there to the assembled crowd of Athenians and foreigners.

Note: The marketplace is known as the agora. The Epicureans followed Epicurus who believed the purpose of man was pleasure and happiness. They believed that if God did exist He did not involve himself in human events.

Note: The Areopagus means "Hill of Ares" and was the official meeting place

of the Council of Areopagus, which was the supreme legislative body in Athens.

In verses 22-34 Paul delivered a defense of his teaching and a sermon in three parts:

- Introduction (vv. 22-23). He mentions they are very religious, they even have an altar to the unknown God.
- The Unknown God (vv. 24-29). He proclaimed the unknown God is the God of heaven and earth who made everything.
- The God of Heaven and Earth (vv. 30-31). God now commands people everywhere to repent, because judgment is coming. As proof He was resurrected.

Some began to ridicule him when they heard about the resurrection, but others wanted to hear more. Paul left them but some joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris.

Note: Dionysius was a member of Areopagite Council. Damaris may also have been particularly influential since Luke mentioned her by name.

Note: Paul's efforts in Athens were not as successful as in other cities because there is no formation of a church.

Acts 18

In verses 1-4 Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

Note: Corinth is just south of Athens and because of its harbor was a center of trade around the Mediterranean Sea.

Paul met Aquila, a native of Pontus, and his wife Priscilla. They had just left Italy because Claudius (the emperor) had ordered all the Jews out of Rome. He stayed with them and worked as they were both tent-makers.


Note: The reference to tent-makers refers to people who worked in leather, not just as a maker of tents.

In verses 5-8 Paul preached in the synagogue every Sabbath. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia Paul was preaching Jesus as the Messiah. But the Jews rejected him, so Paul said from now on he would take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul left there and went to the home of Titus Justus, a worshipper of God, whose home was next door to the synagogue. Crispus the leader of the synagogue believed in the Lord as did his family and a number of others who were baptized.

Note: Paul's statement in verse 6 is not meant to imply that no Jews believed and accepted his message of the Gospel. As verses 7-8 indicate Titus, Crispus, and others believed and were baptized.

In verses 9-17 a vision came to Paul in the night from the Lord reassuring



him that he needed to keep preaching the Gospel because there were many who would believe. God promised He would protect Paul. So Paul stayed 18 months in Corinth teaching the Word of God.

When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia the Jews made a united attack against Paul claiming that he was teaching contrary to God's Law. Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio rejected their plea saying he did not want to engage in matters of the Jewish religion. The crowd seized Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him but Gallio did nothing.

Note: Gallio was appointed by the Roman senate as proconsul in early A.D. 51, so Paul must have appeared before him some time later that year.

In verses 18-22 Paul left Corinth and sailed for Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. When they reached Ephesus he left Priscilla and Aquila there but went to the synagogue. The Jews asked him to stay and teach more but he declined, saying he would return if the Lord wills it.

Paul left Ephesus, sailed to Caesarea, and went up to greet the church, and went down to Antioch.

Note: The "church" that Paul greeted after landing in Caesarea must have been the church in Jerusalem because Luke says he went *up* to it and Jerusalem is higher in elevation than Caesarea. Then he went *down* to Antioch, which is lower in elevation.

Note: Caesarea is a seaport close to Jerusalem.

Note: Paul's arrival in Antioch marks the end of his second missionary journey.

In verses 23-28 After spending some time there, he left and went to strengthen the brothers in Galatia and Phrygia.

Note: Verse 23 marks the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey.


A Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He spoke powerfully about the Lord but knew only of John's baptism. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him speak in the synagogue they took him aside and explained the Gospel more fully.

Apollos went to Achaia with the blessing of the brothers in Ephesus and vigorously refuted the Jews in public demonstrating through scripture that Jesus was the Messiah.

Note: Achaia is Corinth (see Acts 19:1).

Acts 19

In verses 1-7 While Apollos was in Ephesus, Paul arrived and asked some disciples if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. They had not heard of the Holy Spirit because they were baptized with John's baptism. Paul explained John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, they needed to believe in Jesus and receive His baptism. When they heard this they were



baptized into the name of Jesus, Paul laid hands on them and prayed, and they received the Holy Spirit, and began to speak other languages and to prophesy.

Note: *This is the only recorded instance in the scripture where someone received a second baptism.*

Note: The word translated “languages” is also translated “tongues.” The Greek word used there is *glossais* and can mean either an excited utterance or a language learned unnaturally.

In verses 8-10 as was his habit, Paul entered the synagogue and taught. He taught for about three months, but some became hardened and slandered the Way, so Paul withdrew from them and taught the disciples every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Paul continued teaching for two years so all the people of the province of Asia heard about the Lord.

Note: The “Way” is a reference to those following Jesus.

Note: The province of Asia was the west coast of what is Turkey today.

In verses 11-12 God was performing miracles through Paul such that even facecloths and aprons that touched him healed the sick and exorcised demons.

In verses 13-20 some Jewish exorcists, the seven sons of Sceva the chief priest, attempted to cast out demons by proclaiming the name of Jesus whom Paul teaches. The demons said we know Jesus and we know Paul, but who are you? The man with the evil spirit leaped on them and they ran out naked, and this became known all over Ephesus.

People were afraid and the name of the Lord was magnified. Many believers came forward and confessed their bad practices in magic. They collected their magic books and burned them. The value of the books was 50,000 pieces of silver.


In verses 21-41 Luke records the riot that occurred in Ephesus.

In verses 21-22 Paul decided through the Holy Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, and then on to Rome. He sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia while he stayed a while longer in Corinth (Asia).

In verses 23-41 there was a silversmith named Demetrius who made his living making silver shrines of Artemis.

Note: Artemis was an Ephesian goddess, the daughter of Zeus. She was the goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, and virginity. The Roman equivalent of Artemis is the goddess, Diana.

Demetrius gathered other silver workers complaining that Paul was hurting their business because he preached about a God not made by hands. Not only that, but his preaching might discredit the goddess Artemis and her reputation come to ruin.



When they heard this they grabbed Paul's companions Gaius and Aristarchus and took them to the amphitheater. Paul wanted to speak but the disciples held him back.

Note: The amphitheater in Ephesus was capable of seating 25,000 people.

Most of the people didn't even know why they were there. The Jews who believed only in God pushed Alexander forward to speak, but when the crowd realized he was a Jew they shouted for two hours, "great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

The city clerk calmed the crowd down by saying everyone knows Artemis is the protector of the Ephesians. Therefore, if Demetrius and his group had some claim against Paul and his companions they should bring a case before the courts and let the proconsul decide.

He warned that they ran the risk of being charged with rioting since there was no justification for this gathering.

Note: The concern of the city clerk is they could not justify to Rome this public assembly, and he did not want to risk Rome punishing them for their riotous behavior.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *While the Jews in Thessalonica rejected Paul the Jews in Berea studied the scriptures daily and believed. People are much the same today. Some will reject the Good News out of hand, but others will accept the Word based on their study of the Scripture.*
- *The people of Ephesus confirmed their faith in God when they learned more from Paul. Believers confessed their sin and removed what was sinful in their lives, and as a result, the Gospel flourished.*

What I Noticed Today

(Acts 20-22)

Acts 20

In verses 1-6 Paul assembled the disciples in Ephesus, encouraged them, and then left for Macedonia.

Note: Verse 2 says Paul “passed through those areas and exhorted them.” This was probably Philippi and Thessalonica.

Paul arrived in Greece and stayed there for about three months. Just when he was about to leave the Jews plotted against him so he left going back through Macedonia accompanied by Sopater, Aristarchus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus. These men went ahead to Troas.

Note: In Greece Paul was probably in Corinth and Athens.

Note: In verse 6 Luke switches back to “we” so he had apparently re-joined Paul.

Paul and Luke sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They reached Troas in five days and spent seven days there.

Note: The trip from Philippi to Troas is about 150 miles, in five days.

In verses 7-12 Luke describes the disciples assembling on the first day of the week (Sunday) to break bread. Paul spoke late into the night and as he spoke a young man named Eutychus fell asleep, and fell through the window to the ground below. He was presumed dead, but Paul embraced him and he came back to life. Paul continued speaking until dawn and then he left.

Note: Verse 7 is the clearest example in the New Testament of the disciples gathering for a normal meeting on Sunday.

Note: Eutychus means “fortunate” and he was truly fortunate that night!

In verses 13-16 Luke and the other men went ahead by ship while Paul apparently stayed in Troas a while longer and then traveled to Assos where he met up with Luke. From Assos they sailed to Chios, then to Samos, and on to Miletus. They bypassed Ephesus because Paul was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost.

Note: In verse 15 Luke ends the “we” section, indicating Paul went on without Luke.

In verses 17-38 Luke describes Paul’s meeting with the Ephesian elders.

While in Miletus, Paul sent for the Ephesians elders, and when they arrived, he delivered his farewell speech to them.

Note: Miletus is about 30 miles south of Ephesus. The presumption is the

ship Paul was taking to reach Jerusalem was not leaving for a few days, giving him time to meet with the elders from Ephesus.

Note: Paul's farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus is the only one recorded in Acts that was delivered to a group of believers.

His sermon to the elders can be divided into three sections:

- In verses 18-21 a review of his past three years of ministry in Ephesus. How he did not avoid trials but preached to both Jews and Gentiles a message repentance and faith in Jesus.
- In verses 22-27 a review of his current plan to journey to Jerusalem. That he knew he would face affliction, but was being guided by the Holy Spirit. He would never see them again.
- In verses 28-35 a review of the future responsibilities of the Ephesian elders. How they were to be on guard against those who would come against the church, and those who would rise up among them with deviant doctrines. He committed them to God's grace which is able to strengthen leading to an inheritance of eternal life for those made holy (sanctified). He provided for himself as an example to them.

Note: Paul uses five different words to describe how he communicated the Gospel in verses 20-27: preach (v. 20), taught/teach (v. 20), declared (v. 21), testifying (v. 24), and proclaim (v. 27).

In verses 36-38 after this, he knelt down and prayed with them, and when they had said their goodbyes they escorted him to the ship.

Acts 21

In verses 1-13 they set sail for Cos, then to Rhodes, and on to Patara. They changed to a ship headed to Phoenicia, sailing past Cyprus and Syria, they arrived at Tyre where the ship unloaded cargo. They stayed in Tyre for seven days with disciples. The Holy Spirit told the disciples to warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem. When their time was up the disciples and their families said goodbye to Paul and his men. Paul boarded the ship and sailed to Ptolemais where they stayed with brothers for a day before sailing on to Caesarea where they stayed with Philip.

Note: Verse 1 begins another "we" section that lasts through verse 18, indicating that Luke had rejoined Paul.

Note: This was Paul's first stop in Tyre (vv. 3-6) but the disciples there established a close relationship with him in just a few days.

Philip had four virgin daughters all of whom had the gift of prophecy. While Paul was with Philip a man named Agabus came from Judea. He said the Holy Spirit warned Paul that when he arrived in Jerusalem he would be bound, and turned over to the Gentiles. Upon hearing this they begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul said he would go to Jerusalem as this was the Lord's will. He was ready to not only be bound but to die for the Lord Jesus.

Acts 21:17-28:31 Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey

In verses 15-25 some of the disciples from Caesarea went with Paul to Jerusalem, taking them to stay with a man named Mnason, a Cypriot and an early disciple.

Note: Mnason and Barnabas were both originally from Cyprus.

The following day Paul and the disciples met with James and the elders of the Jerusalem church. They told them about all the work God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this they praised God.

However, the Jerusalem elders were concerned about false reports from zealous Jews who said Paul was teaching Jews not to circumcise their children, or to follow Jewish customs.

James suggested Paul take a vow with four men and pay to shave their heads to satisfy the Jewish believers that Paul still followed Jewish customs.

Note: The shaving of the head accompanying a vow was typical for a Nazirite vow. At the end of the vow period, offerings were to be made at the temple. The suggestion was Paul underwrite these expenses for the four men, as a way to demonstrate his support of the Jewish traditions.

In verses 26-36 Paul took the vow with the four men and entered the temple announcing the completion of the vow. Jews saw Paul in the temple and a similar situation erupted with Jews claiming that Paul was teaching against Jewish Law. They also accused him of taking a Greek (a gentile) into the temple. They seized him, dragged him out of the temple and closed the doors behind him.

A Roman commander heard what was going on and took soldiers to where they were beating Paul. There was such a commotion that the centurion couldn't find out what Paul had done wrong so he had him, arrested, bound with chains, and taken to the barracks. Even with the soldiers protecting him the people continued trying to kill Paul.

Note: This is the sixth time a Jewish crowd was incited against Paul and his ministry (Acts 14:19, 16:19-22, 17:5-8, 19:25-34, and 21:27-36).

Note: The Roman Fortress of Antonia was located next to the temple. A number of Roman troops were stationed there with additional troops brought in during Jewish feasts. Claudius Lysias was the Roman commander of the Tenth Legion (a legion was 1,000 soldiers) stationed in Jerusalem.

Note: Verse 32 says the commander took *centurions* (plural). Each centurion was in charge of 100 soldiers, so the commander took at least 200 soldiers to investigate what was going on with Paul.

In verses 37-40 Paul asked, speaking Greek if he was allowed to speak to the commander. The commander was surprised Paul could speak Greek. He had assumed Paul was actually an Egyptian who started a rebellion and led 4,000

assassins into the wilderness.

Note: The word translated “assassins” literally means “cut-throats.” Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote that in A.D. 54 an Egyptian rebel attacked the city of Jerusalem, but was driven back by the Romans.

Paul explained to the commander that he was a Jewish man from Tarsus of Cilicia. The commander gave Paul permission to speak. Paul addressed the crowd on the steps of the Roman barracks in the Hebrew language.

Note: The Hebrew language of this time was Aramaic, which is a Semitic language closely related to traditional Hebrew.

Acts 22

In verses 1-21 Luke records Paul’s speech which is a defense or an apology. It is the first of such apologetic speeches recorded in Acts.

Paul addressed the crowd in Aramaic and they quieted down. He explained that he was Jewish, born in Tarsus, educated by Gamaliel in Jerusalem according to strict standards of Jewish Law. He spoke of how he had persecuted the church (the Way) with full approval of the high priests and elders.

Paul then related his Damascus road experience; how the Lord had visited him, blinded him for three days, Ananias had helped him regain his sight, and how he realized God had appointed him to bear witness to His Son. He received a vision in the temple saying they would not accept his testimony. Paul admitted to standing over Stephen and approving as the Jews killed him. Then the Lord told Paul to go because He was sending him far away to the Gentiles.


In verses 22-29 as soon as Paul mentioned preaching to the Gentiles the crowd called out for Paul to be killed saying he did not deserve to live. The people threw off their cloaks and flung dust into the air.

Note: Throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air was an expression of intense anger.

The commander did not understand Aramaic so he didn’t understand what was going on. He had Paul taken inside the barracks, and ordered Paul be scourged to find out why the crowd was shouting against him. Just as they were about to start scourging him Paul asked the centurion if it was legal to scourge a Roman citizen who had not been convicted of a crime. The centurion reported this to the commander. The commander said he had purchased his Roman citizenship, but Paul said he was born a Roman citizen. The commander was concerned that he had bound and nearly flogged Paul since he was a Roman citizen.

Note: It was illegal for a Roman citizen to be bound and flogged without a trial.

In verse 30 the next day the commander wanted to find out why Paul was being accused by the Jews, so he released Paul, instructed the chief priests and



Sanhedrin to convene and brought Paul before them.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *Other disciples warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit brought a message to tell Paul what kind of persecution was ahead in Jerusalem. But Paul would not be dissuaded from following God's will no matter what trials he might face.*
- *Accusers in Jerusalem lied about Paul's teaching, stirred up the entire city of Jews against him, and attempted to kill him. People will also lie about God's servants today thinking they can stop God's Word.*

What I Noticed Today (Acts 23-25)

Acts 23

In verses 1-10 Luke records the trial of Paul before the Sanhedrin.

The Roman commander brought Paul before the Sanhedrin the next morning. Paul told the assembly he had lived with a clear conscience in his ministry. The high priest, Ananias, ordered some men to strike Paul on the mouth. In response, Paul said God would strike the high priest and called him a whitewashed wall.

Note: The commander decided to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin because if the issue had to do with Jewish law the Sanhedrin would resolve it. If however, Paul was in violation of some Roman law then he could be turned over to the Roman proconsul.

Note: In Jewish law, the accused was presumed innocent until proven guilty. So in striking Paul, the high priest was being hypocritical: he was presuming to be a righteous judge while breaking the law himself.

Note: Paul's reference to the high priest being a whitewashed wall means Ananias looked good on the outside but was deteriorating on the inside.

Paul said he did not recognize the high priest because he knew it was wrong to speak evil of a ruler of the people (quoting Exodus 22:28).

Note: Since Paul had looked intently at the high priest it's hard to understand how he would not have recognized the high priest. Two possible explanations are the high priest was not in his priestly garments since it was early in the morning, and Paul had not been around the Sanhedrin for many years so he may not have known the high priest.

When Paul realized that some of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees and some were Sadducees he said that he was being judged simply because he believed in the resurrection of the dead. This started a huge argument between the Pharisees and the Sadducees because the Sadducees do not believe in resurrection, spirits, or angels. However, the Pharisees do believe.

Eventually, the scribes of the Pharisees said there was no evil in Paul, suggesting perhaps God had sent a spirit or angel to speak to him. As the argument grew more intense the commander removed Paul and took him back to the barracks.

In verses 11-22 the following night, the Lord stood by Paul encouraging him saying as he had testified in Jerusalem you must also testify in Rome.

A group of 40 Jews bound themselves together by a curse saying they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They even went to the chief priest

and elders to inform him of their vow and include them in the conspiracy to kill Paul.

Paul's nephew (the son of Paul's sister) heard of the plot to ambush and kill Paul and went to the barracks and told Paul. Paul then told one of the centurions to take the young man to tell the commander. He told the commander about the plot to kill Paul, and the commander told him not to tell anyone he had reported the plot.

Note: This is the first mention of Paul's sister and nephew being in Jerusalem. Perhaps they had moved there from Tarsus. The Greek for "young man" suggests Paul's nephew was at least in his late teens and perhaps in his 20's. It is unclear how the nephew heard about the plot.

In verses 23-35 the commander gather two centurions and told them to gather 200 soldiers, 70 cavalry (soldiers on horses), and 200 spearmen (470 soldiers total) and be ready at 9pm to take Paul to Caesarea.

He then wrote a letter to the governor, Felix, explaining the background of the issue with Paul, the Sanhedrin, and the plot against Paul's life. He considered Paul innocent, but the dispute was a matter of Jewish law.

Note: The commander's letter put himself in the role of rescuer and protector of Paul, but he left out the details of illegally binding and nearly flogging Paul before he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen. A letter containing the statement of facts was a requirement in the Roman army when a subordinate referred a case to a superior officer.

During the night soldiers took Paul to Antipatris, and the next day they returned to the barracks, allowing the cavalry to take Paul on to Caesarea.

Note: It was about 35 miles from Jerusalem to Antipatris, which is a considerable distance to cover beginning at night and arriving the next day. It was about 27 miles from Antipatris to Caesarea.


In verses 33-35 the soldiers delivered Paul to Felix and gave him the letter from Lysias, the commander. Felix agreed to hear Paul's case as soon as his accusers arrived. In the meantime Felix had Paul kept under guard at Herod's palace.

Acts 24

In verses 1-9 after five days the high priest, some of the elders, and a lawyer named Tertullus came before Felix in Caesarea. The lawyer began with an opening statement and accused Paul of 1) being an agitator against Rome, 2) being a ringleader of a sect of Nazarenes, and 3) desecrating the temple. He said if it had not been for Lysias interfering they would have dealt with Paul themselves.

Note: Felix would not be concerned with issues of Jewish law, but he would be concerned with accusations that Paul was inciting people against Rome.

In verses 10-21 Paul's gives Felix a defense against the accusations made by



the Jews. This is his second defense or apologetic speech recorded by Luke.

It was 12 days since he was in the temple. He was there to worship and was not causing a disturbance in the temple complex or in the synagogue. Paul continued saying his accusers could bring no evidence against him proving their allegations. However, said Paul, he confessed to worshipping God according to the Way as written by the Law and the Prophets and believed in the resurrection. He always attempted to keep his conscience clear (not offending). Paul concluded saying his true accusers were not even present (the Jews from Asia), and ultimately he was brought before Felix over the issue of the resurrection.

Note: There were no legitimate charges to bring against Paul because the Sanhedrin had not found him guilty and his accusers were not present before Felix.

In verses 22-27 Felix was familiar with the Way (the Christian beliefs) and adjourned the trial saying he would decide the case when Lysias, the commander, arrived. In the meantime he ordered a centurion to keep Paul under guard while allowing him some freedom and visitors.

Note: Paul's imprisonment under Felix was much like a house arrest.

After some days Felix, with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess sent for Paul to listen to him about his faith in Jesus. When Paul talked about righteousness self-control, and judgment Felix became afraid and sent Paul away.

Note: Felix may have been fearful of God's judgment since he had taken his wife, Drusilla, away from her first husband Azizus.

Felix sent for Paul and spoke with him often because he was hoping Paul would bribe him to be released. After two years Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus as proconsul. As a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

Acts 25

In verses 1-12 Luke records Paul's defense before Festus.

Three days after Festus arrived in the province he visited Jerusalem and the chief priests and elders there appealed to Festus to bring Paul to trial in Jerusalem. Their plan was to ambush Paul along the way and kill him. Festus refused, saying they should come to Caesarea to present their charges to him there.

After 8-10 more days, Festus went to Caesarea and the next day had Paul brought before him. The Jews who came brought many serious charges against Paul, but couldn't prove any of them. Paul once again proclaimed his innocence. Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem to face the charges against him.

Paul insisted that being in Caesar's tribunal was the proper place for the charges since they were civil in nature. He then appealed to Caesar. After consulting with his council Festus said since Paul had appealed to Caesar he

would be sent to Caesar.

Note: Paul likely remembered the 40 men who had taken an oath to kill him and realized that going back to Jerusalem was not only dangerous, but he would never get a fair trial there. Festus seemed happy to shift the responsibility for deciding the case to Caesar.

Acts 25:13- 26:32

In this section Luke presents Paul's defense before Herod Agrippa II.

Note: Herod Agrippa II was the grandson of Herod the Great. He was about 30 years old when he met with Paul. At the time, because of his family's relationship with Rome, he had been appointed as king of the territories north-east of Palestine. Additionally, Rome had given him authority to appoint the high priest in Jerusalem. Bernice was his sister, and he was having an incestuous relationship with her.

In verses 13-22 Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea and paid a visit to Festus. Festus presented Paul's case to Agrippa; about how he had been in Jerusalem and heard the accusations against Paul. In Caesarea he found no charges against Paul except for the dispute of the resurrection. He had offered to let Paul go back to Jerusalem for trial before the Sanhedrin, but Paul had appealed to Caesar.

The next day Festus and Bernice came with commanders and prominent men of the city. Festus ordered Paul be brought before him. Festus stated all of the Jews had demanded that Paul deserved to die, but he had found no charges against him deserving of death. Since Paul had appealed to Caesar, and Festus had nothing to write to Caesar, he hoped after meeting with Agrippa he would have something to write.

Note: As before, when referring a case to a higher Roman authority the subordinate was required to write a letter stating the charges and facts of the case. Felix didn't know what to write, so he was hoping Agrippa's knowledge of Jewish customs would enable him to write a letter specifying the charges to Caesar.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *The Jewish leaders conspired to kill Paul, but Paul's nephew somehow found out about the plot. All the false charges and lies could not stand against Paul who was blameless before God. God was working behind the scenes to protect Paul, just as He had promised.*
- *All the time Paul spent in prison in Caesarea he was protected and with each of his defenses before the Roman leaders, he was able to preach his beliefs about Christ, just as God said he would.*

What I Noticed Today

(Acts 26-28)

Acts 26

In verses 1-32 Luke records Paul's defense before Agrippa. It has six major sections:

- Paul begins with a complimentary introduction directed to Agrippa (vv. 2-3).
- Paul describes his early life as a Jew (vv. 4-8).
- Paul describes his zeal against the followers of Jesus (vv. 9-11).
- Paul describes his Damascus road conversion and commission by God to preach the Gospel (vv. 12-18).
- Paul describes his ministry among the Jews and Gentiles (vv. 19-23).
- Paul debates Festus and Agrippa (vv. 24-29).

Agrippa, Bernice, Festus, and those sitting with them got up and met to discuss Paul. They concluded that Paul had done nothing to deserve being bound and held or death. If he had not appealed to Caesar he could have been released.

Note: Paul's rhetorical question to Agrippa in verse 27, ("Do you believe in the prophets? I know you believe."), boxes Agrippa into a corner. If he says he does not believe, he is rejecting the prophets and their message. If he says he does believe the prophets then he has to admit that Jesus fulfilled the message of the prophets and is the Messiah. His only way out is to dodge Paul's question with another question.

Note: By the end of his defense to Agrippa many had declared Paul's innocence: the Pharisees (23:9), the commander Claudius Lysias (23:9), Festus the Governor, and now King Agrippa.

Acts 27

In verses 1-8 Luke describes the beginning of Paul's journey to Rome.

Note: In verse 1 Luke uses "we" again indicating that he had rejoined the group. This "we" section runs through verse 37.

Note: Some people consider Luke's detailed description of the voyage to Rome an allegory. The sea and the storm represent opposition to the spread of the Gospel. I think the allegory view is highly unlikely. I believe Luke included this detail as proof of God's intention to fulfill His promise to Paul to protect him and bring him to Rome so he could preach the Gospel there.

In verse 1 Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion in



the Imperial Regiment, named Julius.

In verses 2-8 Luke describes their route from east to west. The centurion was kind to Paul allowing him to visit friends in Sidon, which was their first stop after leaving Caesarea.

Note: The trade winds this time of year (mid-September-mid-November) were against them so the voyage was far more difficult, requiring more stops and a less direct route. Paul's trip was taking place in late-September -mid-October.

When they made it to Myra (southeast coast of Asia Minor, modern Turkey), they switched to a large Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy. They sailed slowly for days to a place called Fair Haven, near the city of Lasea on the island of Crete.

In verses 9-12 after the fast (probably the Day of Atonement) Paul warned the centurion that continued travel was very dangerous and could result in loss not only of the ship and its cargo but also their lives. The centurion listened to the advice of the ship's captain so they set sail hoping to reach Phoenix, a harbor a few miles away on Crete, and winter there.

Note: There was no suitable harbor at Fair Haven to remain over winter because it was open to the sea. The harbor at Phoenix faced southwest and northwest and was protected from the open sea.

In verses 13-26 they left Fair haven, but shortly after a "northeaster" (hurricane winds) came up driving the ship out into the sea to a small island named Cauda some 25 miles from Crete. They tied ropes around the ship to help hold it together and keep it from breaking up. The next day they lightened the ship by dumping the cargo and gear overboard (but not the grain).

The storm raged on for many days and the men felt they were doomed. Paul reminded them they should have taken his advice, and also encouraged them saying, none of the men would be lost, only the ship. He explained the reason for his confidence was an angel of God had told him they would survive, they would run aground on an island, and he would appear before Caesar.

In verses 27-38 after 14 nights, they were drifting along and the sailors thought they saw land. As they got closer to land they threw anchors out of the stern (the back of the ship) to slow the ship down and prayed for daylight.

Note: The reference to the Adriatic Sea in verse 27 is not what we refer to today as the Adriatic Sea, but was the northwestern portion of the Mediterranean Sea between Italy and Greece and south to Sicily and Malta.

Some of the sailors tried to escape in the skiff, but Paul warned the centurion they must all stay together if they were to be saved. This time, the centurion listened to Paul.

The morning of the fourteenth day Paul encouraged the men to eat. He gave



thanks in front of all of them and began to eat. There were 276 men on board the ship and when they had eaten their fill they threw the grain overboard.

Note: 276 men on board this ship with a large cargo and grain means it was a pretty good sized ship. Josephus, the Jewish historian, notes this was not the largest of the ships of this day as some were capable of carrying as many as 600 men.

Note: Verse 37 ends the “we” section of Luke’s description of the voyage.

In verses 39-44 now close to land the ship was grounded on a sandbar. Waves in the stern were breaking the ship apart. Since soldiers were responsible for any prisoners who escaped they planned to kill them all. The centurion stopped them because he wanted to save Paul. The centurion ordered everyone overboard to swim or float to shore on debris. Everyone made it to shore safely. This portion of the voyage ended just as Paul said with the cargo lost, the ship running aground on an island, and everyone survived.

Acts 28

In verses 1-6 once ashore they learned they were on the island of Malta (about 60 miles south of Sicily). The local people started a fire to warm the men since it was cold. As Paul put some wood on the fire a viper bit him on the hand. The locals though Paul must be a murderer because though he survived the sea justice does not allow him to live. Paul shook off the snake. The locals thought he would die, but when nothing happened to him they changed their minds and thought Paul was a god.

In verses 7-10 a leading man of the island named Publius welcomed them and entertained them for three days. Publius’ father was sick so Paul went to him prayed, and laid hands on him healing him. Because of this, they were rewarded with honors and supplies.


Note: In verse 7 Luke returned to another “we” section that runs through verse 16.

In verses 11-16 after three months in Malta, they set sail on another Alexandrian ship bound for Rome. They had several stops along the way and in Puteoli they stayed for seven days with the local believers.

Note: The “Twin Brothers” mentioned in verse 11 on the figurehead of the ship were probably Castor and Pollux, the sons of Zeus. Sailors thought Castor and Pollux were gods that protected sailors.

When they got to Rome they were greeted by believers who had come from the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns. When Paul saw them he thanked God and was encouraged. When they entered Rome Paul was allowed to stay by himself with one soldier.

Note: The Forum of Appius was a town 43 miles from Rome, and Three Taverns was a town 33 miles from Rome. I wonder how they knew to journey all that way to arrive in Rome as Paul was arriving.



Note: This ends the last “we” section in the book of Acts.

In verses 17-22 after three days, Paul called leaders of the Jews together and he explained how he had been accused in Jerusalem and delivered as a prisoner to the Romans who planned to release him, but because he had appealed to Caesar they had sent him to Rome.

The Jews responded they knew nothing about his situation, they had not received any letters from Judea, and no one had come to report anything evil about Paul. Then the leaders of the Jews asked Paul to explain more about this sect that was spoken against everywhere.

Note: It’s interesting that the Christian brothers in Italy knew more about Paul and his situation than the local Jewish leaders. Perhaps once Paul had left Jerusalem bound for Rome they lost interest in him because he was no longer preaching in their territory.

In verses 23-29 many people came to Paul where he lived and he witnessed to them about the Kingdom of God, preaching Jesus as Messiah from the Law and the Prophets. Some of the Jews believed, but others rejected his message. Some began to leave when Paul said the Holy Spirit had spoken directly through the prophet Isaiah.

Note: Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9-10.

Paul said this saving work of God was now being sent to the Gentiles (because the Jews had not listened). After he said this the Jews left debating among themselves.

In verse 30-31 Luke concludes the book saying Paul stayed for two years in his own rented house, welcoming visitors, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and teaching about Jesus Christ with boldness and without hindrance.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *In each defense, before prominent leaders Paul presented the Gospel. Festus and Agrippa listened, and seemed to understand the logic of Paul’s argument for Jesus, but rejected his message anyway. People are the same today.*
- *Paul was under “house arrest” being guarded by a soldier during his time in Rome, but that did not stop him from continuing to proclaim the Gospel with boldness. Are we as faithful and bold to proclaim the Good News?*